PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Recounting the rebuilding of the Temple is a tried-and-true technique used for years by pastors and elders to promote church-building projects. It also provides opportunity to demonstrate God’s workings through His people as they face great difficulty or personal peril. He even used one of the great rulers of the ancient world, Persian king Darius I (522-486 B.C.—known for his administrative acumen and massive building projects), to further His will. This week’s lesson uses not only the Bible as a historical source, but also includes references to ancient archival records quoted in the Bible.

During the reign of Cyrus, a predecessor to Darius, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (i.e., the Samaritans) heard about the Temple-rebuilding effort in Jerusalem and offered to help. Their offer was declined because the Jewish people learned during their Babylonian exile to resist the temptation to join idolaters in any undertaking. This rebuff led to Samaritan-initiated efforts to thwart the rebuilding endeavor, ultimately leading to its cessation until Darius eventually ordered it otherwise. Darius even provided funds from the royal treasury to pay the full cost of the project, all the animals needed for burnt offerings, and the items needed by the priests to conduct their ceremonial rituals.

The rebuilding of the Temple can be used to illustrate a sense of church identity (e.g., the Jewish people decided to do the work unaided by other groups); church unity (e.g., the people worked with one accord to accomplish the goal of rebuilding the Temple); and stewardship of time and resources.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Understand how God works through His people and others to accomplish His purposes. (Know)
• Feel connected to God’s people past, present, and future by how they respond to His leading today. (Feel)
• Commit themselves to God’s service and leading as they see how God led His people to rebuild the Temple. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Stewardship
• Unity in the body of Christ
• Identity (as a church)

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Invite the students to share their ideas regarding the design and accoutrements of a Seventh-day Adventist church sanctuary (i.e., a modern-day tem-
While not a setting where ceremonial rituals take place (unlike the Temple), today’s churches remain places in which God’s people meet to worship, praise, and fellowship. What, if anything, do the architecture and accoutrements of our churches say about our identity as a denomination? What about our church signs and official logo?

We are one church, united in the body of Christ, striving to represent God’s character to a fallen world. Our church identity and unity ultimately come from our relationship with God and our desire to follow His leading, not our worship style or sanctuary architecture.

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

In many areas of the United States signs can be seen along roads acknowledging groups that have volunteered to maintain that section of highway by picking up trash, mowing, and generally making the roadside look nice. Group names seen on such signs include families (good way to bond!), realty agents (good advertising!), or other businesses.

One day I was momentarily stumped upon seeing a sign that gave credit to BSA Troop 312 for keeping the roadside looking sharp. Being more familiar with Pathfinders than the Boy Scouts of America, I hadn’t quickly realized what the abbreviation meant. Shortly thereafter I saw a sign crediting the local SDA church using the initials SDA rather than the full name of the denomination. I wondered how many passersby would recognize that abbreviation.

In the public high school that I attended, one of the staff members in the library where I volunteered enthusiastically noted she was familiar with my church. She exclaimed, “You’re one of those Seven-days Adventurers!” We laughed and discussed the actual name of the church and what it meant, but I’ve never forgotten the term she used. We are Seven-days Adventurers, daily living our lives with joy and purpose as we share God’s love with those around us.

Our identity as a denomination is rooted in our belief that we are a remnant church, part of the lineage of God’s special people throughout human history. The name proclaims two of the major tenets we hold dear. Ask your students if they feel part of this Advent movement, begun in the mid-nineteenth century, and God’s people throughout history.

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**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

God uses His people, past and present, to accomplish His purposes. As Seventh-day Adventists we are specially positioned to be His servants in earth’s last days just as the Jewish people were specially positioned to rebuild the Temple in Old Testament times. That position comes with responsibility to reflect His character to others, to serve Him with our full and best effort, and to be faithful stewards.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- What are the names of the two people who stepped up to take the lead in rebuilding the Temple? Who helped them? Are the charter member names known in your local church? Who were the key people involved with getting it started?
- What impact did reading the authoritative historical record have on those who wished the Temple building to stop? What are some examples of authoritative historical records maintained today in government and/or other institutional archives? Why is it important that such records be kept and made available?
- While more than 15 million people is a large number, that total church membership worldwide provides little comfort or feeling of belonging if you’re in an area where there are not many Seventh-day Adventists. Have you experienced discouragement in such circumstances? Discuss ways to engender a fuller sense of belonging to a worldwide body of believers or to God’s people in times past.
- Can you think of times in history when God used an earthly leader to further His goal?
- Discuss with your students why there is no longer need for a fully functioning Temple complete with ceremonial rituals.
- What role does stewardship play in furthering God’s goals today? Ask a pastor or elder to share examples with your students of how proper stewardship has resulted in something tangible at your church.
• American civil rights leader John Lewis, now a U.S. congressman from the state of Georgia, has said America needs young people today who are willing to “get in the way” of an injustice. What are some biblical examples of people who “got in the way”? Have you gotten in the way of an unjust situation in your community? If so, what does this say about our identity as a church?

• The Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed largely by young people who were not afraid to follow God’s leading. What role or influence do young people have in your local church or in the administrative hierarchy of the world church?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Isaiah 58:11-14; Luke 1:46-55; Revelation 21:22-27.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Seventh-day Adventists, including your students, are part of a long line of God’s people throughout history. The Jewish people in the time of Ezra were bonded by the shared experience of their Babylonian captivity, not unlike the bond that forms among soldiers in time of war. As young people today seek to find their place in their community and world, many teens feel isolated, longing to belong to a group that shares a common purpose.

The book of Ezra is a historical sourcebook (as is the book of Nehemiah) that presents the outworking of God’s plan to restore Jewish nationhood by providing another opportunity for them to cooperate with His purposes and demonstrate their right to exist as a nation. This week’s lesson shows how a few people, led by determined leaders, can do great things for God.

Ezra is one of only three books in the Bible (along with Esther and Nehemiah) pertaining to the period of Jewish history following the Babylonian exile (after 586 B.C.). All the events described take place in the first half of the Persian Empire, which lasted from 539 B.C. (with the fall of Babylon to the forces of Cyrus) to 331 B.C. (when Darius III died and the empire of Alexander the Great rose to prominence).

The Persian Empire spanned from Iran in the east to the coast of Asia Minor in the west to the Armenian highlands in the north and the border of Egypt to the south. Founded by Cyrus, it was his policy to appease nations conquered by Babylon to resettle them in their old homes and restore their places of worship. In general, the kings of Persia attempted to rule their empire in a humane and equitable manner practicing honesty and supporting the interests of the peoples they governed. The monotheistic religion of Zoroaster, which was the state religion beginning with Darius I, was much different from the polytheistic and idolatrous Babylonian religion.

When Cyrus took Babylon he became acquainted with Daniel, who was then very old. Through Daniel, Cyrus learned about Isaiah’s prophecies concerning him and the role he was to play in behalf of God’s people (see...
Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is "Prophets and Kings," chapter 46.  
*A special adaptation of "Prophets and Kings" has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Read and discuss the paragraph found on page 576 of "Prophets and Kings" that is seen in Thursday’s daily thought-provoker, paying particular attention to this sentence: “Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way, that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly.” Ask your students if they can recall an experience that, perhaps after the fact, they realized had been influenced by the hand of God.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God’s people are being led by Him today just as surely as He has led His people in the past. We even have a modern-day prophet to help us. While we may not be literal temple builders, there are responsibilities given us that require our full commitment to His leading, proper stewardship of our time and resources, and unity of purpose that will lead us to the heavenly Promised Land to live with God forever.

Our identity as God’s last-day people, who will stand firm in Him even in the face of personal peril, will be seen ever more clearly as we draw nearer to the day of His coming. That identity is being forged today, in matters great and small, as we live out our commitment to God and to His precepts. Let us Seventh-day Adventists live as Seven-days Adventurers and not abbreviate who we are and what we stand for.

1 Fundamental Belief No. 21.
2 Fundamental Belief No. 14.

Isaiah 44:21—45:13. He died in a military campaign against unruly eastern tribes after a nine-year reign.

Cambyses, the eldest son of Cyrus, reigned for almost eight years, conquering Egypt during his kingship. He was followed by the short reign of the false Smerdis, which was a disaster for the Jews. He was described by Darius I as a destroyer of temples, and it was during his time that the work stopped on rebuilding the Temple. Upon his ascendance, Darius I permitted the Temple work to resume, and his era was marked by prosperity and order. The Jews, as did the other nations within the empire, benefited from his wise rule. Under the spiritual leadership of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they finished the Temple and dedicated it in the sixth year of the reign of Darius I in 515 B.C. (Adapted from The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, pp. 320-322.)

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

*The Past, Present in Pictures*

Photographs of the archaeological sites of biblical places mentioned in a lesson, or artifacts from those sites, bring the past to life. Students will see that these places were as real as the places they see around them now. There are numerous books and World Wide Web sites that feature such photos, which can be easily presented to your students. An image search using the word “Darius” will find you many sites. Ideally, you may have visited a place yourself or a church member may have visited, leading to photos that can be narrated personally.
i want you back!

Scripture Story: Zechariah 1–3 (Zechariah 2–3:5).
Commentary: Prophets and Kings, chapter 47.
Key Text: Zechariah 1:3.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The book of Zechariah is a series of visions given to the prophet by God for the encouragement of the remnant of Judah, fast at work rebuilding the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah’s message, like that of Haggai, is one of hope.

Satan worked feverishly to discourage the returning exiles in any way possible, reminding them of their recent exile and their poor condition. But God through Zechariah offered the maligned remnant a new lease on life. “Return to me,” declares the Lord Almighty, “and I will return to you” (Zechariah 1:3, NIV).

God continued His entreaties to Judah by promising to once again bathe His people in their former prosperity (1:17). Jerusalem would overflow its borders so much that they could not be measured. God would be its walls, and His presence its glory (Zechariah 2).

In spite of this grand imagery, the most poignant moment occurs in Zechariah 3 when God through the Holy Spirit removes the iniquity of Joshua the high priest and clothes him in new garments. This message is at the core of this week’s lesson. Highlight the fact that God is the “author” and “finisher” of our faith. God accepted Joshua’s supplications on behalf of the people, just as He accepts Christ’s supplications on our behalf.

In this message of redemption and restoration God foreshadowed the day when Jesus would redeem fallen humanity from sin. Also, make the point that when we accept Jesus’ sacrifice, Satan’s accusations lose their power. We are complete in Jesus (Colossians 2:10).

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Discover that God offers us a bright future with Him in heaven. (Know)
• Experience the assurance that God is willing to forgive and restore all who repent of sin. (Feel)
• Accept God’s offer of cleansing and renewal. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Grace
• Sin/evil/devil
• Promises

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Divide the class into groups of two or three and ask the teens to share their rankings with the group. After a few minutes, ask one student from each group to share their top three most difficult challenges to
lowship with Himself through promises that echo down to our time and situation. While our world may seem out of control, God is at work in it, reconciling lost humanity.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- God often offers us “carrots” before He uses “sticks”—carrots of course being blessings and sticks representing punishments. What “carrots” did God offer the returning exiles from Babylon?
- God mentioned the past crimes of Judah’s forebears. Why did He dredge up this “old news” when Judah was vulnerable and desperate for a new life, free of Babylonian oppression?
- What special challenges might Zechariah have faced in delivering this message? Was Judah poised to listen to God?
- What does Judah’s response in Zechariah 1:6 tell us about the role of confession in forgiveness? Was this confession a signal of their repentance?
- In what way is the high priest Joshua a “type” of Christ? How is he different from Jesus?
- In Zechariah’s vision, Satan stands to the right of Joshua, hurling accusations to God about him. Were Satan’s accusations against Joshua and Judah unfounded? Do we sometimes give Satan ammunition with which to accuse us before God?
- The removal of Joshua’s sin preceded his being provided clean garments. What act of Jesus removed our sins? What is the “robe” that we now wear? (Isaiah 61:10).

