Welcome

Welcome to the experience of teaching from Cornerstone Connections: Real, Solid, Stories.

The following are provided for your assistance:

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- Why the Bible Story Approach? (teacher introduction) [p. 3]
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A WORD ABOUT WHAT’S AHEAD . . . (student introduction)

The goal of Cornerstone Connections is to lead you to the Bible to see the big story of God and people. This big story continues from the first generation in Eden to your generation today. It’s about the lives of people as the God of the universe interacts with them.

If you are looking for a word from God that is real, Cornerstone Connections captures the message of Scripture and challenges you to make the connections to your real life.

God’s Word is not only real; it is rock-solid. For the first generation to hear God’s voice in the garden to the last group standing before Christ at the Second Coming, the Word of God has been and continues to be reliable.

The word from God comes to us in the stories of people who encountered Him and made a decision to either follow Him or walk away.

Real. Solid. Stories. You will find one in Into the Story in each lesson. Out of the Story will provide you with ways to search for truth you can apply to your life. In each lesson you also will find:

- What Do You Think?—a mental activity to get your mind and heart in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.
- Did You Know?—a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.
- Key Text—a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.
- Punch Lines—a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.
- Flashlight—a brief snapshot of Ellen White’s input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—The Conflict of the Ages.*
temple building and you

Scripture Story: Haggai; Ezra 4–6.
Commentary: Prophets and Kings, chapter 46.
Key Text: Ezra 5:11.

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.cornerstoneconnections.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.

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 complaiingly.” 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 ascendancy, 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.)
“This was a time of wonderful opportunity for the Jews. The highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and it was for the people of God to labor with the utmost activity to carry out the decree of Cyrus. They should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services, and to reestablish themselves in their Judean homes. But in the day of God’s power many proved unwilling. The opposition of their enemies was strong and determined, and gradually the builders lost heart” (Prophets and Kings, p. 572).
If you could design a Seventh-day Adventist church sanctuary from scratch, and money were no object, what elements would you include, if any, from the list below?

- stained glass windows
- cushioned pews
- kneeling benches
- wood floor
- slate floor
- ceiling fans
- flat, not too high ceiling
- high-pitched ceiling
- small electric organ
- large pipe organ
- air-conditioning organ
- theater-style seats
- piano
- large screen and projector
- window wall with pastoral view
- plush, soft carpet on the floor
- regular-size clear windows

Do any of those things say anything about our identity as a denomination? When you think of the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, does it include thoughts of a certain style of church or worship style?

The name “Seventh-day Adventist” was purposefully chosen as a testimony to our beliefs, “Seventh-day,” of course, referring to the Sabbath, and “Adventist” referring to our belief in the second coming of Christ. At the end of 2009 there were 16,307,880 members worldwide organized into nearly 68,225 churches and 63,800 companies.

“Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.”

“As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read . . . , they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop. Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”

“King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon.”

“Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury . . . so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed . . . must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons. Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused His Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.”

“So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.”

(Ezra 5:1, 2; 4:23, 24; 6:1, 7-12, 14, NIV)
“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

“‘Do not be afraid,’ Samuel replied. ‘You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart’” (1 Samuel 12:20, NIV).

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matthew 22:37, NIV).

“‘It seems to me that the dedication of a library is in itself an act of faith. To bring together the records of the past and to house them in buildings where they will be preserved for the use of men and women in the future, a nation must believe in three things. It must believe in the past. It must believe in the future. It must, above all, believe in the capacity of its own people so to learn from the past that they can gain in judgment in creating their own future.’” —Franklin D. Roosevelt, United States president (1933-1945), on the occasion of dedicating a facility to maintain the archives of his presidency.

OUT OF THE STORY

Why did the Temple rebuilders cease work during the reign of King Artaxerxes?

The passage tells us that the prophets helped the Jews build the Temple. What does that tell us about the role of a prophet?

Why do you think King Darius was so kind to the Jewish people?

What role did records maintained in archives play in Ezra’s chronicle of the Temple rebuilding?

Does King Darius seem a bit big on himself? Well, he was! His capital city, Persepolis, was located in what is now Iran. Parts of his palace (circa 510 B.C.) are on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Persepolis was conquered, looted, and burned by Alexander the Great. Does the account of the efforts of God’s people to rebuild the Temple over time offer a lesson to us today regarding the unity or identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over time?

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### Sabbath

Ezra 5:14 talks about the gold and silver utensils taken from the Temple by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, which were to be returned to the rebuilt Temple. What do you think the design and accoutrements of a church sanctuary today should include? What does Temple building in Old Testament times and today have to do with stewardship (both in time and resources)? Unity in the body of Christ? Identity as a church? Both? Neither?

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### Sunday

Did you ever feel resistance as you sought to serve God from doing God’s work today? Have you ever been involved with an effort to build a church, literally with your labor, perhaps as part of a short-term mission project? What impact did that experience have on you? Have you been or are you part of a project to raise funds for a new church home for your congregation? If so, was or is the congregation fully supportive, or is it divided? The Old Testament Temple builders were guided by prophets, so there was strong evidence of God’s leading. How do we discern God’s leading today?

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### Monday

This week’s lesson chronicles the efforts of God’s people over time to follow God’s leading in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. After initially proceeding with great energy to rebuild the Temple, God’s people in the time of Cyrus lost heart in the face of armed intervention. What terms or conditions would dissuade you from doing God’s work today? Have you ever felt resistance as you sought to serve God with all your heart?

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### Tuesday

The Flashlight quote taken from Ellen White’s Prophets and Kings notes that the Temple builders in the days of Babylonian King Cyrus lost their enthusiasm for following God’s leading in rebuilding the Temple. Has there been a time in your family or church family when people have lost heart after initially following God’s leading? Have you ever been involved with an effort to build a church, literally with your labor, perhaps as part of a short-term mission project? What impact did that experience have on you? Have you been or are you part of a project to raise funds for a new church home for your congregation? If so, was or is the congregation fully supportive, or is it divided? The Old Testament Temple builders were guided by prophets, so there was strong evidence of God’s leading. How do we discern God’s leading today?

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### Wednesday

The word “heart” is seen in the chosen Punch Lines as well as in Flashlight. The love and service to God noted in these texts are Christian hallmarks. Yet there are times when Christians may lose heart from any number of causes. Indeed, it may be that a Christian has done something truly evil, yet Samuel’s admonition to God’s people of his day to serve the Lord with all their heart remains true for us today. Through God’s grace we are given opportunity to claim His forgiveness for being faint of heart or worse.

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### Thursday

How are you involved with temple building today? That is, what is your response to God’s leading in a very specific matter? Read and reflect upon this remarkable paragraph from page 576 of Prophets and Kings that speaks about God’s leading, those who follow in faith, and how He uses us today in His service:

“To His children today the Lord declares, ‘Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.’ The Christian always has a strong helper in the Lord. The way of the Lord’s helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him. 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 complaining. Their faith would be stayed on God, and no trial would have power to move them. They would acknowledge Him as their wisdom and efficiency, and He would bring to pass that which He desires to work out through them.”

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### Friday

How do you see yourself as in the lineage of God’s people past and future? In much the same way as a record in an archive provides a tangible link to the past providing information about something that happened, so also do you provide evidence of God’s leading in the present.

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*this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 46.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
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.cornerstoneconnections.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:

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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.
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.

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.
i want you back!

flashlight

“The assaults of Satan are strong, his delusions are subtle; but the Lord’s eye is upon His people. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but Jesus will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness will be removed, that through them the image of Christ may be perfectly revealed” (Prophets and Kings, p. 589).

keytext

“Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

(Zechariah 1:3, NIV)
what do you think?

On a scale from 1 to 10, which of the following challenges would be most difficult (1) to beat, and which would be least challenging (10) to overcome?

___ You lose your entire music collection when your iPod breaks.
___ Your father loses his job.
___ Your application to the college of your choice is denied.
___ Your grandfather dies.
___ Your parents decide to divorce.
___ Your best friend betrays you.
___ You get caught shoplifting at the mall.
___ You fail the final of your most difficult class.
___ Your negligence while driving causes an accident.
___ You have a really bad habit that you can’t seem to shake.

DIG YOU KNOW?

did you know that the name Zechariah means “Yahweh remembers” or “God remembers”? As is the case with many of the Bible’s prophets, the name of the prophet is often a summary of the prophet’s message. What is the significance of Zechariah’s name?

God through Zechariah wanted the returning exiles to know that He hadn’t forgotten the covenant made with them at Mount Sinai when He gave them the Ten Commandments. In return for their obedience, God had promised to bless them and He wasn’t about to forget His promise.

“Then they repented and said, “The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.”’’

“‘Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,’ declares the Lord. ‘Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you.’”

“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?’

“Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.’ Then I said, ‘Put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

“The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: “If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.”’”

(Zechariah 1:1-6; 2:10, 11; 3:1-7, NIV)
“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down’” (Revelation 12:10, NIV).

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38, NIV).

“Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (1 Kings 8:56, NIV).

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5, NIV).

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (Psalm 32:1, NIV).

“Forgiveness is the answer to the child’s dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is made clean again.”—Dag Hammarskjold, 1961 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Secretary General of the United Nations.

“The cure for all ills and wrongs, the cares, the sorrows, and the crimes of humanity, all lie in the one word ‘love.’ It is the divine vitality that everywhere produces and restores life.”—Lydia Maria Child, abolitionist, women’s rights activist, novelist, journalist.
Sabbath

Were the items in the What Do You Think? section difficult to rank? Recovering from a major setback is never easy. This was the challenge the people of Judah faced after spending 70 years as captives in Babylon.

Why did God allow Judah to be captured by the Babylonians? (Zechariah 1:4-6)

When the mighty Persian kingdom defeated Babylon, the Jews were freed. A small group of them decided to return home to Jerusalem. List three major obstacles that you think they would have had to overcome to rebuild and resettle their destroyed homeland.

Sunday

After reading the Into the Story section, explore the passage using the Out of the Story prompts. The book of Zechariah is made up of several visions that God gives Zechariah to encourage the remnant of Judah that returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the ancient Temple that was destroyed by Babylon.

Read Zechariah 2:10. Put yourself in the shoes of one of the returning members of Judah. Write a sentence expressing how these words would make you feel.

Monday

This Sabbath’s Key Text makes it clear that God stood ready to return to the people of Judah, but Judah had a part to play in the process. What do you think God meant when He said to Judah, “Return to me”?

Many of God’s promises to His people are conditional. Read Exodus 19:1-8. What did God promise to do? What did the people of Israel—of which the tribe of Judah was a part—promise to do?

Tuesday

God was not the only Being who reminded Judah of the sins that led it into Babylonian captivity. Satan “accused” them before God. The Bible calls Satan the “accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10, KJV).

Why do you think that Satan proceeded to charge Judah before God? Let’s make it more personal. Why does He make accusations about you to God? Satan’s plan is to separate all human beings from God’s love and fellowship, and He uses our sins to try to convince God that we are not worth saving.

What ray of hope does this week’s Flashlight shine on our humbling condition?

Wednesday

Take a look at this week’s Punch Lines. This week’s Scripture painted a picture of sin’s devastating effects. While in vision, Zechariah saw Joshua, the high priest of Judah, dressed in filthy, tattered clothes—something that God would never tolerate, especially for a priest. Joshua’s manner of dress symbolized Israel’s degraded spiritual condition.

How does God go about fixing this condition? Do you think Psalm 32:1 accurately captures how you feel when God forgives you of sin? Explain

Thursday

Think of a time in your life when you felt abandoned by God. Perhaps it was after you failed a test, or committed a sin that you’d vowed never to do again. How did you deal with the feeling of separation from God? When you feel abandoned by God, how can the Bible help you reconnect with Him? What role can friends play in helping you to hook up with God again?

On a 3 x 5 index card, finish this statement: Whenever I feel far away from God I will . . .

Friday

If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here” (Zechariah 3:7, NIV). Those are the words that the angel of God spoke to Joshua in Jeremiah’s dream. God promised Joshua and Judah a place in His kingdom, provided that they remained obedient to His requests.

In what area of your life are you struggling to obey God? Stop right now and pray, asking God to give you the willingness and strength to obey Him.

12

26

this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 47.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
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
• Church
• Holy Spirit

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.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 hang-dog 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.

• As a starting point, ask for a show of hands of students who have ever read from the books of Ezra and Zechariah. This will allow you to get a sense of how much background you may need to share later.

• 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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**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 persever. 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.

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 48.

*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.

1 Fundamental Belief No. 12.
2 Fundamental Belief No. 5.
Throughout the history of God’s people great mountains of difficulty, apparently insurmountable, have loomed up before those who were trying to carry out the purposes of Heaven. Such obstacles are permitted by the Lord as a test of faith. When we are hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of His Spirit. The exercise of a living faith means an increase of spiritual strength and the development of an unflinching trust” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 594, 595).
Everyone needs encouragement. Wouldn’t you agree? According to Eboni Baugh, Ph.D., the following are five things that parents can do to encourage their teens—you—to feel better about themselves. (OK, don’t gag!) Rank the following parental support tips in order of their importance to you on a scale from 1 to 5 (1—Gotta Have It to 5—Whatever!).

1. Take time to listen to you.
2. Help you set goals for your life.
3. Compliment you regularly.
4. Be a positive role model.
5. Try out one of your favorite activities, or participate in something that you want to do.

How does God encourage us during difficult times?

**Into the Story**

“In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God...”

(2 Kings 10:5-9, NIV)

“Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the...
OUT OF THE STORY

The Scripture story for this week splices together the messages of two separate prophets who are writing about the same event—the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

What do you find unique about Ezra’s message, the first part of *Into the Story*?

What do you find interesting about Zechariah’s message?

*Underline* the promises of God that you find in these scriptures.

How did God help smooth the way for the rebuilding process? How did He help the returning exiles?

What do you think God meant when He stated that Jerusalem would be a city without walls, that He Himself would be a wall of fire around it? Here’s a hint: Consider why ancient cities erected huge walls.

God said that He would be Jerusalem’s glory within. What do you think He meant?

What do these passages tell us about God’s love for humanity?


eresources

punch lines

“What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!'” (Zechariah 4:7, NIV).

“So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:6, NIV).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” (Psalm 46:1, 2, NIV).

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:1, 2, NIV).

“So he said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6, NIV).

other eyes

“If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counselor, caution your elder brother and hope your guardian genius.”—Joseph Addison, English essayist, poet, and politician.

“The chief obstacle to the progress of the human race is the human race.”—Don Marquis, 19th-20th-century U.S. columnist, playwright, humorist.

“It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him.”—Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States.
**Sabbath**

Whether you care to admit it or not, some of the items in the *What Do You Think?* ranking list are essential to your well-being, to your ability not to merely survive, but thrive.

Read Ezra 6:3-5 and think carefully about the following question: If something happened to your church, perhaps a fire that destroyed the entire structure, how would it impact you and the other members of the congregation?

_________________________________

_________________________________

Now think about how the church would react if a wealthy neighbor in the community decided to rebuild the church at their own expense. Write one word to describe how you would feel.

How do you think the people of God felt when they heard the decree to help them rebuild the Temple?

_________________________________

_________________________________

**Sunday**

After reading the *Into the Story* and completing the *Out of the Story* questions, what is new to you in these passages?

When Zechariah saw in vision the man (angel) with the measuring line going over to measure Jerusalem’s dimensions, almost immediately another angel arrived on the scene to stop the man from measuring Jerusalem. Why? Because the people and livestock of Jerusalem would overflow whatever boundaries were erected.

Do you think this promise of a new and beautiful Jerusalem bears any connection to the new Jerusalem described in Revelation 21? Explain.

**Monday**

Read this week’s *Key Text* again. The decree to allow the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by the newly freed people of Judah was no small blessing.

What did the enemies of Judah do to try to discourage Zerubbabel and his citizen workforce? (See Ezra 4:1-5.)

How do you stay focused on doing what God tells you to do when others are disregarding His commands? How does God help you during these challenges?

**Tuesday**

This week’s *Flashlight* quotation highlights the importance of trusting God through difficult circumstances. A little later in this same chapter of *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White makes a very powerful statement that one might easily overlook. She writes: “The way of the world is to begin with pomp and boasting. God’s way is to make the day of small things the beginning of the glorious triumph of truth and righteousness” (p. 595).

In your own words, write what you think she means by this statement.

_________________________________

_________________________________

**Wednesday**

Read this week’s *Punch Lines*. The first *Punch Line* scripture is one of the most powerful verses in all the Bible. Who is the speaker in Zechariah 4:7? What is the unmistakable message that God wants to deliver to Zerubbabel and all of Judah?

What often-quoted verse precedes Zechariah 4:7? What point do you think God was making to Zerubbabel, and Judah?