Notice in this story that confession leads to repentance, which leads to forgiveness, and finally, restoration through Christ’s righteousness alone.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Exodus 28; Isaiah 53; Matthew 27; Hebrews 4:14–5:10.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.
1. The Parent Trap. The parents of the returning exiles of Judah had died in captivity. Some fled to Egypt instead of heeding Jeremiah’s message not to resist the Babylonian captivity, and they perished there.

To a large extent, it was the parents of Judah’s remnant that brought God’s judgment down on the entire nation. Hence God’s rehashing of the sins of their parents. God was not trying to rub Judah’s nose in what their forebears had done. He knew that unless they understood the wrong that their parents had done and saw the justice in God’s punishment, they would be doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

Through Zechariah, God was giving Judah a chance to seize the future, but before doing so they had to come to terms with the past.

2. Without a Mediator. In “Joshua and the Angel,” chapter 47 of Prophets and Kings, Ellen White notes that “Zechariah’s vision of Joshua and the Angel applies with peculiar force to the experience of God’s people in the closing scenes of the great day of atonement. The remnant church will then be brought into great trial and distress” (p. 587).

In the vision Joshua stands before a holy, sinless God, pleading his case. As he pleads for mercy on behalf of himself and the nation of Judah, he is shouted down by the searing accusations of Satan. Satan’s taunts are deeply distressing to Joshua. This will also be the case for God’s remnant church as it approaches the second coming of Jesus.

Today is the day to let Jesus reproduce His perfect character in us to fit us for that day.

3. Other Voices. Zechariah’s message of hope was part of a theme. Isaiah prophesied that God would one day comfort His exiled people:

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Great Expectations**

All learners come to a learning environment with certain expectations. During some downtime, consider asking your students what they expect when they come to Sabbath School. Ask them what they’d like to see happen. Would they like to help with a portion of the lesson, for instance? Often teens will connect more with other teens than they would with their teacher.

Once you know what your teens are expecting, you can then tailor the class to expand the range of experiences that they get. Today’s media-saturated, technology-savvy teens can overwhelm a teacher with their desire for an entertainment-driven Sabbath School. Resist the urge to be entertainment-driven. Make the learning interesting through the use of media, for instance, but try to not to overdo this.

**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1, 2, NIV).

After the captivity, God had a plan to prosper Judah and not to harm them (Jeremiah 29:11). Jesus looked down through the eons of time to our day with the knowledge that like Judah, we too would face uncertain days. To His disciples then and now, He said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1, 2, NIV). Amen!

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask students to form pairs. Ask each student to think of an area in their life that needs to be totally and completely given over to God. The students are not to share this with their prayer partners.

When students have had a chance to think of their area of need, ask each student to pray for the other person in their pair and vice versa. Have the kids focus their prayers, asking God to give their prayer partner the strength to turn over their challenge to Him. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The human need for God’s forgiveness and restoration is incessant and unquenchable. Perhaps Marghanita Laski, once a well-known secular humanist and novelist, put it best when she remarked during a television program: “What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me.” How empty is the life that has never experienced grace!

God promised Judah that He would return to them if they would return to Him. The promise was conditional, but He who had promised was faithful. He would keep His word, though theirs would no doubt fail.

Through Zechariah, God gave Judah a reason to hope. Though buffeted and slandered by the enemy, He would not only help them rebuild their broken lives; He would remove their sin and dress them again in clean clothes. He would rebuke Satan!

God is speaking to you and me today, daring us to take hold of His wondrous offer of love.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapter 47.

*A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

God never promised us a bed of roses, some say. That's no more true than in this week’s lesson. The remnant of Judah led by Zerubbabel faced a hostile crowd of naysayers determined to prevent the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

Yet, as Ezra 6 notes, God worked mightily on behalf of His beloved people. He used King Darius to enforce a long-lost decree giving Judah permission to rebuild the Temple. Through Zechariah God promised that He Himself would come to Jerusalem and make a home with them, a clear prophetic reference to the future advent of the Messiah.

Zechariah’s message was designed to give hope and encouragement, particularly to Zerubbabel. God wanted him to know that his labors to build up God’s Temple were not in vain, and neither are ours today. The finishing of the work would not be accomplished “by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6, NIV).

At the center of this week’s study is God’s promise to help us through the challenges we face in doing His bidding. We, like ancient Judah, are metaphorically building up God’s house here on earth. We labor to lead others to Him, and we labor to be like Him. In both endeavors, we can do nothing without His direction and support.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Learn that the call of God to do great things is accompanied by power to accomplish the task. (Know)
• Experience the peace that comes from trusting God through trial. (Feel)
• Accept an opportunity to turn all their plans over to God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Adversity/trials
• Church1
• Holy Spirit2

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

After the students have had some time to rank their responses, ask them to share which parental action they ranked first on their list. Note: Many teens do not believe that they need anything from their parents, especially this “mushy” stuff, but press them for responses.

The objective of this exercise is to highlight our need for encouragement through the words and actions of our parents and, by extension, God. God, through Zechariah, was offering Israel hope in
extremely difficult circumstances. That is why Zechariah’s message is essential for us today.

Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:

Olympic gold medalist Darrell Pace was to give an archery exhibition in New York City’s Central Park, and the event received coverage by all the news stations. Shooting steel-tipped hunting arrows, Pace punctured bull’s-eyes without a miss. Then he called for a volunteer.

“All you have to do,” said Pace, “is hold this apple in your hand, waist-high.” ABC correspondent Josh Howell took a bold step forward. He stood there, a small apple in his hand, a larger one in his throat. Pace took aim from 30 yards away as everyone held their breath. Then THWACK—a clean hit that exploded the apple before striking the target behind.

Everybody applauded Howell, who was all smiles—until his cameraman approached with a hangdog look. “I’m sorry, Josh,” he said. “I didn’t get it. Had a problem with my viewfinder. Could you do it again?”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:

How many of us would volunteer the first time, let alone the second time, with an arrow aimed at us? Yet faith in God often requires not just one, but multiple applications.

Zerubbabel and the remnant from Judah faced a daunting challenge: “Build a temple for God”—in hostile territory. Every day that the people and the builders went out to do God’s will, they had to exercise an unflinching faith—especially Zerubbabel. There was no presumption in Zechariah’s message. God would be the Author and Finisher of Judah’s faith, and that’s the message we all need as we approach daunting trials before Jesus comes!

Out of the Story for Teachers
After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- What specific things did God do to ensure Judah’s success during the rebuilding process? Was this a source of comfort to them?
- Was the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem solely commanded by God so that He could be worshipped and revered? What role did the Temple play in Jewish life? What happened at the Temple?
- What impact would the rebuilding of the Temple have on the surrounding nations? Remember, when God called Israel to be His special, prized possession (Exodus 19), God had the blessing of the entire world in mind. How was the rebuilding of the Temple a continuation of God’s original plan for Israel?
- The adversity Judah faced is not unlike that which we face today as we seek to obey God’s commands. Ask the students to share some of the present-day obstacles to obeying God that they face. Did the Israelites face similar temptations/challenges?
- Does God have to put us into captivity before we decide to follow Him? What role did Israel’s memory of their horrific experience in Babylon play in their willingness to trust God?
- Zerubbabel faced unique challenges as the leader in God’s effort to rebuild the Temple. How did Zechariah’s prophecy of God’s protection and blessing during the rebuilding process make him feel?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Exodus 19; 20; Deuteronomy 28–30; Ezra 4–6.

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. The name says it all. Zechariah was handpicked by God to deliver a much-needed message of hope to ancient Judah and us today. Consider this ordained coincidence: Zechariah’s name means “Yahweh remembers.” He is a descendant of Iddo from a priestly tribe. Iddo means “at the appointed time.” Zechariah is the son of Berechiah, and Berechiah means “God will bless.”

Put it all together and you get something like this: God remembers at the appointed time and
He will bless. Or, God remembers to bless at the appointed time. Many of the ancient prophets’ names would summarize their message, but this connection is special. It seems tailor-made to communicate the love of God for Judah following their captivity.

What will God remember? His covenant. God will never forget His people or His promises to them (Isaiah 49:16), and at the appointed time, He will bless them!

2. **God at Work.** The Babylonian defeat at the hands of the Persians brought about Judah’s freedom. As Zerubbabel led a contingent of Judah back to Jerusalem, he was miraculously allowed to start the rebuilding of the Temple. This was not due to the generosity of the Persians.

   “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ‘This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem’”’ (Ezra 1:1-3, NIV).

What do these verses tell us about God’s willingness to reach the heathen and use them to bless His people? If God used heathen Babylon to punish Judah, why couldn’t He also use heathen Persia to bless Judah?

3. **The Church.** The remnant of Judah is a symbol of God’s remnant church at the end of time. The church will experience challenges and perplexities until Jesus returns, but it is not to waver or doubt God’s protection or providence.

   Ellen White writes: “Human power and human might did not establish the church of God, and neither can they destroy it. Not on the rock of...”

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**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Open Up**

Teens will often care about the subject matter when they see that it matters in real life, that it made a difference in the life of someone they know. Can you think of a time in your life when God was not the sole focus of your life? Would you feel comfortable sharing what your life was like when there was not a “place” for God?

Avoid generalizations, if possible. Think of a tangible difference that making a place for God in your life has made. Mind you, there’s no need to reveal some deep dark secret here.

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
human strength, but on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages, was the church founded, ‘and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ Matthew 16:18. The presence of God gives stability to His cause” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 595, 596).

Notice, the church is not stabilized by its doctrines, its diet, or anything else. It is stabilized by the presence of God. A mere intellectual assent to truth, without the presence of God residing in the heart, will not keep us in the last days of earth’s history. God was with Zerubbabel and Judah. That is why they succeeded, and that is why we, too, will succeed.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Bring several building tools to class if you can. Or, better yet, ask a fellow church member who works in the building trades to bring some of their work tools to your class.

As you prepare to close, ask them to come in and explain briefly what each tool is used for. Then, close by asking your students to think about the life that they are building. Ask them to quietly reflect on this question: What tools do they need to build a relationship with God?

Close with a prayer asking God to help everyone to draw closer to Him.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Malachi 3:6 reminds us that God does not change. His promises are so sure that once uttered they carry the same weight of blessing as if spoken today. The God who commissioned the rebuilding of the Temple by moving the heart of a heathen king is the same God who stirs our hearts to serve Him today.

The God who provided materials and means to erect the Temple wants to build a place in our hearts today. It should not be lost on us that the Temple was the first item that God commanded to be built following Judah’s captivity.

To accomplish this task meant that the people would face difficulties, but God’s purpose was resolute and through Zechariah He encouraged Judah to persevere. This story reminds us that our relationship with God must always be first in our lives. We must build a place for Him, that He might dwell with us until He returns to take us to a place built for us.

1. Fundamental Belief No. 12.
2. Fundamental Belief No. 5.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

On this earth people tend to rely more on themselves than to look to God for guidance. We seem to put our faith more in the things of this world than in the hope of Jesus Christ.

In this lesson we will learn about Queen Esther’s strong and steady faith in her Creator. We will see how she knowingly put her life on the line in order to save her people and their faith. She knew that even though she could die, God was by her side and would never forsake or abandon her.

It is her unrelenting faith in times of trouble that we should ponder. She is a great example of a trusting servant of the Lord. Whenever in despair, we should remember the story of Esther and how—in seemingly hopeless times—she stood strong in her hope and trust in God.

Quoting from Martin Luther: “Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.”

Imagine having faith so strong that you were willing without a thought to put your life on the line for the Lord. In scary situations, many times people tend to try to think of ways to get out of them. They rely on their own intelligence. God wants us to use our intelligence and our own skills. However, He doesn’t want them to be the apex to which we strive and struggle. He wants us to look to Him for help. In Psalm 46:1 the Bible says: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (NASB).

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Become aware of how important faith in Jesus Christ is. (Know)
• Feel a sense of peace in knowing that God is never absent from their lives. (Feel)
• Rely on God to help them in times of trouble, rather than look for the answer in the world or in themselves. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Faith
• Prayer
• Knowing God

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Divide everyone into groups. Tell each group to think of a situation in their lives in which faith is the key element. After they've done this, ask each group to share the situation they came up with and explain why they thought of it. Then ask them if they've ever been in a similar situation themselves. Also ask them to name a
famous person from history or even from today whom they’ve seen demonstrate faith or trust in God. Ask them to find another famous person who appears to rely only on themselves and their own talents, rather than God.

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

In Russia before the Berlin Wall came down, the people were not free to worship as they chose. Many Christians had no choice but to worship God in secret. On this certain day a group of believers gathered together in hiding to hold a worship service. As they were well into their service a group of Russian soldiers violently threw open the door. They were all armed with rifles. They told people that anyone who wasn’t a Christian should leave immediately, but anyone who had come to worship the Lord should stay.

The people began to evacuate the room. Most of the people left; however, there were still a few believers who remained. The soldiers then closed the door behind them and locked it. Then they all set down their rifles and told the people who still remained that they were also Christians and wanted to worship God alongside true believers.

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

The faith that these people demonstrated is so inspiring that we should all look to their examples and remember them when we are in times of trouble. As long as we remember that God is by our side we have nothing to fear. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28, KJV).

Sometimes people think that their faith is insignificant. But the smallest amount of faith is all that we need to move mountains. The Russian believers in this story had the faith in God to know that He was with them no matter what happened. In this same sense, Esther knew that even though she was risking her life to save her people, God was with her no matter what the outcome.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

*After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Many times we may think we have great faith in the Lord, but when a situation comes around in which faith is needed we seem to forget that God is with us. In what way did Esther’s actions demonstrate her faith in God?
- What was Haman’s initial reaction toward Mordecai when he realized that he would not bow down before him?
- Many of us have driving forces behind the steps we take in putting faith in God. What do you think was Esther’s driving force that caused her to do what she did? Do you think it was God who helped her through it, or her own desperation to save her people?
- Why do you think Haman was so eager and insistent on persecuting Esther’s people?
- King Xerxes did listen to Haman’s wish and granted him what he wanted. Why do you suppose the king would let Haman commit such evil deeds?
- List a few ways in which Esther could be an example to us in our faith and how we trust in God.
- What do you think a person might have done in Esther’s shoes if they did not know God?
- If you were in Esther’s shoes what would you have done?

*Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Luke 17:6; Matthew 8:26; Romans 5:2; Deuteronomy 11:13; 2 Chronicles 19:9.*

Another reason why we should have faith in God is because He is faithful to us. Here are some verses in the book of Psalms that talk about Him being our faithful Father: Psalm 57:10; 71:22; 91:4; 108:4.

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

Throughout our lives we have times when we feel as if we are up on mountains, and other times when we feel as if we are down within valleys. God wants us to put our faith in Him whether we are going through good times or bad times. In the story of Esther we see how even in the most tragic circumstances she did not falter in her unmoving faith in the Lord.

However, we must look on another character in this story who demonstrated faith in God—Mordecai. He knew how Haman’s wrath could be used against him,
yet he would not bow down before him. He loved God too much to give his reverence to any other but Him. In not bowing down before Haman, he knew he could be facing certain death, yet he did not bow to the arrogance and conceit of Haman. He put his faith in God to be by his side whether he was delivered from the claws of death or not. In a way, he portrayed his faith just like Esther portrayed hers. They both knew they were risking their lives by their actions, yet they did it because they trusted in their heavenly Father.

In this story Haman is the perfect example of a power-hungry and arrogant man. It was as if he wanted to take the place of God. By having the people bow down to him, he was assuming to have the status of someone worthy of being worshipped. His conceit and disdain for others is what eventually brought his downfall. The faith that Esther had in God is what ultimately saved her and her people from Haman’s greedy thirst for power and control.

In our lives we may come into contact with many Hamans. We may know people who, through their arrogance, want only to be recognized and given the power to use other people. We must be careful not to become like Haman. Pride is a weakness, and if we have even a little bit of it, we can soon be completely taken over by it.

We must, instead, try to live with the humble humility and faith that Esther lived by. If we put our trust in God then not even the most powerful Hamans of our day can control us or use us. God is to be the only one whom we worship and show our true allegiance to. If we put our faith in Him, He will bless us beyond our imagination.

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**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Faith in Hardship Role Play**

Throughout our lives hardships and tragedies come, and sometimes it seems hard to be reassured that we are not alone. Having faith may not be easy at times, but anyone can acquire it. All you have to do is remember that no matter what happens in your life, whether good or bad, someone is watching and someone knows and understands what you’re going through.

Working with your students to develop a role play of a biblical character (such as Esther or Mordecai) may help them explore and apply the experiences of others who have gone through hardships in their own lives. It may also help them appreciate the experiences of others more powerfully.

To do this, possibly have one student play Esther and have several others ask her questions about her life. Then “Esther” will answer in the first person. It’s a good way for us to “walk in someone else’s shoes” for a while!

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  
  *Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

- **Flashlight**
  
  *Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.*

- **Punch Lines**
  
  *Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.*

  *Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.*
III. CLOSING

**Activity**

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Tell the students to make a list of ways in which they can portray faith in their daily lives. Make sure the students know that even though they may not be going through extreme trials in their lives as Esther did, they can come to God with even the simplest problems and trust in God to take care of them no matter what the circumstance—whether big or small. Keep them aware of just how significant their lives and even small problems are to their Creator.

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Proverbs 3:5, 6 says: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (NIV).

Throughout our lives hardships and tragedies come, and sometimes it seems hard to be reassured that we are not alone. Having faith may not be easy at times, but anyone can acquire it. All you have to do is remember that no matter what happens in your life, whether good or bad, Someone is watching and Someone knows and understands what you’re going through. Pray to God that He will give you faith and understanding. Our God is a faithful God. He shows us mercy and compassion in so many numerous ways that we may not even be aware of them. Trust in God, keep steadfast in your faith, and you will be blessed all the days of your life.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapter 49.

*A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
Finally convinced she had come to royal position “for such a time as this,” Esther made her move. She approached the king even though she knew about the potential death penalty.

But when the king finally extended the scepter to show his approval of Esther, she didn’t come right out with her request. Instead, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet—then, when they showed up for that event, to a second banquet before she finally raised the issue of the decree against the Jews. Was Esther scared? Strategizing? Stalling for time? Whatever her reasoning, her efforts paid off. She asked the king to spare her people, and he agreed. Haman, once the power behind the throne, suddenly found the tables turned. Now he was the victim of the king’s wrath, and Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews experienced God’s gift of victory.

The lesson focuses on the victory we can have through Christ—victory over sin, over temptation, over Satan’s power in our world and in our lives. Victory is God’s work, but grasping it requires courage on our part—courage like Esther had. It also requires faith—putting our trust in God who can bring good out of the worst circumstances.

II. TARGET
The students will:
- Understand that God promises victory not only over literal enemies but also over sin and temptation. (Know)
- Feel confident in God’s love and ability to bring victory. (Feel)
- Choose to make a courageous stand like Esther’s, knowing that God will be with them. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
- Courage
- Temptation
- Love for enemies

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED
Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

We all experience hardships and difficult times in life—but we also experience victory. In fact, as Christians we should expect victory. How do we deal with it when God answers our prayers?

Give each person in the class a piece of paper and pencil. Ask them to brainstorm all the “victories” they can think of in their lives—answered prayers, times they overcame temptation, or found a solution to a difficult problem. Ask each person to choose one thing from the list that they’re comfortable sharing with others, then go around the circle (in a larger class, divide...
into small groups) and ask each person to share one
close one victory they’ve experienced with God’s help.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Once upon a time, when people watched a sport-
ing event on TV, they watched it as it happened. Just
like those watching live in the stands, they had no idea
of the outcome until the game was finished. Viewers at
home sat in real suspense as the game of football or
hockey or baseball played out.

We can still do that, of course. But in this day and
age, we’ve also got video recording, digital recording,
TiVo, and every other imaginable way of recording
what we watch for entertainment. If you have to be out
on the night the big game airs, you can save it to
watch later.

Have you ever sat down to watch a prerecorded
sporting event when you already knew the outcome?
You still thrill to watch your team play and cheer when
they score points, but you already know they’re going
to win. The suspense of watching is lessened by the
fact that you know the outcome.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In our Christian lives we face challenges, set-
backs, and trials. But we know the outcome will be
victory if we trust in Jesus. He has already won the
game for us. We’re not spectators, but players; we
play with the confidence of knowing that victory is
already secure.

Bible stories such as the story of Esther challenge
us to trust God in a big way—to stand up for what we
believe, to do what’s right when it’s unpopular. The
same stories come with the assurance that God will
give us victory—even though our faith may be tested
on the way.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your
students, use the following in your own words to
process it with them.

Discuss the Out of the Story questions, then refer
back to some of the “victory” experiences students
shared in the Getting Started section. Ask a couple of
students if they are OK with you using their experi-
ences as an example for the discussion (you can also
contribute one or two of your own). On a chalkboard,
whiteboard, or flip chart at the front of the room, recre-
ate the following chart. Discuss with students how to
fill in each of the headings, using four experiences of
victory suggested by class members, plus Esther’s
experience from the Bible lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>What was the problem?</th>
<th>Who/what was the enemy?</th>
<th>What did the person involved have to do?</th>
<th>What did God do for them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esther saves the Jews of Persia</td>
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</table>

After discussing each situation, ask: What can we
learn from these stories that can help us the next
time we face an “enemy” in our lives?

Use the following as more teachable passages
that relate to today’s story: Romans 8:31-39;
Ephesians 6:10-18.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light
on the story for your students. Share it in your own
words.

Some of the Bible stories, such as this one, can
shock us a little with the amount of bloodshed and
violence that’s carried out, apparently with God’s
approval. When God provides victory in this story, the
Jews get to fight back against their enemies, Haman
gets hanged, and Esther and Mordecai demand that
the bodies of Haman’s sons should be put on display
as a warning to anyone else who might want to attack
God’s people. The Old Testament is full of stories such
as these—the firstborn of Egypt wiped out, the cities of Canaan sacked and destroyed, etc.

It’s difficult to square these stories with the God of love and mercy as seen throughout the Bible, and seen most clearly in the ministry of Jesus. However we choose to understand these stories, it’s clear that we as Christians are living in a new era. Jesus taught that our attitude toward enemies should be one of love and forgiveness (Matthew 5:43-48). So for Christians, having “victory” doesn’t mean defeating your enemies in battle, or even humiliating that classmate who makes fun of you for your beliefs.

Paul reminds us that we are not battling flesh and blood, but spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:12). The real enemy is not your nasty classmate—he or she is a human being you are called to love and win for Christ. The real enemy is Satan, who tries to tempt us, discourage us, and distract us from following God. The

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
real enemy often seems to come from within, because we all have a sinful nature over which God promises victory. In our struggle against spiritual powers, our weapons are not swords and guns, but the whole armor of God. Victory doesn’t mean gloating over the decaying bodies of our enemies, but triumphing over our own “dark side” and the temptations of the devil. Sometimes, loving our human “enemy” can be the greatest victory.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Create an “award certificate” (easy to do with most word-processing programs on your computer) for each person in the class. Each certificate should say: GOD PROMISES VICTORY OVER EVERY ENEMY IN YOUR LIFE

Hand the certificates out to students, and have each person write their name on it. Say: As we close with prayer, I want you to think about how God can bring victory out of any difficult situation you’re facing right now, if you turn it over to Him.