These two verses remind us that God is truly the “author” and “finisher” of our faith, and everything else in our lives.

**Thursday**

The remnant of the tribe of Judah that returned from Babylonian captivity was small and seemingly insignificant. That is one of the reasons why the surrounding nations targeted them for destruction once they saw them rebuilding the Temple of their God.

On Monday you read Ezra 4:1-5. Why is it that the righteous seem to experience more trials when trying to do what’s right than people who are committing open sin? This is a question that many Bible writers asked, and many still struggle to find an answer today.

**Friday**

God promised Judah protection as they rebuilt the Temple, as well as the resources needed to do it. Think about your future, your life, where you want to be in, say, 10 to 15 years. What would you like God to do for you as you “build” your life?

Now read Matthew 7:24-27. Reflect for a moment on this question: On what foundation are you building your house—your life?

**this week’s reading**

*Prophets and Kings*, chapter 48.
a story of faith

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.cornerstoneconnections.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
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.

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.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

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).

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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.

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.

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 unmov ing 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.
II. 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.
a story of faith

flashlight

“The trying experiences that came to God’s people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. The revelator, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared, ‘The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.’ Revelation 12:17. Some who today are living on the earth will see these words fulfilled” (Prophets and Kings, p. 605).

key text

“Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!’”

(Esther 4:15, 16, NKJV)
If a gunman were at your school, looked you in the eye, and said, “All Christians die today. Are you a Christian?” and then added, “But if you tell me who the other Christians are, I’ll let you go,” what would be your response?

___ Yes, I’m a Christian, but I won’t give you the names of other Christians.
___ No, I’m not a Christian, but here are the names anyhow.
___ Yes, I’m a Christian, and here are the names of my Christian friends.
___ No, I’m not a Christian.
___ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Christian martyrs are people who willingly give up their life because they refuse to renounce their faith. Most of today’s Christian martyrs are unnamed. It’s easy to remember martyrs from the Bible days and from centuries ago; however, most of today’s martyrs we may never hear about. In the story of Esther we will learn how she trusted in God and put her faith in Him, even though she knew she could perish. She knew that she must put her faith in her Creator in order to keep her people and their faith from being destroyed. God was with her and He gave her the strength to face the king. She went before the king even though she knew it might end her life. It is this kind of faith that has been placed in the hearts of millions, even when face-to-face with death.

“After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. . . .”

“When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. . . .”

“When Haman said to King Xerxes, ‘There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business.’

“So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ‘Keep the money,’ the king said to Haman, ‘and do with the people as you please.’”

“When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it . . . .

“When Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. . . .

“Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. . . .

“Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. . . .

“Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’

“So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.”

(Esther 3:1, 2, 5, 8-11; 4:1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 15-17, NIV)
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5, NIV).
“Everything is possible for him who believes’ (Mark 9:23, NIV).
“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13, NIV).
“But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:18, NIV).
“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9, NIV).
“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you’” (Matthew 17:20, NIV).
“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” —Saint Augustine, 4th-5th-century church father; bishop of Hippo.
“Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” —Martin Luther King, Jr., 20th-century U.S. clergyman and civil rights activist.
Sabbath
A lot of us probably look at Esther’s amazing leap of faith and wonder what we would do if we were put in that situation. It has to do with trust in God. If we put our lives in His hands and commit ourselves to Him fully, He will give us the strength to stand up and do the right thing. Trust is what we need. We must not trust in the things of this world, but give ourselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and He will lead us through our trials, sorrows, and paths of life with a steady hand.

List five situations in your life in which you’ve demonstrated faith in Jesus Christ.
1. ________________________________________
2. ________________________________________
3. ________________________________________
4. ________________________________________
5. ________________________________________

Sunday
God will always be by our side, whether we feel Him there or not. Sometimes we are so caught up in our own lives and problems that we forget that it’s Him we should depend on, and not ourselves. At times when we think that God has abandoned us and has left us cold and desolate in this world, we should stop and think that maybe it’s we who have abandoned Him. Can you think of such a time in your life? When did you realize that it wasn’t He who left you, but you who left Him? If we commit ourselves to Him and put faith in Him, then He will never be absent in our lives.

Monday
In the book of Esther, she is quoted saying, “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” It is this kind of faith that is key in our relationship with God. She knew that whether she lived or perished, God was by her side. It was that faith that drove her to see the king. It was through that faith that God helped her save her people from being destroyed. You may not be faced with Esther’s exact problems, but how can you try to put faith in God in the big and little things in your life?

Tuesday
The Flashlight quote reminds us that one day we may all be faced with a life-and-death situation because of our faith. We might be persecuted and despised. We might be hunted down and sought after. However, sometimes to gain life you must give up life. To die for Christ is to live for Him. We must realize that people can kill or scar our bodies, but because of our faith in Jesus, we will have eternal life—and nobody can take that away.

Wednesday
We must not lean on our own understanding but lean on God and His Word. Often we think we know the answer to a problem we are having, or we think we can solve it with our cleverness. But unlike us, God sees the whole picture. He knows what will happen and what we should do. He sees the situation better than we see it.

Read through the entire book of Esther and try to find more examples of faith and trust. Write down three of them that could apply to your life.
1. ________________________________________
2. ________________________________________
3. ________________________________________

Thursday
What are some trials, whether big or small, that you’ve gone through and put your faith wholeheartedly in God?

Friday
If your life was ever put on the line in order to defend your faith or the faith of others, what would you say to your persecutors? Write down three different sentences.
1. ________________________________________
2. ________________________________________
3. ________________________________________

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, KJV).

this week’s reading*
Prophets and Kings, chapter 49.
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.cornerstoneconnections.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 victory they’ve experienced with God’s help.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Once upon a time, when people watched a sporting 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, setbacks, 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 experiences 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, recreate 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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</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

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Talking About Personal Experience

The Getting Started activity for this week’s lesson asks students to share their personal experience of a victory in their lives with others in the group. Different groups of young people will differ greatly in terms of how willing they are to share personal experiences, and within a group there will be different levels of comfort with activities such as this. Your challenge as the teacher is to make these activities low-risk enough that nobody feels “on the spot” or threatened, while still allowing for meaningful discussion.

Young people who are shy or experience social anxiety, or who feel they don’t fit in well with others in the group, may be uncomfortable with this kind of experience. Those who are not very spiritually mature or haven’t given much thought to spiritual things may find it difficult to come up with something appropriate to share. Some tips to make sharing easier:

- Divide into pairs or small groups, especially if your class is very large.
- Allow students to brainstorm a list of ideas privately first, then pick one they’re comfortable sharing.
- Model appropriate answers yourself as you introduce the activity: “For example, one victory I experienced was when I prayed about an exam I thought I was going to fail, and God answered my prayer by helping me think clearly and figure out the answers, so I passed the exam.” Make sure your own example is general and relatable enough that it will encourage class members to think of similar examples from their own experience.

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.

*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.
“The trying experiences that came to God’s people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. . . . The same spirit that in ages past led men to persecute the true church will in the future lead to the pursuance of a similar course toward those who maintain their loyalty to God. Even now preparations are being made for this last great conflict. . . . And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 605, 606).
When I get something I really want, I
____ can’t believe this is happening.
____ am grateful to God and anyone who helped me.
____ am proud of myself.
____ usually do something to mess it up.

In the ancient world, defeated enemies usually suffered a terrible fate. Prisoners of war could be expected either to be killed or taken as slaves, although wealthy and important prisoners might sometimes be ransomed—returned to their homes in exchange for money and land. Very few were so lucky. Defeated enemies might be tortured, hanged, drawn and quartered, beheaded, crucified, or burned, depending on the technology and the traditions of the enemy who defeated them.

The Bible tells us that after Esther informed the king that she was a potential victim of Haman’s plot, Haman was hanged on the gallows he’d built for Mordecai. Later, Esther demanded that Haman’s 10 sons be hanged as well—it was common for victors to wipe out the families of their enemies as well, so that no one could survive to carry on a blood feud.

As Christians, we’re told to love our enemies. How does the idea of getting revenge on a defeated enemy fit with Jesus’ idea of forgiveness? What kind of “victory” does God promise us?

“Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

“Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, ‘Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?’

“As soon as the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, ‘A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman’s house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.’

“The king said, ‘Hang him on it!’ So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.”

(Esther 7, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think Esther waited for a second banquet rather than tell the king what she wanted as soon as she went to the throne room, or at the first banquet?