Ask students to take the certificates home and keep them in a place where they’ll see them and be reminded of the promise of victory.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words: Esther faced a challenge. All the Jews of Persia faced a challenge—an enemy who was determined to destroy them. But Esther moved forward in faith, doing what had to be done even though she recognized that it was risky. When she responded with courage, God rewarded her and her people with victory.

We, too, face challenges. We’re not likely to be attacked by enemies who want to kill us, but we’re attacked by the devil’s deceptions, by temptation, fear, discouragement, and all kinds of things that try to derail us from living a Christian life. When we face up to these enemies with courage and do God’s will, He promises victory, just as He did for Esther.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapter 49.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

This lesson is primarily about leadership and preparing the heart to follow God’s will. It is important to impress on the students that any person with the right attitude, discipline, and desire can lead people for God.

I. SYNOPSIS

Ezra is preparing to take the children of Israel home—at least those who want to come back home with him. He is a strong and learned man, about whom it says in 7:10: “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (NIV). He was a leader, a teacher, and a doer of the Law and will of God.

The story goes on to tell us that many Israelites did go back with Ezra, although he had to make multiple pleas at times to get those he needed (the Levites in particular) to come along with him. He came to realize, however, that many of the Israelites who returned with him were not following the will of God to which Ezra had devoted his heart and life. Therefore, he had to stand firm on the issue of intermarriage. The point was broader than marrying someone from a different country; it was about following what God had asked them to do.

As we teach this week we want to be very cognizant of the fact that becoming a leader is something that anyone can do with the right attitude and desire to know the will of God. While we don’t necessarily know the kind of person Ezra was, what we can surmise is that he was disciplined, desirous of a relationship with God, and passionate for God’s people. We should be leading the young people to these same values.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Become more familiar with an important character and story in the Bible. (Know)
• Sense that God has a call on their lives. (Feel)
• Understand what is required of a spiritual leader and agree to go where God leads. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Spiritual leadership
• Understanding of the law of God
• Consistent living within God’s will

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Ask students to read the What Do You Think? section of their lesson and then ask the following questions:
• Do any of you go to school away from home? If so, what does it feel like to come home?
• Do you think it would make a difference if home were a shack compared to the mansion you live in at school? (Babylon to Jerusalem parallel).
• What do you think God is calling you to do? Lead, follow, ignore?
• How far are you willing to go for God?
• Is there anyone you can look to in your life and say they are a spiritual leader? (Pastors are excluded.)

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Alexander the Great, the Greek king, once led his troops across a hot, arid desert. After nearly two weeks of marching, he and his soldiers were near death from thirst, yet Alexander pushed ahead.

In the noonday sun, two of his scouts brought what little water they were able to find. It barely filled a cup. Alexander’s troops were shocked when he poured the water into the burning sand.

The king said, “It is of no use for one to drink when many thirst.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

While Alexander went on to many victories, he also had a few problems. When you juxtapose this with Ezra’s leadership style you can see a vast difference. While Ezra was also willing to be the kind of leader who would not abandon his people in their time of need, he also had a very different starting point from Alexander.

Alexander’s leadership was much about him, while Ezra was always seeking the heart of God in his leadership of God’s people. Ezra was never one to let his ego go in front of his responsibility to God, and to those who were entrusted into his care.

As Christ-called leaders, we must be willing to submit ourselves to His will, constantly seeking His heart and devoting ourselves to the study of His words.

As we humble ourselves before God He will give us His strength and His wisdom to lead His people to where God desires them to go.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• What is the most important text in this group of texts? Underline it.
• Why do you think a genealogy was included in this story? Please explain.

• Highlight your favorite text out of the group.
• The Scripture story tells us that Ezra was “a teacher well versed in the law of Moses.” What does this tell us about the attributes of spiritual leadership?
• The passage speaks of all the different people who came to be part of the Temple worship: priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants. What does this tell us about worship and God’s will for worship?
• The king was gracious to God’s people, giving them articles of gold and silver for the Temple, as well as money to buy sacrificial animals. Why do you think he was so generous?
• What does this passage tell us about God? about us? about our relationship with God?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Luke 5:1-6; Exodus 4:1-12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

There is a great deal of background important to understanding this story of Ezra. Perhaps the first point is that Ezra bringing the children of Israel back is a fulfillment of prophecy. It harkens back to Isaiah 44 and 45. It is possible that Cyrus had heard of the prophecy of Isaiah—this he could possibly have learned from Daniel. But regardless of his knowledge, King Cyrus was used by God in order to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah.

The purpose of Ezra’s account is interesting. It was probably written about 400 B.C., or a little later. The author was interested in encouraging the Jews in their despondency. They had returned in part from the Babylonian exile and had been able to rebuild the Temple. However, they really didn’t have any true political freedom, and they were not able to reestablish King David’s royal line.

The author saw clearly that in the history of Israel two things were intertwined: the Davidic line and the Temple. Therefore, he wrote a history of both things so that people might understand that if the Temple had been restored, then it was very possible that the restoration of the monarchy might happen as well.

However, what he did not understand was that the Temple without the coming Messiah was really just an empty shell.
Although the people, at least in part, were back in Judah, they were still not wholeheartedly following the law of God. While we have spent the majority of the time on the spiritual leadership of Ezra, it is important to note how Ezra was a firm believer in following the commands of God. Perhaps this is a consideration for teaching this section: he was interested in the people of Israel following God’s will, but he was also the kind of leader that allowed for flexibility in dealing with what was happening (remember the rain in chapter 10).

Last, Ezra can be considered a “type” of Christ our High Priest (Hebrews 7). While not a one-to-one distinction, such as that found in Romans with the use of Adam as the “type” and Christ as the “Antitype,” it is still a strong parallel that shows us that Christ is truly our High Priest, both spiritually and in a historical context, as we look back on the way Ezra led his people. Christ has always fallen into the role of leader and teacher. As well, Jesus has had that same ability as Ezra to be both flexible and inspirational as a leader. We are blessed to have such great examples of spiritual leadership.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Give each person a 3” x 5” card and have them list the attributes they are looking for in a spiritual leader. In fact, if you give them the cards at the beginning of the class, you can ask them the question before the lesson as well as after. Their answers might change with the influx of new information through the study of Ezra. At the end, collect the cards and have a prayer that each student might become one of those spiritual leaders.

Summary
Spiritual leadership and a desire to follow the will of God is of paramount importance to this lesson. We see Ezra, a priestly leader, devoting himself to the study of God’s Word and will, as well as being a man of action who does what God is calling him to do. He

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Media Minds
Whenever possible, use media to create a better understanding of the history and background of the story you are talking about. Things such as PowerPoint presentations, video clips, and even using Google Earth to see the area we are talking about. This creates an opportunity for young people to see and hear, which always adds to the spiritual and educational experience. Where this is not possible, you can always explain to them what life would have been like for Ezra and the people of Israel.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
   Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
   Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
   Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

   Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
is also a man who understands the human condition and is not so inflexible that he is not willing to work for both the good of the community and the good of the call of God in his life and the life of the children of Israel. Young people need to understand what it means to be a good spiritual leader. Hopefully, you as the teacher have had the opportunity to be that spiritual leader to your young people. As they see the principles shown to us in Ezra, may they come to understand how you are that type of leader and how they can be as well.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 50; 51.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week’s lesson is the first of four studies covering the faithful work of Nehemiah.

Now that the exile in Babylon was over, the Jews were dispersed in every direction. The news came to Nehemiah describing the terrible condition of the city walls and gates of the once-glorious city of Jerusalem. The disrepair of the walls is symbolic of the spirit and faith of the Jews, which caused Nehemiah to weep. While some Jews simply accepted their situation and sought to fit in to their surroundings, Nehemiah felt a deep conviction for the glory and pride of God’s people.

As an exile, Nehemiah served the Persian king with skill and wisdom, and emerged as a person of influence for the king. Ellen White observed of Nehemiah: “The recipient of royal favor, however, though surrounded by pomp and splendor, did not forget his God nor his people” (Prophets and Kings, p. 628). Of all the admirable qualities he possessed, Nehemiah’s greatest attribute is displayed in his initial response of turning to pray first to God as the source of redemption and hope.

Nehemiah recalls his first response: “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4, NIV). But even as his prayer was lifted up and the tears poured out, his strength, courage, and insight as a leader stirred within him. His corporate prayer for repentance and the return of God’s glory is a prayer to be prayed today. Even now, if young people begin to pray, courage and insight will fill their hearts and new opportunities will emerge to do great things for God again.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Discern that the first step to any challenge is to pray. (Know)
• Sense genuine concern for broken people and the broken perception people have of God. (Feel)
• Choose to work hard for God’s cause in the world. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• God’s will/guidance
• Fasting
• Prayer

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

This week’s Either/Or activity challenges young people to choose one response or the other and explain their answer. Both answers are good, but the exercise urges them to flesh out their experience.
When students describe which is more meaningful, praying with others or praying alone, you might ask after they respond: “What are the different reasons we might pray alone versus with others? How is praying for another person (individual) different from praying on behalf of them (corporate)?” Discuss the reasons why you think God wants us to pray for the big problems in the world?

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

The story is told of a man who was taking a morning walk when a garbage truck roared up beside him, stopped, and the driver jumped out to speak with him. The man walking thought maybe the garbage man needed directions, but then he reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and showed him a picture of a sweet little 5-year-old boy. “This is my grandson,” the driver said with tears choking up in his voice, “He’s on life support in a hospital across the country.” The walker then thought the driver was going to ask him for money to help with the hospital bills, but the driver wanted something much more valuable than money. He implored, “I’m asking everybody I can to say a prayer for him. Would you say one for him, please?” The driver believed that if his grandson’s cause became an item of prayer, perhaps God would work a miracle on his behalf.

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

Many people believe in prayer. Praying first and acting next is what makes Nehemiah such a great leader. The prayer of Nehemiah is like the desperate prayer of the grandfather mentioned in this story.

Someone has to make the first move when it comes to prayer. Nehemiah’s first response to the problems at Jerusalem was not to examine the theological ramifications of the problem, but to do what he could do—pray. You might say Nehemiah is more of a “kneelogian” than theologian. Examine each word and phrase in this story to capture a sense of the sadness and hope that stirs in the heart of Nehemiah for God’s people.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

*After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- What is the key problem that prompts Nehemiah to pray?
- Who are the “remnant” in this passage, and why are they described this way?
- Underline the words and phrases that convey the emotions that Nehemiah felt.
- What other characters in Scripture might understand Nehemiah’s burden? Explain.
- Examine the prayer of Nehemiah and identify key parts that you think might be important.
- What do you think is the “covenant of love” referred to in Nehemiah 1:5?
- In verse 11, what specifically does Nehemiah pray for? (You may have to read ahead in your Bible.)
- Why do you think this passage is in the Bible?
- What is the message God has for you in this story?

**Extra Teacher’s Questions**

- As Nehemiah is praying, how often does he refer to “we”? What do you think is significant about praying from the viewpoint of “we” versus “I”?
- What are some things we should pray about corporately as opposed to individually? Why?

*Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Exodus 4–6; John 17; Philippians 1; 2; Daniel 6; Acts 4; 5.*

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

Essentially, Ezra and Nehemiah pick up where the history in Chronicles ends. In the Hebrew Bible the books of Ezra and Nehemiah form one book, whereas in the English Bible the book of Nehemiah is separate, as it is the “memoirs of Nehemiah.” The English Bible places the book of Nehemiah with the historical books, but the story of Nehemiah starts after the exile of the Jews in Babylon. There was no exodus from Babylon as there was from Egypt. In fact, most of the Jews dispersed around the surrounding country and very few, comparatively, even went back to Jerusalem or the Judean countryside.

**Post Exile**

*The SDA Bible Commentary states that “aside
from Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are the only historical books of the postexilic period, and are of great importance for a reconstruction of the history of postexilic Jewry. However, they do not record the history of the people of God in unbroken sequence for the period covered by the two books, but only certain parts of it” (vol. 3, p. 320). The basic time period of Nehemiah begins after the fall of Babylon to the Persian Empire as noted in Ezra 1:1.

The mood of the Persians that ruled during this time can be characterized as open-minded and often kindhearted toward the Jews. Upon their release, the Jews were enabled to begin the process of rebuilding their Temple in Jerusalem. But the walls and the gates of Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed throughout the captivity in Babylon, and the rubble and holes in the walls really spoke symbolically of the spirit and faith of the Jewish people.

Another historical feature that contributed to the goodwill Persia extended to the Jews had to do with where Jerusalem was on the map. Jerusalem and the surrounding area stood in the middle of the highways that went east and west; and the more amicable influence a king had with people in that region, the better commerce, trade, and security were enhanced. So it was good for Artaxerxes to extend goodwill to Jews and assist them in their social and religious endeavors.

The name Nehemiah means “God has comforted,” which attests to the seasons of sadness and despair while in exile. In this lesson Nehemiah needed comfort because his brother brought news of the tattered walls of his homeland and the spiritual brokenness that marked Jerusalem. Herein lies the setting for Nehemiah’s deep sadness for his people. Nehemiah’s first response to fast and pray is key to understanding his leadership role in such a pivotal time of Jewish history. The people needed leaders who would cooperate with God, instead of moving ahead with their own plans or cowardly sitting on their hands as some kings had done in the past.

Teaching From . . .
Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.
  
  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
mighty and brave, others are wise and inspiring, still others are faithful and caring hard workers, such as Nehemiah. His attention to details and faithfulness to duty caused him to become a very influential person in the court of Artaxerxes. You don’t get where he got by being incompetent. When He faced a challenge, he met the challenge by cooperating with God in prayer and work. His passion for his people was remarkable, but many can get weepy when bad things happen. Nehemiah not only demonstrated deep concern, but he moved to enlist the help of God to fix the problem. His example is one we should follow today. Ellen White says: “Again, worldly wisdom teaches that prayer is not essential. . . . The same compassionate Saviour lives today, and He is as willing to listen to the prayer of faith as when He walked visibly among men. The natural cooperates with the supernatural. It is a part of God’s plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 525).

III. CLOSING

**Activity**

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Describe how the broken gates and holey walls of Jerusalem portrayed a visual symbol of the spiritual condition of the people during that season of disorientation after the exile in Babylon. Invite them to get together in twos or threes and think of some modern symbols around them today of the spiritual condition of the church or their personal spiritual lives. Urge them to come up with positive symbols (if the tendency is to be more negative). Have the students debrief by sharing their symbols with the class and explaining their meanings.

**Summary**

*Share the following thoughts in your own words:*

The Bible is filled with heroes of all sorts. Some are

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 52.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The book of Nehemiah is a compilation of the memoirs of Nehemiah. The historic journey of Nehemiah to the construction site in Jerusalem begins with a simple but profound statement: “I was the cupbearer to the king.” His role at court (more thoroughly described in the background context section) is what put Nehemiah in place to make a difference for his people. If kings are anything, they are unpredictable, which is why Nehemiah nervously made his way about his business in court, for he feared his manufactured smile would not hide his true sadness. The king saw through, and instead of being insulted by his servant’s preoccupation with other matters, he inquired of Nehemiah, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” Nehemiah was afraid because you don’t look sad in front of the king. But the goodwill and trust between them gave way to a conversation about the broken walls and gates of his homeland.

Nehemiah stepped even further onto dangerous ground by asking for letters of passage in order to arrange the supplies and resources to rebuild the walls. When the Bible says “It pleased the king to send me,” the words are a testimony to how powerful an influence anyone can be in the world. While there are many themes in this lesson, none is more than that illustrated by the way Nehemiah leads—in cooperation with God. When the king asks, “What is it you want?” the next words in the text are “Then I prayed to the God of heaven.” Nehemiah’s leadership is a cooperative venture between God and man, the same kind of cooperation that is still available today.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Discover God’s guidance is always available. (Know)
• Feel confident in the ability to influence others. (Feel)
• Commit to a cooperative walk with God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Prayer
• Witnessing
• Adversity

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

This week’s activity explores the leadership style of visionaries and doers. As the students report on their tendencies, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both. Perhaps the students can think of biblical or historical examples of leaders who act first or
pray first. Maybe there are such examples of leaders around us.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

There is a story told about a boy who flew a kite so high that it was lost in the clouds. Standing out on the grass with the wind blowing, the boy held on to the string that threaded its way up into the heavens. A man walked by who had been watching the boy and asked, “Why are you holding on to that string?” The boy explained that at the end of the string there was a kite swaying back and forth in the heavens. The man replied, “I don’t see a kite swaying back and forth in the heavens.” The boy smiled and said, “Neither do I!” The man, clearly getting impatient with the boy, inquired, “Well, if you can’t see the kite, how do you know there is one up there?” The boy answered, “I don’t see it, but I know it’s there because I feel the tug on the string.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Great people who do great things are usually holding on to an unseen hand or hearing the still small voice of God in their ears. In this week’s lesson Nehemiah takes some necessary, but risky, leaps of faith to do what needs to be done for God’s glory. Nehemiah was aware that God’s help and counsel were immediately available. As you read the story, note the way Nehemiah moves and reacts to challenges. Observe the way he holds tightly to a string that is tugging at him all the time.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• Read the story, underline the key words and phrases in the passage, and share why you think they are important.
• Circle the people mentioned in this passage and try to identify who they are and their contribution to the story.
• Read the text again carefully and notice the personality and character qualities about Nehemiah that emerge in this story.
• How does the interaction between the king and Nehemiah portray the relationship between kings and servants? To what do you attribute the goodwill or support of the king?
• What enduring truth or example does this story convey?
• What passages indicate how passionate Nehemiah is about this rebuilding project?
• Why is this so important to Nehemiah? Why does it seem like he begins this journey alone?
• Why do you think this passage is in the Bible? What other stories in Scripture depict tentative interactions between servants and rulers? What lessons are similar?
• What is the message God has for you in this story?

Extra Teacher’s Questions

• What leadership qualities do you see in Nehemiah?
• What wise steps does Nehemiah follow as he undertakes this project?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: John 14–16; 1 Samuel 16; 1 Peter 5:7; Daniel 1; Philippians 4:6, 7; Acts 8:26.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Nehemiah shares virtually the same historical background as Ezra. The book of Nehemiah records the third return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Almost 20 years are covered in the book of Nehemiah from the time of his first visit to the time of the actual rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah, named the governor, led the Jews in rebuilding the walls of the city and in reorganizing the people.

It is helpful to remember that Nehemiah is a child of the Babylonian exile. He was born to parents who had been taken into captivity, and his concept and value of freedom is new and very real. While he is serving Artaxerxes at his court, it is a position of a servant, but not a slave. Nehemiah’s skill and trustworthiness earned him the esteemed job as cupbearer to the king. “As cupbearer he occupied a position of immense influence within the empire because of his closeness to the king, a closeness which could actually make the cupbearer second only to the king himself” (J. G. McConville, Daily Study Bible, p. 74). It has been said
of the cupbearer, “If someone tries to poison the king, long live the king, say goodbye to the cupbearer!” The position is clearly a matter of trust.

Even though Nehemiah was born in captivity, he never failed to “remember” his heritage. The word “remember” is mentioned 10 times throughout his memoirs.

The SDA Bible Commentary observes: “It may seem strange that Nehemiah waited three or four months after receiving the report from Jerusalem before approaching the king with his request” (vol. 3, p. 394). One reason might be that the king lived in several residences throughout the course of a year and simply may not have been present to notice the sadness of Nehemiah. Another reason may be that Ezra 4 reveals that the king might have been moody and easily prone to be swayed from one position to another. Hence, the unpredictability of a king might have prompted Nehemiah to caution.

But the king’s reaction to the countenance of Nehemiah speaks of his affection and value of his cupbearer. “Few Persian monarchs would have been sufficiently interested in their personal attendants to notice whether or not they were sad” (The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 395). Clearly, the tremendous support of the king speaks to the kind of leader Nehemiah was and the influence he had as a humble servant of God.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Nehemiah begins the journey of taking this nightmare of information about Jerusalem and making it his dream in life to make it right. More important than the wills are the hearts and minds of his people. Often the process of doing the right thing together will foster an unmistakable transformation in the character of the people who participate. Much in the same way the

Teaching From . . .
Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

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  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
short-term mission trips have the power to truly change the way you think and live and believe, so did the work of rebuilding the walls for the people of God. Is there a good cause you can get involved in, or perhaps start? Please don’t wait until you feel ready or that you have a close relationship with God. It is in cooperation with God that your connection with Him increases. Are there broken walls and busted gates in your sphere of influence today?

**Summary**

*Share the following thoughts in your own words:*

It is hard to face the truth when you are wrong. The people of God had wandered so far from Him that the only way to bring them back again was to send them into captivity in Babylon. God’s plan wasn’t to punish them, but to prepare them to become the kind of people they were destined to be to the world. The path to become God’s true ambassadors to the world is not an easy road, and the journey often includes moments in which your weaknesses, faults, and even sinful behaviors are exposed. But God’s grace and mercy are always there to reach you and teach you about the abundant life. Remember the promise God spoke in Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (NIV). If your desire is to embrace this plan for your life, then be willing to receive the instruction and adversity God brings your way to grow you as a child of God.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 53.

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getting it right

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Nehemiah’s work on the walls and the gates of the city had progressed amidst interpersonal challenges as well as adversity from outside the camp. Through it all the faithful governor and prophet to the people managed to negotiate through the problems. But one particular issue surfaced that stands out as a lesson for all.

God had placed clear guidelines on proper treatment and resources for the poor, but after the exile this counsel went ignored by some who had more means. The wealthy lent money to the poor but charged high interest, sending their own people further into debt and greater poverty. Ellen White states: “Many had been forced to sell their sons and daughters into servitude; and there seemed no hope of improving their condition, no way to redeem either their children or their lands, no prospect before them but ever-increasing distress, with perpetual want and bondage. Yet they were of the same nation, children of the same covenant, as their more favored brethren” (Prophets and Kings, p. 648).

Nehemiah reflected on the news: “When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry” (Nehemiah 5:6, NIV). Nehemiah and others rallied the resources to buy back their brothers and sisters from bondage and set a lesson that seemed to sink deep in the hearts of the Jews: If they had obeyed God’s law, the poor would always have hope and relief. Nehemiah 5:12, 13 shows the penitent response of the landowners, demonstrating that the people can be transformed by the mercy of God. Our lesson this week is about setting people free from their burdens and their hopelessness, and is one in which we can celebrate the mercy God has given us.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Know that God’s law sought to dispense tangible reminders of mercy. (Know)
• Sense the freedom of giving and forgiving. (Feel)
• Choose specific ways to set people free as God commanded. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Freedom
• God’s law
• Grace

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadouministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

This week’s activity posits a question that may be surprising. Galatians 6:10 challenges us to do good to all people, especially to those who are believers. This may seem backward to the students. In fact, this may be surprising to those who are only young at heart.
Have the students discuss which will have a more enduring impact over time.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

“I was visiting my wife while she worked on developing a remedial program for students. I found myself spending lunchtime in the first grade. I enjoyed watching the students rustle around the classroom with their lunch pails and small boxes of milk. I noticed one boy with bright-red, curly hair who remained in his seat. My heart sank into my stomach as someone announced out loud what was obvious to anyone watching, ‘Billy doesn’t have a lunch.’