Why was it important to Esther to have Haman present when she made her accusation?

What does the king’s reaction tell you about the kind of man the king was?

How do you think Esther felt while the king was out in the garden and she was left inside with Haman?

How do you think the way Esther and Mordecai dealt with Haman and his family teaches us about how (or how not) to deal with enemies?

other eyes

“After the cheers have died down and the stadium is empty, after the headlines have been written and after you are back in the quiet of your room and the championship ring has been placed on the dresser and all the pomp and fanfare has faded, the enduring things that are left are: the dedication to excellence, the dedication to victory, and the dedication to doing with our lives the very best we can to make the world a better place in which to live.” —Vince Lombardi, 20th-century U.S. football coach.

punch lines

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57, NIV).

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39, NIV).

“With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies” (Psalm 60:12, NIV).

“Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4, NIV).

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21, NIV).
### Sabbath

Look back at the What Do You Think? section, then at the Bible verses under Punch Lines. Throughout the Bible God promises us victory. In some Bible stories, such as the story of Esther, this means victory over a literal enemy who’s threatening us. Do you have enemies such as that?

For many Christians today God’s promise of victory means victory over temptations, sin, and trials in our lives. Where would you like to see victory in your life today?

Think about one time in your life when God gave you victory in a tough situation. How did you react?

### Sunday

Read through the Into the Story Bible passage and the questions that follow it. As you read the scene, imagine yourself in the role of each of the three players: Esther, Haman, and the king. What are the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells that surround you at Esther’s banquet? What would you be feeling as the evening unfolds?

Choose one of the three characters and write a paragraph describing how you think that person would feel at the moment Esther accuses Haman of plotting to kill her people.

### Monday

What would you do if a king offered you anything “up to half the kingdom”? This over-the-top offer King Xerxes made to Esther was an exaggeration—intended to show the king’s generosity.

But the King of heaven, our Father, really does make extravagant promises. Read Ephesians 3:20. What does it tell us about God’s promises?

### Tuesday

If you walked into the throne room of heaven and God offered you more than you could even ask or imagine, what would you ask Him for?

### Wednesday

Read the Bible verses in the Punch Lines section. Each of them is a promise of victory. Choose your favorite promise from this list (or another Bible verse you like about God giving us victory) and create a poster of it that you can display in your room, near your computer, or anywhere you look at often. Use it as a reminder that God is powerful enough to give you victory over any kind of “enemy” you face.

### Thursday

Our “enemies” could be actual people—maybe a bully who picks on us, or someone who stands in the way of doing what we know is right. More often, the enemies we fight are spiritual, and they take root within our own lives—temptations and trials that we have to overcome. Read Romans 8:31-39 and Ephesians 6:10-12 to see what kinds of battles we fight as Christians, and what kind of victory God promises.

Think about a battle that you’re engaged in on the spiritual level right now. God promises victory, but He often asks us for courageous action—just like He asked of Esther. What’s one thing you could do today to move toward the victory God has in store for you in this situation?

### Friday

Sometimes when you’re in a crisis situation, such as Esther was, it’s difficult to have faith that God will give you victory. Reflecting on Bible stories and other experiences in which God has triumphed can build our faith. As you think about your own “battle” situation (see yesterday’s section), what stories of faith—from the Bible, from people you know, or from your own experience—encourage you and give you inspiration? Reflect on those stories and remember that though it may take awhile, God always promises victory!

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*This week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 49.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
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 God’s law
• Consistent living within God’s will

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

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.

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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.
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.
“Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he ‘prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.’ Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God’s people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land” (Prophets and Kings, p. 608).
Do you like coming home? There is nothing like coming home after a long time away. You can imagine what it would have felt like to go home after all that time. How do you feel after being away from home? Are you happy to return? hesitant? unsure?

About 40,000 Israelites went home with Ezra during this period. This was not the entire nation of Israel, but it was a significant number. The question of why some didn’t go home should be looked at. Perhaps, as we see later on in the text, it is because of the intermarrying that the Israelites became so fond of during this time. Perhaps it was because of their lengthy captivity that they had become so comfortable in a foreign land that they couldn’t see themselves leaving. Do you think you would have stayed or left?

“After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Merioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. 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.

“Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand. Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

“You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.”

(Ezra 7:1-10, 13-18, NIV)
punch lines

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42, NIV).

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13, NIV).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

“Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the Lord God” (1 Chronicles 22:19, ESV).

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16, NKJV).

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 11:14, NASB).

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” —Warren G. Bennis, current U.S. scholar, author, organizational consultant.

OUT OF THE STORY

What do you think of Ezra now that you know a little bit more about him?

The king entrusted Ezra with money, valuable articles for the Temple, and told him to let him know if he needed anything else! What does this say about Ezra’s character, and the trust that the king put in Ezra?

How can we be persons of character so that others can trust us?

How could you be like Ezra, devoting yourself to Scripture and following God’s will?

Those going home included priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants. What does that tell us about God? about us? about our relationship with God?

How do you think the Israelites felt about coming home?

Why do you think Ezra was picked out of everyone else to lead the children of Israel back to the Promised Land?

other eyes

“There is always the danger that we may just do the work for the sake of the work. This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in—that we do it to God, to Christ, and that’s why we try to do it as beautifully as possible.” —Mother Teresa, 20th-century Albanian Roman Catholic nun known for her humanitarian work in India.
Sabbath

Coming home is always an interesting thing. Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter. The city of Jerusalem was probably still in ruins at the time Ezra was given permission to take whoever wanted to go back to Israel. This would have made the coming home a bit bitter. However, they were no longer to be foreigners in a foreign country, so that had to be sweet.

It is important to realize that Ezra’s leadership abilities were pretty important here. He had to convince those Israelites that were becoming more and more comfortable in Babylon, a city of incomparable riches, that they should go home to the rubble that was Jerusalem. That could not have been an easy task. Not only that, when he got the group together, there were no people from the tribe of Levi, which were very important to have, and so he had to go back and convince them. He could have done this only if he had trained himself to listen to God and pray at every turn.

In what ways has God placed you in a position to influence those around you?

Sunday

After having read the Out of the Story questions, do you think that you could have been a leader like Ezra? Could you have disciplined yourself enough in order to listen to God and make His will the desire of your heart? The task that Ezra was taking was a huge task, and one that could easily have failed. What do you do when you have a difficult task to complete? Do you bring God into the equation? Explain.

Monday

Ezra is the key to this story. The Key Text says that he was committed not only to knowing the law, but to keeping it as well. This is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to believing in God. Do we do what we know He wants us to? If not, why not? Do we even care about what He is asking us to do? Ezra cared! Not only did Ezra care, but he moved as soon as he was asked to move. He became what God needed him to be—a leader—and helped change the course of history.

Tuesday

But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. . . . This Flashlight quote is important to the reading of this whole text and in understanding the kind of person Ezra was. We oftentimes realize that something is wrong with our spirituality. We often think that we understand what we are supposed to do. However, are we so “not satisfied” that we will actually move in the direction that God is asking us to move? Are we truly seeking to know the will of God by becoming students of Scripture and people of action when it comes to His will?

Wednesday

The Punch Lines this week spoke specifically about why we do what we do, and about our hearts. Ezra prepared his heart by making a decision to love God and seek His will. The decision came and the rest followed. Perhaps this is a good model for us.

The quote from Mother Teresa speaks to our motivation of why we do things. The reality is that once our hearts are prepared, we become more and more in tune with what God wants and how we can fulfill His will in our lives. If Ezra could move a country’s worth of people, in what ways can we move ourselves?

Thursday

Have you decided to move your heart to know the Scriptures, seek God’s will, and lead others to Him? It’s a big question, with another question in tow: “How?” The first thing to do is to ask God into your life and ask Him to make His presence known. Then search the Scriptures to see where God is talking to you. After this, it is simply a matter of movement, in order to live what you know to be true.

Friday

Does God have a plan for you? Absolutely! It is the same plan for us all: to be together with one another again soon. He seeks reunion with all of us, and with you as well! Ask yourself this question: “How can I be a leader like Ezra for You, Lord?”

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* this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 50, 51.

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NOVEMBER 17, 2012

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

Nehemiah, the kneologian

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 1.
Commentary: Prophets and Kings, chapter 52.
Key Text: Nehemiah 1:11a.

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.cornerstoneconnections.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.

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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 “kneeologian” 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; Phillipians 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.
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 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).

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.