“At first I thought the remark was cruel. Before I could react the room full of students scurried into action. What I saw seared the most beautiful image of community into my mind. Each student began breaking off pieces of their peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and placed them on a tray that was being passed around the room. I never saw who started the tray around. Bags of chips popped open and littered the brown plastic cafeteria tray with samples of every flavor known to first graders across the land, a half of a banana, tons of carrots and celery, and a bounty of cookies broken in half. As the tray filled with food was set before the hungry lad a grin crept shyly across his sweet freckled face. Embarrassed? A little. Tickled to death at the feast fit for five first graders looming before him like a small mountain? No question. Actually, I had many questions. Who started the tray? When did they learn to do this? Why didn’t I forget my lunch? I asked the teacher, ‘Where did they learn to do this?’ He smiled, ‘It happened a few years back when one of my students would share his lunch with anyone who forgot theirs. Everyone joined in and then it just became kind of an unspoken rule in the classroom. When someone forgets a lunch, everyone helps.’ I was stunned by the simple way the kids created community in their classroom” (Troy Fitzgerald, Christwise Discipleship Guide [Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002], p. 71).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In the same way the class had rules about how to act if someone forgot their lunch, God had rules to make sure the poor had help. It was during the rebuilding of the walls that a heinous truth came to Nehemiah and stirred his anger to action. Read through the story and respond to the questions in the Out of the Story section.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• This week’s story occurs while the people of God are trying to rebuild the walls but can’t contribute financially because of their poverty.
• Briefly describe what you see happening to God’s people in this story.
• Circle the words “we,” “our,” and “us” as they recur in this passage. How do these words reveal a sense of solidarity against injustice?
• What is Nehemiah’s reaction to injustice in verse 6? Explain how this kind of anger is good.
• How did God’s original instructions serve to prevent this kind of tragedy? (Read Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, 11; 23:19.)
• How do Nehemiah and the faithful people respond to the injustice? How do they begin to remedy the problem?
• Reflect for a moment on the significance of buying the slaves back in verse 8.
• What is the response of the nobles and the wealthy in this story to Nehemiah’s rebuke?

Extra Teacher’s Questions

• Why do you think this passage is in the Bible?
• What is the message God has for you in this story?
• In a sentence write what you think the good news is in this passage?
• What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?

Extra Teachable Passages

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Matthew 21; Luke 13:13-18; Deuteronomy 15:15; Galatians 3:14; Isaiah 62:12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Nehemiah’s role in Judea was not simply that of a general contractor; he functioned as a spiritual change cornerstone.
agent; and the locals responded well to his leadership. Nehemiah had brought a radical transformation to the region and the attitudes and perceptions people had about the God Jehovah.

The timing of this story is difficult to mark in the context of the rebuilding of the walls and gates. It is possible that this story took place during the building process, but it is hard to say. Ellen White describes the incident in this week’s lesson as taking place during the rebuilding process.

As the Jews were released from exile, those who returned to the Judean countryside established themselves economically. But severe doubts and seasons of disaster took a toll on many people. The poor had to borrow from those who had means and were charged severe interest for their debt. Furthermore, when the debts could not possibly be paid, their children became slaves to try to repay what was owed.

The Jews had forgotten the laws that Moses had given them to protect the poor and increase their understanding of the significance of their own deliverance. In the law God commands:

“If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs....There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, 11, NIV).

During that time the taxes required were paid by those who had means, and those who did not had to borrow from their own kinsmen in Judea. The SDA Bible Commentary states: “Like other Persian provinces, Judea was annually required to pay a tribute, partly in money and partly in kind, to the Persian treasury. In ordinary years this burden may not have seemed oppressive, but in lean years the appearance of the tax collector often foreshadowed great misery. To meet the taxes debts had to be contracted, and without hope that they could be repaid” (vol. 3, p. 413).

In Prophets and Kings, Ellen White observes that “the Lord had commanded Israel, through Moses, that every third year a tithe be raised for the benefit of the poor; and a further provision had been made in the suspension of agricultural labor every seventh year, the land lying fallow, its spontaneous products being left to those in need. Faithfulness in devoting these offerings to the relief of the poor and to other benevolent uses would have tended to keep fresh before the people the truth of God’s ownership of all, and their opportunity to be channels of blessing. It was Jehovah’s purpose that the Israelites should have a training that would eradicate selfishness, and develop breadth and nobility of character” (pp. 646, 647).

As the issue was brought before Nehemiah in this lesson, his response is classic Nehemiah: He became passionately angry, but he took a few moments to pray and gather his thoughts before he spoke to the people. Additionally, he spoke with action, not just words. He gathered the resources to buy out of bondage as...
many children from the landowners as possible and then challenged them to respond in kind. What is so amazing about this story is that they agreed and followed Nehemiah’s example.

II. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Because our only hope to not repeat this behavior in the future is being mindful of our past as we live in the present, we need to think about what this story would look like today. Invite the students to rewrite this story as it might happen in our time. Have them divide into groups of two or three to work on their modernized Nehemiah stories. As students share their narratives, affirm the similar qualities you see in their story that are evident in the biblical story.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

It is hard to imagine how only a few years from being slaves in Babylon the children of God forget—not only what it is like, but who they are and who God is. Each incident and story in Scripture is part of The Big Story. One teacher asked the students to give a descriptive title to the Bible the same way we would title the story of Moses and the Red Sea. Students need to see the big picture and how the parts fit the whole.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapters 54; 55.

*A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
hungry for more

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week’s lesson is focused on a day of worship on which the people gathered to hear the reading of God’s law and sought to understand its meaning. The walls had been repaired and the gates restored, but much of the city still lay in ruins. The work of restoration done by Nehemiah and the people demonstrated a visual symbol of the renewal that was taking place in the lives of the Jewish people: hopeful progress, yet still work to be done.

As the congregation gathered, the aged prophet Ezra read the law to the people. But the law was not simply read; it was explained. Unfamiliar with God’s law and His will for them, the throng gathered hungry for instruction. Their knowledge of God was thin and they were starving to hear and know. On their feet they stood, listened, and responded with an emphatic, “Amen, amen!” Clearly the language of the law was foreign, but the spirit of God’s enduring message through the feasts and services of the Temple still stirred them to respond. “All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law” (Nehemiah 8:9, NIV). But Nehemiah, sensing their conviction, longed for them to enjoy the grace of God, so he challenged them to be joyful about the good news they had heard. Of course, the Levites agreed, but added, “be still.” Not as a contradiction, but to add to Nehemiah’s encouragement a way to make the joy stay: “Be still, let this great message of God’s mercy and plan sink in deep.”

If this story reminds us of our spiritual journey, then it is appropriate that the story of Nehemiah include a day of worship that celebrates God’s grace as the source of our spiritual growth.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Understand the role of worship in our relationship with God. (Know)
• Sense the joy and grace of God in worship. (Feel)
• Choose to seize sacred moments as a time for reminders, rebirth, renewal. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Worship
• Feasts
• The law of God

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

This week the What Do You Think? activity invites students to rank the kind of activities that are most meaningful to them in worship. These items are more general, but they capture principles of worship that are essential to our spiritual growth. As students indicate
which are more meaningful, invite them to explore why the other expressions are not. In some cases, it is because they simply don’t try it or have experience with that form. You might ask: “Which of these expressions of worship would you like to experience more than you do now? Why?”

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

Fifty thousand people gathered for the event: a regular season football game. The sights, the sounds, the smells were quite normal for such an event. Even the opening ceremonies followed the standard operating procedure: introductions and the national anthem. During the national anthem I noticed the mood of the crowd shift slightly, more reflectively, as the big TV screens showed close-up shots of people in the crowd who recognized the reverence of the moment. A man stood next to me and my son who stood attentive and fixed on the flag, tears welling up in his eyes. Throughout the course of the game I spoke with him about many things, but his demeanor during the opening ceremony made sense when he informed me that he had served in the United States Marines. Everything clicked at that point. His posture. His story. His values. I asked him what goes through his mind when the national anthem is played and people aren’t paying attention. He smiled and said, “At first I would get angry. Now I just hope and pray that everyone will someday get a chance to feel the pride and respect I have for my country.”

Sometimes we hear people describe a significant experience as “having a moment.” In this week’s lesson the people of God stop and “have a moment” together, learning, crying, shouting for joy, and feasting in celebration of God’s amazing love and care for His children. How would you describe those moments with God? Are they few and far between?

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

As you think about your national pride and the feelings you have for your country, how does your national pride compare to the respect and emotion you feel toward God? As you read the story for this week’s lesson and note the dynamics, the genuine desire to hear, and the overall experience of God’s presence, think about your own worship experiences and the moments you have been reminded of God’s grace and have been reborn.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:

- Circle the word “understand” throughout this passage. How many times is there a phrase that refers to the teachers or hearers as being able to understand what was read? Why do you think there is much emphasis on the phrase “able to understand”?
- What other key verses or phrases emerge as you read this story?
- How would you characterize the worshippers gathered at this sacred service?
- What is their attitude toward the Word of God? How long are they engaged in worship?
- What is the one verse in this story that you think is central to understanding what is happening in the passage?
- In this story is there a — truth to believe? — promise to claim? — behavior to adopt?
- What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?
- Nehemiah tells the people to eat and drink and rejoice, while the Levites tell them to “be still.” What do you think that interchange is about?

**Extra Teacher’s Questions**

- What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?
- What part of this story really arrests your attention today? Why?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 2; Luke 19:38-40; Psalm 98:4; Isaiah 49:13; Psalm 46:10.

**Sharing Context and Background**

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The lesson for this week is a storied celebration of worship occurring at the time of the Feast of Trumpets, as Ellen White describes it: “It was the time of the Feast of Trumpets. Many were gathered at Jerusalem.
The scene was one of mournful interest. The wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the gates set up, but a large part of the city was still in ruins” (Prophets and Kings, p. 661).

There are seven Jewish feasts given by God to be celebrated each year, notwithstanding the seventh-day Sabbath occurring every week.

The first four feasts come in the spring (April or May) together in succession:
1. The Passover
2. Unleavened Bread, for 7 days after the Passover
3. Firstfruits, the last day of Unleavened Bread
4. Pentecost, 50 days after Passover

Then there is a break until fall (September or October) and three more feasts occur in succession:
5. The Feast of Trumpets, for 10 days
6. The Day of Atonement, at the end, 10 days later
7. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, five days later

The people gathered to celebrate the great feasts of the seventh month as well as seize the time for religious instruction. The title of this lesson is “Hungry for More,” which captures the earnest spirit of this gathering to learn more about a God they had almost forgotten. The SDA Bible Commentary comments: “Not content with existing conditions, they desired to reach a higher level in their spiritual experience and were convinced that the hearing of God’s Word would benefit them” (vol. 3, p. 425).

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Active Participation and Reflection

There are two teaching techniques that are actually demonstrated in this week’s lesson. One tool is the active participation and celebration of new knowledge—affirmation. Whenever a student says something or does something in class that enriches the experience, affirmation is crucial. To acknowledge a skill learned or a concept understood deepens the students’ desire to try again. Simply watch how children respond to people who affirm them—they are drawn to them. The other tool is a reflective piece in this story. The Levites ask the people to “be still” because reflection is key to the learning process as well. Both are done in joy, but are two different activities that need to be fostered in classrooms and churches.

The time of corporate worship has arrived. The walls are rebuilt, but the city is still broken. The people are clearly ignorant of so much of their heritage and identity as Hebrews. But in spite of their lack of understanding and experience, they are hungry to know, to experience, and to obey God, which is portrayed in this wonderful story. Ezra’s work has not gone on in
vain. Nehemiah’s efforts have been a success. The people of God are postured to renewed growth and obedience to God’s plan for their life. The worship ends in seasons of feasting, joy, and somber reflection of what this all might mean to them.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Stand up and shout or sit down and be still. Have the students think of experiences in their lives in which they were so impacted by a worship experience that they felt compelled to do either of the two responses. Challenge them to think of an example of both, share their experiences with the person sitting next to them, and again with the rest of the class if they want.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This story is a classic demonstration of our hunger to learn and grow once we discover the truth of God’s amazing mercy and plan for our lives. We are deeply affected by what God has done for us and so determined to know more that we must respond. What is so beautiful about what we learn in this story is that as broken and unfinished as we might be, there is joy, confidence, peace, and safety in our knowledge of Christ. What an awesome picture to see broken people with new construction all around them be so joyful about the possibilities of new growth. Perhaps this is why Paul writes: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NIV). So when you, like those people in Nehemiah’s day, finally understand God’s message in His Word, you will stand up and shout or sit down and be still. Either response is a joyful declaration of God’s ability to save you and make you whole.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapters 56; 57.

*A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
The prophecies of Isaiah come from a troubled time in Jewish history. Threatened by powerful empires all around, losing its connection to God, the nation of Judah was on the downward path that would end with exile in Babylon. Isaiah’s prophecies warned of God’s judgment on the surrounding nations, and pointed forward to a brighter time when the Jews would be restored to their homeland. During the exile in Babylon, these words brought hope to the captives.

For Christians, Isaiah’s prophecies point forward not only to Israel’s return from exile, but to the coming Deliverer, Jesus, who would set all humanity free from exile and bondage to sin. The week’s lesson focuses on hope, and how God’s promises can bring hope in the darkest times in our lives. Students are encouraged to relate Israel’s experience to their own, and to recognize that God offers hope when they are discouraged and in despair. Specifically, the lesson should focus on the fact that Jesus is the one who will bring deliverance from sin, fear, and discouragement—just as He promised to do for His people Israel.

II. TARGET
The students will:
- Understand that God offered hope to His people in their darkest times. *(Know)*
- Sense that God offers the same hope to them today. *(Feel)*
- Place their faith in Jesus as the living embodiment of God’s promise of hope and deliverance. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

- Hope
- Faith
- Dealing with discouragement

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the *What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Divide students into groups of three or four. Ask each person to share with the group one time when things were going very badly for them and/or they felt really discouraged. Ask: What (if anything) gave you hope during that time? What kept you going?

Bring the whole group back together and ask a few volunteers to share an example of something that gave them hope during a hard time. Be prepared to wrap up by sharing an example of your own.

Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:
For seven and a half years, American General Robbie Risner was held prisoner under terrible condi-
tions in a Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp. Kept in solitary confinement, cut off from any communication with home, starved, beaten, and tortured, prisoners fought to hang on to their sanity.

Early on during Risner’s time in prison, he noticed a vent in the floor of his room and wrestled the grate off it. Stretching out on the floor on his belly, he was able to stick his head down the opening a little ways. What did he see? Not a secret escape tunnel, but a pencil-sized hole in the bricks and mortar. Through that hole, he could see a single blade of grass.

It was the only bright, colorful, living thing in a gray world of brick and stone. It was the only sign of life and hope, and each day Risner stared at it, drawing strength from this one tiny vision of the outside world.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

When we’re discouraged, when things go badly, the smallest things can give us hope. It could be a single blade of grass, as it was for Robbie Risner in his prison cell. It could be an encouraging word from a friend, a Bible verse, a memory of a time when things were better, linked to the promise that someday they will be again. For God’s people in the dark times of oppression and captivity, promises of a restored homeland and a Deliverer who would come to set them free kept their hope alive. That same hope—in Jesus, our Deliverer—can encourage us even when things are at their worst.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

The passages in the Into the Story section are written in the form of poems, such as the book of Psalms. These ancient poems express God’s promise of hope and deliverance for His people. They paint a creative word-picture of what Jesus would do when He came to earth. The promise of a better future helped people get through hard times.

Divide your class into pairs or groups of three. Give each group paper, poster board, and art supplies. Say: I want you to write a message of hope like Isaiah did. Yours should be for someone your age who is going through a hard time. What promises would encourage that person and offer light in their darkness? You can use a combination of Bible promises (from the lesson passage and/or other places in the Bible) and your own words of encouragement. When you’ve decided what to write, copy it out on poster board and illustrate it.

After each group has completed their poster, display the posters in your Sabbath School room or somewhere else in church.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The historical time period in which Isaiah lived was at least 200 years before the exile into Babylon, but the prophecies in the book of Isaiah point forward to this time period and are very relevant to the experience the Jews went through during those years. Isaiah’s prophecies speak to a people who are on the verge of giving up hope. The “chosen people” have been chosen to be rebuked and punished by God, oppressed and overrun by foreign nations.

The years of fighting against foreign powers, culminating in the exile in Babylon, tested the faith of the people of Israel and Judah and caused them to rethink their beliefs about their relationship with God. The earlier books of the Bible are full of stories of victory and triumph—God promising that Israel will triumph over their enemies and providing victory, as when they settled the land of Canaan and drove out the Canaanites. Their understanding of the covenant with God was that they would worship God, and He would bless and protect them.

When they found themselves on the losing side, God’s people questioned whether God had abandoned them. Isaiah and the other prophets were there to point out that suffering was part of God’s plan to lead them back to a faithful relationship with Him, but also to reassure them that hard times wouldn’t last forever.

When we go through difficult times, despair and discouragement, we too may question our relationship with God and ask whether He still cares. Young people who have accepted Jesus with the understanding that He will provide positive feelings and victory over sin may be shaken when trials and temptations hit. Looking at the experience of Israel and the messages God gave to His people can teach young Christians that there is always something to be learned from suf-
fearing, and that God always promises a way out. Most important of all, we can see that the Scriptures point to Jesus as the one who will ultimately deliver us from all suffering. That was true 700 years before His birth, and it’s just as true today.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Divide students into pairs and ask them to pray for each other. If they feel comfortable doing so, they can share with each other one situation in their lives in which they feel as if they need hope right now—or a friend they’d like to pray for who is in need of hope and encouragement. Allow a few minutes for students to pray together, then close with a prayer for the whole group.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God’s people in the Bible went through tough times. God’s people today—you and I—go through tough times as well. The Bible does not promise us that life will be easy or that everything will always go well just because we’re Christians. In fact, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33, NIV). But He also added, “Take heart! I have overcome the world.”

The promise of the Messiah’s coming was the hope that shone light in the darkness for the Jews in ancient times. It’s the same promise that encourages us today. We know that He has already come and proven God’s love and power by dying for us and rising again. Now our hope looks forward to His second coming when God’s promises to Israel—and to all people—will be completely fulfilled. We can trust that Jesus will bring hope to our lives today, and an even greater hope of a new earth where we’ll no longer experience the trials and troubles we have today.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Creative Writing
This week’s lesson calls for some creative writing—creating a modern-day “prophecy of hope,” using a combination of Bible verses and the students’ own words. Some students find writing intimidating, perhaps because it’s been difficult for them in school. Working with a partner or small group should take some of the pressure off. If one member of the group is more comfortable writing, the other(s) can contribute ideas and leave the actual words to the person who likes writing.

It also helps to remind students that this isn’t school—you’re interested in their ability to communicate a message of hope, not to spell or punctuate.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 58.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.*
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah look beyond Israel’s present troubles—oppression by foreign nations, exile in Babylon, the attempt to rebuild the homeland after exile. They look forward to a time of peace and prosperity in which all nations look to Israel as a source of truth and enlightenment. At the center of these prophecies is the figure of the Lord’s Servant as described in Isaiah 53 and other passages. The Servant is not the conquering Messiah who will defeat Israel’s enemies in battle, but the humble Leader who suffers on behalf of others.

When Jesus came, He was not the kind of Messiah Israel was hoping for. Their hope was for deliverance from their immediate problem—political oppression. Jesus came to be a different kind of Leader. His type of leadership was foretold in the prophecies of the suffering Servant, and His kingdom was to be the peaceful kingdom prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah—not just the kingdom of Israel, but a kingdom for those of all nations who worship the God of compassion and peace.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Recognize the portrayal of Jesus in the Old Testament prophecies. (Know)
• Desire to follow Jesus as a leader rather than the world’s idea of a hero. (Feel)
• Choose to follow Jesus’ example of loving service to others. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Prophecy
• Leadership
• Jesus’ ministry

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Bring in a selection of pictures illustrating different “heroes”—real-life celebrities; comic-book superheroes such as Superman, Spiderman, and Batman; legendary and mythical heroes. If you’re not able to get pictures, just write names on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or flip chart. Ask: Which of these people is a hero? Why? What have they done?

From the discussion generated by the pictures of heroes, ask students to brainstorm a list of qualities.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Who are the “superheroes” we’ve been discussing? They come from a variety of backgrounds—myth, legend, history, movies, television, comic books. What do heroes have in common?

They often come from humble or ordinary back-
grounds. Think of the comic book and movie superheroes. Superman is an alien from a distant planet—but he’s raised by a simple farming family on earth and grows up as Clark Kent. Spiderman is high school nerd Peter Parker until he has a lucky encounter with a radioactive spider. Batman is really billionaire Bruce Wayne, but his childhood was scarred by his parents’ murder.

Out of a humble, disadvantaged, or tragic past, the hero grows to develop extraordinary powers and uses them for the good of humanity. So far, the typical comic book hero sounds a lot like Jesus—who came from a simple peasant family and grew up to use His divine powers to help and heal people. But one important distinction exists between Jesus and all other great heroes. They all triumph through strength—using force to blast or crush or otherwise destroy their enemies. Only Jesus triumphed through weakness—allowing His enemies to crush and destroy Him, so that by suffering He could redeem the suffering of others.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The prophets gave the people of Israel hope throughout hard times. But people focused on the message they wanted to hear—that someday their nation would be great again, that foreign oppressors would be overthrown. They overlooked some of the shadows in the picture of the future that the prophets painted—a picture of a Messiah who would conquer through suffering, who would redeem others by dying for them. When Jesus came, they didn’t see in Him the Messiah they were expecting. Sometimes our own expectations of how we would like God to work blind us to what God is actually doing in our lives.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

Direct students’ attention to the activity in Sunday’s lesson. Divide the class into groups of three or four and have them do the activity together, making up a “Messiah Wanted” ad based on the Bible passages in the lesson. Encourage group members to suggest other Bible passages—particularly from the Gospels—that could be used to add to the job description of the Messiah. Then give each group poster board and art supplies and ask them to design and illustrate a job ad for the Messiah, using several Bible texts drawn from the lesson and from other parts of the Bible.

After the posters have been done and shared with the whole group, ask: What kind of Messiah were the people of Israel looking for? What kind of Messiah did God send them? Was Jesus what they really needed? Why did most people not recognize Him as the true Messiah?

What kind of Savior, God, or hero are people looking for today? Does Jesus fit the job description? How can we help people be more aware of their need for Jesus and how He fulfills their needs?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It can be challenging to teach a lesson about how Jesus fulfilled—and didn’t fulfill—Jewish expectations of the Messiah without sliding dangerously close to anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews). For many centuries Christians have had a tragic history of hating and persecuting Jews, using as their excuse that “the Jews rejected Jesus.” The worst historical expression of this hatred was, of course, seen in the Holocaust during the Second World War (which most students in this age group will have learned about in school).