*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.
To pray as Nehemiah prayed in his hour of need is a resource at the command of the Christian under circumstances when other forms of prayer may be impossible. Toilers in the busy walks of life, crowded and almost overwhelmed with perplexity, can send up a petition to God for divine guidance (Prophets and Kings, p. 631).

“O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

(Nehemiah 1:11, NIV)
Either/Or

The experience of praying is more meaningful to me when I pray . . . individually or with others.

What do you think are the kinds of things we ought to pray for individually in contrast to the things we should pray for corporately?

_______________________________________

_____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Here are two types of “ask” used in the Greek language: Ask (aiteo) refers to asking as an inferior to a superior. Ask (eratao) refers to asking as an equal with authority.

What difference does it make? Read John 14:14 (aiteo), and 16 (eratao), and think about how this might change the way you pray.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.’”

(Nehemiah 1:1-11, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

What is the key problem that prompts Nehemiah to pray?

__________________________

Who are the “remnant” in this passage? 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 verse 5?

__________________________

In verse 11, what specifically does Nehemiah pray for? (You may have to read ahead in your Bible.)

__________________________

What is the message God has for you in this story?

__________________________

PUNCH LINES

“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath” (Deuteronomy 4:29-31, NIV).

“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you” (Jeremiah 29:12, NIV).

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7, 8, NIV).

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV).

“What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31, NLT).


“Do you know what is wrong with the world today? There’s too much theologian and not enough kneelogian.” —Dallas F. Billington, 19th-century U.S. preacher.

“A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back on the crowd.” —Max Lucado, current U.S. Christian author.
Sabbath

As you respond to the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson, read a portion of a letter from Paul in Philippians 1:3-5. How does Nehemiah’s prayer for help for his people compare with Paul’s? How are they alike? How are they different? What do you think it is easier to pray for, mundane ordinary things or great and miraculous events? Why?

_____________

Sunday

Read the passage in the Into the Story section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. What parts of this story are new to you and what insights have you gained from this passage? As Nehemiah prays fervently for help to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, what would this prayer sound like today? What key things would a leader be praying for?

_____________

Monday

The Key Text in this week’s lesson from Nehemiah 1:11 is a specific request to God: “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man” (NIV). When in your life have you prayed for specific outcomes? How did that work out? When have you prayed more generally?

_____________

Tuesday

In this week’s Flashlight quote from Prophets and Kings, Ellen White encourages Christians to pray in whatever way is feasible to have a conversation with God. Whom do you know that is a champion of prayer? How have you seen their prayer life impact the well-being of others?

_____________

Wednesday

Read the Punch Lines in this week’s lesson and rank them (1—the most and 5—the least) according to the way they speak personally to you. Which passage, if acted on, would transform your spiritual life the most? Why? Choose one verse in the Punch Lines and talk to God about how you might live out that message today.

_____________

Thursday

In this week’s lesson Nehemiah prays to God for help from a king. Throughout history God has used many who don’t even believe in Him to be instruments in His plan. How do you see God using various events, people, and situations around the world to continue His work throughout the world? Nehemiah’s desire is earnest and single-minded. What three things do you think God would have us be “single-minded” about as a church? Why are they important? Begin to pray deliberately and specifically for these things to happen, and be willing to do whatever it takes to be part of the answer.

_____________

Friday

Think about the times in your life when prayer has been especially helpful. There are times when God brings comfort and peace, but there are also times when God helps you get good things done in His name. Take time to thank God for His actions in the past as well as for His promises in the future.

Thank You, Lord, for the times in the past when You answered my prayers by

_____________

Thank You, Lord, for Your promises for the future that you will

_____________

this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 52.

* A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
**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 cup-bearer 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.cornerstoneconnections.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

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Making Timeless Truths Timely
If truth is to be transferred from one generation to the next it needs to be contextualized in order for it to be valued. One way to do this is by asking what this story would look like if it were played out today. The students must then wrestle with the key elements that make up the salient parts of the message. Another way to make timeless truths timely is to package them in the most relational form possible—a person. Asking “Who does this story remind you of in your life?” or “Whom do you know that reminds you of Esther?” invites the students to keep the heroes of history real, and in so doing makes their example reachable.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
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 difficult 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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risky witness

flashlight

“Nehemiah’s whole soul was in the enterprise he had undertaken. His hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination were contagious, inspiring others with the same high courage and lofty purpose. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to make stronger the heart and hand of his neighbor” (Prophets and Kings, p. 638).

keytext

“I was cupbearer to the king.”

(Nehemiah 1:11, NIV)
Some leaders are “visionaries” and some leaders are “doers” but a rare few have to some degree the capacity to do both. Choose the approach to which you tend to ascribe and why you think it might be good. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both.

• “Work hard at what you know is right and God will accompany your efforts.”
  OR
• “Pray first and wait for God to guide you in what you should do.”

Did you know?

Everyone put on your happy face! Did you know that in ancient times you could be executed for appearing depressed in the presence of the king? Monarchs must appear to inspire joy and happiness in their subjects, no matter what! Or else! Fortunately, our King is secure in Himself and, thus, calls us to bring not only our joys into His presence but our burdens and sorrows as well!

“Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, ‘How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?’ It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. I also said to him, ‘If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’ And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

“I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

“I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.”

(Nehemiah 1:11; 2:1-12, NIV)
Read the story and 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 note 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 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?

What is the message God has for you in this story?

What leadership qualities do you see in Nehemiah?

What wise steps does Nehemiah follow as he undertakes this project?

“The Christian way is not the middle way between extremes, but the narrow way between precipices.”

—Donald Bloesch, current U.S. evangelical theologian.

“If you are successful, it becomes possible for you to leave an inheritance for others. But if you desire to create a legacy, then you need to leave something in others. When you think unselfishly and invest in others, you gain the opportunity to create a legacy that will outlive you.”—John Maxwell, current U.S. expert on leadership.
Sabbath

As you answer the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson, you were challenged to consider who Christians might be “especially” good to: nonbelievers or believers. Galatians 6:10 asserts we should be good to “all people,” but read Paul’s words and think about why those words are true. Some might think Paul’s thinking is backwards, but people are not wary of Christianity because of how we treat the world as much as they observe how Christians treat each other. What might our church be like if we started with Paul’s words and followed Nehemiah’s actions? How might these words be relevant for the people in Nehemiah’s day?

Sunday

Read the passage in the Into the Story section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. How is the theme of slavery and redemption portrayed in this section of Nehemiah? What provisions did God make to prevent this from happening? What is more surprising: the horrible slavery the rich engaged in or the fact that they obeyed the command of God and immediately made it right?

Monday

Consider the message of the Key Text in this week’s lesson that reveals how the sinful practices of Israel caused Nehemiah to become angry. In every person there is a sense of “ought” that stirs humanity to decry slavery. Nehemiah could not believe his countrymen were taking advantage of the poor seemingly without conscience. When in your life have you witnessed something terribly wrong and didn’t know what to do about it? Whom do you know that has spoken out against evil with effectiveness like Nehemiah?

Tuesday

In this week’s Flashlight quote from Prophets and Kings, Ellen White connects the way Nehemiah and others purchased back their people from slavery to how Christ redeemed humanity from sin. In fact, we are told that “by deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us” (Prophets and Kings, p. 652). What opportunities do we have today to demonstrate our understanding of what Christ did for us by extending compassion to others?

Wednesday

Read the Punch Lines in this week’s lesson and choose two verses that you think Christians today need to understand and rewrite them in your own words. (Use the Notes section in the back of this journal to rewrite these verses.) Be sure to paraphrase this passage according to how it speaks to you. Pray that God gives you an opportunity to share these words with someone else this week.

Thursday

The positive way the people of God respond to Nehemiah’s challenge is comforting. Is there a cause or an opportunity to serve someone in need that you and your friends can do as a group? Nehemiah’s individual courage is remarkable, but some of Christianity’s finest moments are when a community of people get together and do the right thing. Gather your friends together and plan a small act of liberation for someone in need.

Action Plan

Friday

Throughout Scripture there are those who have stood alone in the way of evil. While true believers are drawn to their side for support, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to stand first. Whom do you recall in the pages of the Bible or history that have made such a stand for the right? How are they remembered?

It is interesting to watch Nehemiah seemingly work alone as a compass for truth and goodness in this story. But equally inspiring is the powerful way the people respond as a unit. Reflect on your journey with Christ and note the great group moments as well as crucial times when you, or someone you know, stood alone for what is right.


this week’s reading*

Conflicts in the Ancient World, chapters 54, 55.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Nehemiah's work on the walls and the gates of the city had progressed amid 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.cornerstoneconnections.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)?

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 cornerstoneconnections
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

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.
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.

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 what they are called to be. It all begins when you fail to remember. Ten times the word “remember” is used by Nehemiah in this book because if you are not deliberate, you will forget. During the exile in Egypt the children of God forgot who their God was and, in turn, lost sight of their own identity. Throughout the years, God has had to remind His people that He gave His laws to us not to confine us, but to keep ever before us the matchless truths of His character. After three years of this slavery there should have been a massive offering taken to ease the burden of the poor. After seven years, everyone should have been set free, according to God’s law. They just forgot. When Nehemiah brazenly reminded them of God’s commands and their behavior they repented and made it right. This is the response of the faithful who when touched by God’s Spirit, obey. What about you? Is today a day for you to turn around and make things right with 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, 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.
getting it right

flashlight

“We were all debtors to divine justice, but we had nothing with which to pay the debt. The Son of God, who pitied us, paid the price of our redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich. By deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us” (Prophets and Kings, p. 652).

keytext

“Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. . . . we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.’ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.” (Nehemiah 5:5, 6, NIV)
We should devote ourselves to acts of kindness and good deeds especially to believers or nonbelievers? Explain your answer.

Read Galatians 6:10 and consider whether you think what Paul is asking is backwards or right on. Why?

Eighty-five percent of “outsiders” describe churchgoers as “hypocritical”—saying one thing, doing another. Seventy-two percent of “outsiders” describe churchgoers as “insensitive to others.” Seventy-five percent of “outsiders” describe churchgoers as “too involved in politics.”

The above “outsiders” are Americans between the ages of 16 and 29 (Unchristian, by David Kinnaman, p. 34).

“When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, ‘You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!’ So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: ‘As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!’ They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

“So I continued, ‘What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.’

“We will give it back,’ they said. ‘And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.’ Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.

“I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, ‘In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!’ At this the whole assembly said, ‘Amen,’ and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.”

(Nehemiah 5:1-13, NIV)
Punch Lines

“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. . . . Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. 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, 10, 11, NIV).

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. . . . So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:2, 10, NASB).

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. . . . They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:1, 42, 46, 47, NASB).

“Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you.”—André Gide, 20th-century French novelist, essayist, critic.

“You don’t live in a world all alone. Your brothers are here, too.”—Albert Schweitzer, 20th-century French Protestant clergyman, philosopher, physician, music scholar.
As you answer the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson, you were challenged to consider who Christians might be “especially” good to: nonbelievers or believers. Galatians 6:10 asserts we should be good to “all people,” but read Paul’s words and think about why those words are true. Some might think Paul’s thinking is backwards, but people are not wary of Christianity because of how we treat the world as much as they observe how Christians treat each other. What might our church be like if we started with Paul’s words and followed Nehemiah’s actions? How might these words be relevant for the people in Nehemiah’s day?

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In this week’s Flashlight quote from Prophets and Kings, Ellen White connects the way Nehemiah and others purchased back their people from slavery to how Christ redeemed humanity from sin. In fact, we are told that “by deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us” (Prophets and Kings, p. 652). What opportunities do we have today to demonstrate our understanding of what Christ did for us by extending compassion to others?

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The positive way the people of God respond to Nehemiah’s challenge is comforting. Is there a cause or an opportunity to serve someone in need that you and your friends can do as a group? Nehemiah’s individual courage is remarkable, but some of Christianity’s finest moments are when a community of people get together and do the right thing. Gather your friends together and plan a small act of liberation for someone in need.

Action Plan

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Throughout Scripture there are those who have stood alone in the way of evil. While true believers are drawn to their side for support, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to stand first. Whom do you recall in the pages of the Bible or history that have made such a stand for the right? How are they remembered?

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It is interesting to watch Nehemiah seemingly work alone as a compass for truth and goodness in this story. But equally inspiring is the powerful way the people respond as a unit. Reflect on your journey with Christ and note the great group moments as well as crucial times when you, or someone you know, stood alone for what is right.

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Read the passage in the Into the Story section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. How is the theme of slavery and redemption portrayed in this section of Nehemiah? What provisions did God make to prevent this from happening? What is more surprising: the horrible slavery the rich engaged in or the fact that they obeyed the command of God and immediately made it right?

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Consider the message of the Key Text in this week’s lesson that reveals how the sinful practices of Israel caused Nehemiah to become angry. In every person there is a sense of “ought” that stirs humanity to decry slavery. Nehemiah could not believe his countrymen were taking advantage of the poor seemingly without conscience. When in your life have you witnessed something terribly wrong and didn’t know what to do about it? Whom do you know that has spoken out against evil with effectiveness like Nehemiah?

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Read the Punch Lines in this week’s lesson and choose two verses that you think Christians today need to understand and rewrite them in your own words. (Use the Notes section in the back of this journal to rewrite these verses.) Be sure to paraphrase this passage according to how it speaks to you. Pray that God gives you an opportunity to share these words with someone else this week.

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A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

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this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 54, 55.
PRESAPRING 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.cornerstoneconnections.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).

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.

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.
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.

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hungry for more

flashlight

“Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. . . . It is God’s glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation” (Prophets and Kings, p. 668).
Rank the statements below according to which you think are the most meaningful ways to respond to God’s mercy in worship.

The best way to show gratitude and commitment to God for His grace is . . .

___ joyful celebration
___ thoughtful reflection
___ faithful obedience
___ frequently retell the story
___ offer excellence in worship, praise, and music

The law of God was almost lost in translation. Judah had intermarried and become mixed with other nations so much that they had lost their connection with the language of the law of God. This is why there were people present to help the people understand.

In Jewish thought, the people’s standing is understood to reflect complete silence.

what do you think?

INTO THE STORY

“Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbadanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

“The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah— instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

“Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, ‘This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, ‘Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.’

“The Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.’ Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

“On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: ‘Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from
“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle” (Psalm 103:1-5, NASB).

“For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, “In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength”” (Isaiah 30:15, NASB).

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, NASB).

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2, NIV).

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19, NASB).

“And what greater calamity can fall upon a nation than the loss of worship?” —Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century essayist and poet.

“The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.” —C. S. Lewis, 20th-century English novelist and essayist.
Sabbath

The What Do You Think? section of this week's lesson invites you to rank the best responses to God in worship from your perspective. The people of Judah met to be reintroduced to God and His law, but many of those present had been slaves and were brought back to freedom by Nehemiah and others. Sadly, some were unfamiliar with God, His law, and even the language, so that the worship leaders had to explain the message in plain, simple language. Read Hebrews 5:12 and describe the similarities between the Hebrews in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament.

Sunday

Read the passage in the Into the Story section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. As you survey the spectacular day of worship and renewal you may notice the genuine heartfelt response of the people to God. The walls are up but much of the city is in disrepair, which is symbolic of where the people are as well. Their hearts are sincere but their understanding of God and His will has a long way to go. What part of this story inspires you personally, and why?

Monday

The Key Text for this week is Nehemiah 8:8, whichSimply states: “They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” (NIV). How many times have you opened God’s Word and struggled to understand the meaning or the point of the passage? Some feel as if the Bible is a magic book, that if you only open the pages then something should happen. But more often than not, Bible study and your devotion to God come as a result of simple, consistent conversation and communion. Take a moment to think about what you can do to connect with God in a more regular way so that the Word of God and your overall experience is familiar instead of awkward.

Tuesday

In this week’s Flashlight quote from Prophets and Kings, Ellen White reminds people how much God waits to restore and rejoice with the sinner who comes to God in faith. She states: “It is God’s glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation” (p. 668). How does this picture of God match with your perception? How often have you resisted praying or coming close to God because of the distance that has grown between you and Him? Even though it seems awkward, consider how much God wants to reconcile! Maybe you know someone who is distant and doesn’t feel like they can return to God or even speak to Him because of their shame. Begin today by praying for them and perhaps gently sharing with them this insight.

Wednesday

The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson represent an array of themes in this story. Repentance, worship, and consecration are a few examples you may notice in the texts given. Which text speaks to you personally? Which text captures the essence of the worship service taking place in this week’s story? When in your life has a worship experience made an indelible mark on your spiritual growth? What key elements of the service do you remember the most? Why?