It’s important to focus on a Christian understanding of the Old Testament messianic prophecies without condemning the Jews for having a different understanding. We need to focus on the fact that the Jews of Jesus’ time (and in the centuries leading up to that time, from Isaiah’s era onward) experienced persecution, loss of freedom, and loss of their independence as a people. It was natural for them to look back to the golden age of Israel as a free and sovereign nation, and look forward to a Messiah who would restore that golden age.

Many of the things the Jews expected the Messiah to do—to bring peace on earth, to bring the whole world to the knowledge and worship of the true God, to reestablish Jerusalem as a great city and a center for the worship of God—are, indeed, found in these Old Testament prophecies. Jesus did not do these things during His life on earth, a fact that many Jews
today point to as proof that He was not the Messiah. Many Jews still believe a Messiah is coming who will do these things—while Christians believe that Jesus will do these things when He returns to complete His work at the Second Coming.

As Christians, our attitude toward the Jewish people should be one of respect and gratitude for the heritage and the Scriptures we have inherited from them. While we recognize that our understanding of the Messiah’s role differs from that of the Jews, our focus should not be on “how those Jews got it all wrong,” but rather on the many ways that we, as Christians, still “get it wrong.” Despite having both the Old and New Testaments to learn from, we still don’t fully appreciate Jesus’ ministry of peace, humility, and servanthood. We should turn to the Bible to correct our own errors, rather than condemning the errors of others.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

Using “Pop-culture” References in Teaching

This week’s lesson asks students to reflect on the idea of Jesus as a leader, or hero, by comparing Him to superheroes from popular culture (some specific examples are given in the Getting Started section). Most young people today are deeply familiar with popular culture and popular media because they are surrounded by it on all sides. Drawing illustrations and parallels between biblical truths and popular culture can sometimes make biblical truth relevant to them—but a few cautions should be kept in mind:

- Make sure the illustrations you choose are culturally relevant to and sensitive to the community in which your youth live.
- Don’t attempt (especially if you are a generation older than your students) to appear “up-to-date” with your references to pop culture—you will almost certainly end up looking more out-of-date! Give examples from your own frame of reference (e.g., “When I was a teenager, one of the popular shows on TV was . . .’”) and then ask them to supply examples from their own cultural frame of reference.
- Be sure to point out differences between the values of our culture and the values of the Bible. While similarities can be useful, we should be aware of the differences, too. For example, this week’s Getting Started activity points out some similarities between Jesus and comic book superheroes—but also mentions the most important difference: superheroes triumph through strength and the use of force, while Jesus triumphed through weakness and self-sacrifice.
III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Say: This week’s and last week’s lessons have talked about how the promises of Jesus’ coming brought hope to God’s people in dark times, and how those same promises can bring hope for us today.

Hand out a 3” x 5” index card (or, if you can purchase them in advance, a postcard with an attractive nature scene on it) to each student. Write on a chalkboard or whiteboard at the front of the room:

“Jesus gives me hope because . . .”

Ask each person to fill out the card with their own reasons why Jesus provides them with hope. Tell them to take the card home and keep it in their Bible to remind them of the hope Jesus offers in their lives.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God promised His people a Deliverer who would bring them out of darkness and into light. That promised Deliverer was Jesus, but He was a disappointment to some people. He wasn’t a cape-clad superhero or a sword-wielding action hero. Instead, He was a humble servant who met suffering people where they were, helped them, and shared in their suffering. In the end, He shared the worst of all human experiences—a painful death He didn’t deserve.

Jesus triumphed through suffering. He was great because He was humble. He led by being a servant. He promises hope to all of us in our darkest times, but He also calls us to serve others and to suffer just as He did. It’s a big promise, and a big challenge. Let’s pray we’re all ready to be led by the greatest Servant of all.

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Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapter 59.

*A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
The issue of the second coming of Christ and the eternal liberation He will bring to His true followers runs across the Bible from beginning to end. From the chosen nation of Israel to our time, the promise of eternal life and peace with the heavenly hosts has lived fresh in our minds. However, being in a sin-stained world has made an impact in our choices regarding our eternal destiny.

Day after day our enemy (Satan) tries to lure us with his counterfeit promises so we can make wrong choices, which do not lead us to the Promised Land. It is for this reason that our heavenly Creator, through His love for us, gave us heralds through the voice of His early messengers, the prophets, so that we may be strong in our faith, as God will soon fulfill His promises for us through the grace He has expressed in Jesus Christ.

The same way it was with the people of Israel during the time of the prophet Isaiah, so it is with us today—crushed and hopeless, in the world of sin. Isaiah proclaimed a message of hope to the people of Israel that God would set His people free and take them home to Jerusalem to begin a new life. Our Father in heaven has given us the gifts of grace and mercy without which we would be most miserable. Before Christ comes to take us to our heavenly home, let us live so close to God that He can extend His grace and mercy through us to others.

II. TARGET
The students will:

- Comprehend the ability of God to give eternal liberation to His true followers through Jesus Christ. (Know)
- Realize the unchanging nature of God’s promises. (Feel)
- Choose Christ as their personal Savior and Redeemer. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
- Second Coming1
- Grace
- New earth2

You will find materials to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Form groups of three or four and have students share the various responses according to What Do You Think? section. Ask: In what ways have you offered these same words of comfort to others?

Illustration
Many years ago when I was about to graduate from high school, one of my classmates told me, “Philip, I pray that you make your light shine in the
world outside. . . . Be a loyal citizen, so that you are not found on the other side of the law." I had considered it trivial up to sometime recently when I paid a casual visit to one of my country's prisons. That is when I witnessed what it means to be on the other side of the law. Although I was not an inmate myself, I can testify that freedom is really worth what it is, and that liberation is far more than what we already know about it. I came to cherish my friend’s words.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In this world, we are actually behind bars in a place full of pain, suffering, and sin. Each day we get bad news from the media reports, and fear continues to grip us as we desperately look for solutions to our daily problems. In this state of affairs, the world does not seem like a good place for us to live.

Therefore, how good it is to hear that our Father in heaven cares about our predicament in this world! And by His gift of grace and mercy He will soon call us home to be with Him in the eternal kingdom.

The gift of God’s grace, which was manifested in the person of Jesus Christ, will be climaxed at His second coming, when He comes to take the righteous elect to their heavenly home, where pain and suffering and death will be matters of the past.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section of the lesson with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• Underline those words that you find difficult to understand in the selected passages.
• What promises does God make to the people of Israel in these passages? Could the same promises be applicable in your case today?
• Choose and circle two verses that appeal to you the most. Why did you choose these?
• List the features in these passages that are specific to the “new heavens and a new earth” cited in the story.
• What do you think is the most important to understand as far as our spiritual walk is concerned: where we have come from, where we are, or where we are going to?
• What do you think is significant about the fact that God will fulfill only His “best” promises to His “true” followers?

• Read Malachi 4:5, 6 and try to explain it to a friend, a relative, or a nonchurch member in your own words.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Matthew 17:10-13; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1; Isaiah 11:6-9; Romans 10:20, 21.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. Grace

If we could take time to remember the number of mistakes we make every day, we would realize how God gives us mercy and grace on a daily basis. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NASB).

This verse teaches us that whenever we come to God and repent, He always gives us grace and mercy in return. This follows the unconditional love that God has for all His children from the beginning, and we can learn that the two virtues of mercy and grace are inseparable qualities of our Creator.

In 1 Peter 1:3-5 the gifts of grace and mercy are tied to another host of virtues such as hope and salvation, which are embedded in the framework of our redemption plan. For the people of Israel, the prophets proclaimed the message of grace despite the people’s own sin and disobedience toward God and their lack of trust in Him. In the best ways possible the prophets called the people and their leaders to repentance, to live a life of righteousness and justice, and warned that failure to listen to God would bring doom and destruction.

Paul, in the book of Ephesians, tells us that some of the grace gifts are salvation, inheritance, forgiveness, and adoption. We would thank God for His grace, for without it we would never make it to the kingdom.

2. The triumphant entry

It is important to know that when Christ came to the world to identify with the fallen human race, He did not receive the kind of welcome fit for a redeemer or a liberator. The Bible says that “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his
own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:10, 11, NIV). However, since Christ knew who sent Him to the world, He came as one of our own for all of us, to lift us up from the depth of sin to the greater heights of spiritual prosperity. That is why He came as a ransom, to face the consequences of our transgressions at Calvary. What is more, Christ did not go back to heaven forever after His death (Acts 1:11, NIV).

At the execution of the sin sentence, Christ Himself will appear on the judgment day to separate the grain from the chaff. This is the day we are looking forward to, when one day will mark the end of our suffering in this world. “One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ’s second coming, to complete the great work of redemption. . . . The doctrine of the Second Advent is the very keynote of the sacred Scriptures” (The Great Controversy, p. 299).

3. Realms of the New Jerusalem

When Elizabeth Mills wrote the song “We Speak of the Realms” (SDA Hymnal, No. 434), she was inspired to give a hint of what the heavenly home is like. We can imagine the architectural design of the home, the overall tranquility and the total absence of evil, which is overshadowed by the very presence of Christ in that place. You can think of the greatest cities of the world you know, but the point remains the same: the new city we hope for, adorned as a bride for her Lord, is so holy and clean, free from sorrow and affliction. This is the home that Jesus promises to His true followers (John 14:2). Isaiah records: “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” (Isaiah 65:18, NIV). John the revelator also gives us a glimpse of the activities of this Holy City: “The greatness and the wealth of

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**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Random Assignment Lead**

The main aim of the Bible study lessons is based on the idea that in the final end of the lesson all students are able to know, feel, and do according to what they have learned. The Making It Real sections provide a good roundup for the whole lesson for the students to make a personal application of the same. This approach starts with you, the facilitator. Assign the seven days of application randomly to seven members of your class. Each assigned member will lead the class through the day for which he or she is assigned. The entire class tackles issues emerging from the respective days, with the day leader presenting his or her personal views. As the class facilitator, your role is to come up with thought-provoking questions and clarification where your students may feel stuck. In this way the whole class becomes active as each student is prepared to take the lead of any day, and it also enhances participation.

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.
  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
the nations will be brought into the city. But nothing that is defiled will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of the living will enter the city” (Revelation 21:26, 27, TEV).

The Spirit of Prophecy also confirms the magnanimity of the New Jerusalem by highlighting that “in the earth made new the redeemed will engage in the occupations and pleasures that brought happiness to Adam and Eve in the beginning. The Eden life will be lived, the life in garden and field” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 730, 731).

Finally, we have been given the freedom to choose either to be or not to be there. But the big question rests with us: What must we do to be there?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

In your class have two groups to represent the humble and patient. To illustrate the concept of delayed gratification, promise a bigger, long-lasting reward to the group that would wait. The reward can be T shirts or caps for special church functions. For the impatient group promise something that does not last; for example, a cup of juice or a packet of biscuits. At the end of the activity note the following questions:

- How did the students who received smaller rewards feel when their counterparts received larger and long-lasting ones?
- What was the reaction on both sides?
- What was the determining factor for the choices made by the two groups?
- Explain to your class that the same situation will be experienced at Christ’s return when the obedient followers with greater patience will receive a larger reward of eternal life.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The second coming of Jesus, the message of grace, and the new earth are three elements tied together for the salvation of the true followers of Christ. The message of grace is tied together with faith. When we have true faith in God, we will experience a change of character that will yield love, trust, and submission. And as we look forward to the great day of Christ’s second advent and the subsequent new earth, let us have true faith that can lead us to the Promised Land. “The faith that is unto salvation is not a casual faith, it is not the mere consent of the intellect, it is belief rooted in the heart, that embraces Christ as a personal Saviour, assured that He can save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 391).

1 Fundamental Belief No. 25.
2 Fundamental Belief No. 28.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is Prophets and Kings, chapter 60.

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