Thursday

In this week’s lesson we view a worship service filled with beautiful images of God’s people reconnecting with Him and reconsecrating their lives to His purpose. So many good things happen in this worship service that the people are not sure how to react. Should they dance and sing and throw a party? Or should they be more reflective and still? Knowing how to respond to God’s grace is not something that should be legislated or manufactured. The exercise of being still and quiet is extremely helpful to your soul, but so is shouting and praising God out of a grateful heart. Do both this week. Find ways to express your joy and find ways to be still and let your praise sink in and internally transform you from the inside out.

Friday

Have you ever clapped out of praise when no one else clapped or said “Amen” all by yourself? Think about how God feels when we come to Him in worship and how glad He is that we are there. It is hard to imagine God finally getting our attention only to inform us of the correct posture and program that He prefers us to praise Him with. If this story gives us anything to think about it is the simple way God calls us to return to Him and the personal way in which we freely worship and show our gratitude.


this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 56, 57.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
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.cornerstoneconnections.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.

“The many prophecies concerning the Saviour’s advent led the Hebrews to live in an attitude of constant expectancy. Many died in the faith, not having received the promises. But having seen them afar off, they believed and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. From the days of Enoch the promises repeated through patriarchs and prophets had kept alive the hope of His appearing” (Prophets and Kings, pp. 699, 700).
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 suffering, and that God always promises a way out. We may not always understand how God fulfilled His promises this side of heaven, but, like the Hebrews of old, we can see them “afar off,” and continue to believe. 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.”

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.
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.

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.*
Century after century passed away; finally the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel. As the Jews departed from God, faith grew dim, and hope well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future. The words of the prophets were uncomprehended by many. . . . But in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined; and ‘when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son . . .’ Galatians 4:4’ (Prophets and Kings, p. 700).

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

(Isaiah 40:31, NIV)
When things are really going badly for me, I usually . . .

___ talk to someone about it.
___ pray.
___ think of something I can do to make things better.
___ get more and more discouraged till everything seems awful.
___ try to avoid other people.
___ focus on positive things.
___ imagine a time when things will be better.

The prophecies of Isaiah come from some of the darkest hours of Jewish history—from a time when God seemed to have abandoned His people. Foreign invaders threatened the nation of Judah. Long after the time of the historical prophet Isaiah, his prophecies took on deeper meaning as the nation entered its darkest time—when Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians, and its people were taken into captivity. But through God's prophet came a message of hope for the future. Like a tiny candle flame flickering in darkness came the promise that someday the years of exile and captivity would end. God's people would be restored to their land.

But the prophecies of Isaiah looked forward to more than just a return from exile. They pointed forward to a coming Deliverer who would do far more than provide freedom for exiled captives. They foretold the coming of a Messiah who would set people free from bondage to sin and despair. When things were at their worst, God gave His people the hope of ultimate deliverance.

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

“The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

(Isaiah 11:1-9; 40:28-31, NIV)
OUT OF THE STORY

What promises did God make to His people in these passages?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What hope would those promises have offered to Jews faced with the loss of their freedom and their homeland?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you lived in the time of the exile to Babylon and you heard or read these prophecies, how do you think they would make you feel?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What kind of Messiah or Deliverer is promised in these passages? What will He do for God’s people?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How are these prophecies relevant to us today? What hope do they offer for people in 2008?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

punch lines

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2, NIV).

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:6, 7, NIV).

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5, NIV).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4, 5, NIV).

“Three grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for.”—Joseph Addison, 18th-century British writer.

“Hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper.”—Sir Francis Bacon, 16th-century British writer and scientist.

“What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life.”—Emil Brunner, 20th-century Swiss theologian.
When things were darkest for the people of Israel, God promised hope in the form of a Deliverer who would come and restore the world to a perfect state. When we’re at our darkest hour, God also promises to help us. Choose one Bible verse from the passages we’re studying this week, plus one other Bible promise, that can give you hope when you’re feeling discouraged. Write both verses out below:

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**Sunday**

Imagine that you are one of the exiled Jews in Babylon. When you think of what has happened to your homeland and your people, how do you feel? What are your feelings toward God?

When you meet on the Sabbath with other Jews in exile, someone stands and reads the words of the prophet Isaiah—the same passages found in our *Into the Story* section. As you listen to these words, what thoughts and ideas come to mind? Do they change the way you feel about the future? about God?

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**Monday**

Look at the *Key Text* for this week: Isaiah 40:31. In some Bible translations this passage begins: “Those who hope in the Lord...” Other translations begin: “They that wait upon the Lord...”

The idea of *hope* is closely connected to the idea of *waiting*. If we always got what we wanted right away, we’d never know the meaning of the word “hope.” Hope is what we do when things aren’t going our way, when our prayers aren’t answered right away. Hope is what carries us through the dark hours while we wait for an answer to prayer. What are you waiting for today? What gives you hope?

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**Tuesday**

Read the passage from *Prophets and Kings* in the *Flashlight* section of the lesson. In this passage Ellen White takes us beyond the time of Isaiah, beyond the time of the exile and return from Babylon, to the era when Jesus was born. At that time, Mrs. White says that “faith grew dim, and hope well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future.” Yet it was at that very time that God’s divine plan fell into place. When things seemed so dark that many people had given up hoping for a Deliverer, at that moment God Himself came into the world in the form of Jesus of Nazareth—the ultimate Deliverer.

God’s people waited thousands of years for the promise of a Messiah to be fulfilled. Jesus’ followers have waited 2,000 years for the promise of His second coming to be fulfilled. Do you think today we’re living in the time when faith has grown dim, and hope no longer seems to illuminate the future? If so, what can this passage say to us?

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**Wednesday**

Look up Isaiah 9:6 in the *Punch Lines* section. Using a Bible concordance and/or a chain reference Bible, find other verses in the Old Testament that foretell the coming of Jesus. List some below. What information does each verse give about the coming Messiah?

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**Thursday**

Our Bible lesson this week has been all about offering hope to people who are discouraged. When the Jews were discouraged and felt God had abandoned them, the promise of a Messiah and Deliverer gave them hope. What gives you hope when times are tough? If you had a friend who was discouraged, what hope could you offer? Can you think of someone you know now with whom you can share this hope? How will you do it?

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**Friday**

In your prayer time today, ask God to keep hope alive in your heart. If you’re discouraged about any situation in your life right now, choose a Bible verse you can memorize and repeat to give you hope. Tell God in prayer that you are claiming that verse as His personal promise of hope to you!


*this week’s reading*

*Prophets and Kings*, chapter 58.
the servant hero

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.cornerstoneconnections.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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
‘For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had waited the coming of the promised Saviour. Their brightest hopes had rested upon this event. For a thousand years, in song and prophecy, in temple rite and household prayer, His name had been enshrined; and yet when He came, they did not recognize Him as the Messiah for whom they had so long waited’ (Prophets and Kings, p. 710).

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

(Isaiah 53:3, NIV)
what do you think?
Do you follow the adventures of cartoon or comic book superheroes? What about heroes from movies, books, or legends? What makes a great hero?

My favorite hero is _____________________________ because __________________________________

Into the Story

saiah 53, one of the passages we’re studying this week, is one of the sections of the book of Isaiah usually known to Bible scholars as the “suffering servant songs.” These poems describe a servant of the Lord who will bring deliverance and peace to God’s people through His own suffering.

During Jesus’ ministry on earth, the prophecies of Isaiah were among the most important scriptures that He used in explaining His mission and role to His followers. The Gospel writers used quotes from Isaiah to show that the Scriptures pointed forward to Jesus.

Jews in Jesus’ time were expecting a superhero Messiah—one who would defeat the occupying Roman forces and establish Himself as king of Israel. But Jesus showed that the Messiah was to be God’s suffering servant—a humble leader who conquered by showing love and suffering on behalf of others.

The prophecies of Isaiah and the later prophecies of Zechariah look forward to a future time when love and peace will draw people from all over the world to learn from Israel’s God. Those prophecies were partly fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, and will reach their final fulfillment when He comes again.

saiah 53, one of the passages we’re studying this week, is one of the sections of the book of Isaiah usually known to Bible scholars as the “suffering servant songs.” These poems describe a servant of the Lord who will bring deliverance and peace to God’s people through His own suffering.

During Jesus’ ministry on earth, the prophecies of Isaiah were among the most important scriptures that He used in explaining His mission and role to His followers. The Gospel writers used quotes from Isaiah to show that the Scriptures pointed forward to Jesus.

Jews in Jesus’ time were expecting a superhero Messiah—one who would defeat the occupying Roman forces and establish Himself as king of Israel. But Jesus showed that the Messiah was to be God’s suffering servant—a humble leader who conquered by showing love and suffering on behalf of others.

The prophecies of Isaiah and the later prophecies of Zechariah look forward to a future time when love and peace will draw people from all over the world to learn from Israel’s God. Those prophecies were partly fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, and will reach their final fulfillment when He comes again.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”

(He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. . . .

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. . . .

“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”

(Isaiah 61:1-3; 53:2-7, 9, 11, NIV)
According to Isaiah 61:1, what was Jesus’ mission?

What effect would Jesus’ ministry have on the people of Israel?

According to Isaiah 53, how would people feel about Jesus?

What would Jesus’ suffering accomplish for Israel?

How many ways can you think of in which the prophecies in these passages were fulfilled by Jesus during His life here on earth?

What does this passage say to us regarding the suffering that we experience?

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope” (Isaiah 42:1-4, NIV).

“[Jesus] said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27, NIV).

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved.” —Helen Keller, 20th-century U.S. author and speaker.

“Life is a place of service. Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.” —Leo Tolstoy, 19th-century Russian author.

“A person who is worthy of being a leader wants power not for himself, but in order to be of service.” —Sam J. Ervin, Jr., 20th-century U.S. senator.
Sabbath

Look at the What Do You Think? section of the lesson. Whom did you choose as your hero? What qualities in that character do you admire?

Some heroes are admirable because they’re good-looking, strong, powerful, or have amazing abilities. What does Isaiah 53:2, 3 say about Jesus?

Jesus wasn’t your typical superhero. People weren’t attracted to His good looks or His amazing strength. Instead, it was His compassion that drew people to Him—His ability to suffer along with people. He was no comic book superhero, but a true servant leader.

Sunday

Based on what you read in Isaiah 53 and 61, fill in the blanks below to make up a “Messiah Wanted” ad—a job description for the job only Jesus could do.

MESSIAH WANTED:
Must be able to ____________________.
This job requires someone who is _______ and ________________.
The ideal applicant should ____________ and ________________.

Monday

The Key Text (Isaiah 53:3) says that the Messiah would be “a man of sorrows.” Look up Luke 10:21; John 15:11; John 17:13.

What quality of Jesus is mentioned in each of these passages? ____________________

How could Jesus be both a joyful person and also a “man of sorrows”? Explain.

Tuesday

The Flashlight section of our lesson tells us that even though the Jews had been looking forward to the Messiah’s coming for more than 1,000 years, they didn’t recognize Jesus as the Messiah when He came. Why do you think they didn’t accept Jesus as the Messiah? What did they expect their Messiah to be and to do? Why do you think they had those expectations?

Sometimes God’s answers to our prayers don’t look like what we expect, either. Like the Jewish people in Jesus’ time, we can get so hung up on expecting God to work in a certain way that we don’t even recognize His answers when they come.

Wednesday

Read Isaiah 42:1-4 from the Punch Lines section of the lesson. This passage is another of the “suffering servant” songs in Isaiah. Look back at your Messiah job description in Monday’s section of the lesson. What could you add to that description after reading Isaiah 42?

Thursday

Jesus’ life demonstrated how a servant could also be a leader. No, He didn’t kick out the Romans and reestablish the throne of Israel. But through suffering, and caring for those who were suffering, He changed the world forever.

Jesus calls us to follow His example—to lead by caring for others, even if it involves suffering ourselves. What is one practical thing you can do today to help others who are suffering? What will it cost you to do it?

Friday

Take a look back at what we said about expectations in Tuesday’s lesson. Can you think of a situation in your life in which you have been expecting God to act in a certain way? What did you expect God to do for you?

Is it possible that God might have a different plan than you expected? How can you keep your eyes and your heart open for God’s leading? Remember that if the Jews of Jesus’ time had read the prophecies of Isaiah more carefully, they might have been prepared to accept a Messiah who was going to suffer for them. Studying the Bible will help you recognize God’s answers to your prayers, even if they don’t fit your expectations!

this week’s reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 59.
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 Coming
- Grace
- New earth

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

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 tranquillity 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

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 short-lived 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.
“The darkest hour of the church’s struggle with the powers of evil is that which immediately precedes the day of her final deliverance. But none who trust in God need fear; for ‘when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,’ God will be to His church ‘a refuge from the storm.’” Isaiah 25:4” (Prophets and Kings, p. 725).
As Christians we look forward to the day when Christ will come and take the righteous elect to their heavenly home. While we are still battling with sin, pain, and suffering in this world, which voice of the Lord appeals to you most in times of distress?

“I am here.”
“I hear you.”
“I understand.”
“I care.”

Think of the saddest moment you have experienced in your life; does the issue of God’s grace through Christ give you some hope to overcome?

How can you encourage your friends in similar situations to accept that God cares?

The lion, particularly the face of the male, is one of the most widely recognized animal symbols in human culture.

Lions live for approximately 10 to 14 years in the wild, while in captivity they can live up to 25 years. A lion’s roar can be heard up to five miles away.

Male lions weigh from 330 to 530 pounds; females weigh 270 to 300 pounds. Lions stand between three and a half and four feet tall at the shoulder.

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. 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. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; He who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

“Yes, the wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the Lord.”

“For this is what the Lord says, ‘I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.’ When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes. . . .

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord.”

“So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty. ‘I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.’

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, and the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

(Isaiah 65:17-21, 25; 66:12-14, 22, 23; Malachi 3:5, 6; 4:4-6, NIV)
“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:2-4, NIV).

“Salvation is to be found through him alone; for there is no one else in all the world, whose name God has given to men, by whom we can be saved” (Acts 4:12, TEV).

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8, NIV).

“The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:31, 32, NLT).

“Mercy does not give us what we deserve; grace gives us what we don’t deserve.”—Heather-Dawn Small, Women’s Ministries director, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

“There is no liberation without labor . . . and there is no freedom which is free.”—Siri Singh Sahib.
Sabbath
The What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson asks you to ponder the great day of Christ’s second coming. Although we live in a time and age characterized with pain and suffering, the loving voice of our Savior constantly appeals to us not to harden our hearts but to make a noble choice to accept Him as our Savior. This week, think about how you can humbly take steps to respond to the four voices of Christ in the What Do You Think? section.

Sunday
The excerpt from Isaiah 65:17 talks of God making a new earth and new heavens. In view of your own situation in the present earth, would God be just in His decision to destroy the current earth and replace it with a new one? What about those who believe in the joy and happiness of this world and its luring incentives? Do you think they will inherit the new earth? What must you do to be part of the eternal liberation that will come by Christ’s second coming?

Monday
The Key Text reminds us of Christ’s commitment toward our salvation. Reflect on the circumstances in which you have shown the virtue of commitment. To whom were you most committed? Your parents? Your boy/girlfriend? Your nation? Your teacher? God? Rank them from the most to the least and give a reason for your ranking.

The Key Text also projects into the future, after the end of sin. How does this testi-mony of Jesus give you hope even after death? How can you improve your scope of hope in relation to your faith? Consider teaming up with your friends and identify opportunities to feed your faith as a heaven-bound child of God.

Tuesday
Take a look at the powerful statement of Ellen White in the Flashlight section of the lesson. The ability and power of Christ to redeem a fallen world revealed the profound grace and mercy, and complete liberation, which are deeply entrenched in God’s master plan of salvation. Are there situations in your life in which you have borne the consequences of other person’s mistakes? How did you feel? As you consider these situations, think about what Christ experienced on your behalf at Calvary.

Situation(s):

Consequence(s):

Wednesday
After reading the selected verses in the Punch Lines section of the lesson, choose two verses which you think are most relevant to your life as you wait for the second coming of Christ. Do you have friends or relatives with similar experiences? In what way can you encourage them to remain strong in their faith amid pain, suffering, and boredom, which continue to suppress us in this world? Paraphrase the verses you chose and recite them to a friend during a dinner invitation this week.

Thursday
Take time to read Prophets and Kings, chapter 60. An overview of the new earth is provided: “There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will appear new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects of study to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul” (p. 731). In view of the powerful insight that Ellen White gives on the state of the new earth, what do you look forward to the most?

Friday
Have you ever thought of what life will be like in the new earth? Think of a time when you moved from one home to another—a better one. How did you feel in your new home? As you reflect on the promised new earth, consider making this your prayer:

“Dear God, I admit that I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that I might have eternal life. Please forgive me of my sins. I accept Your gift of eternal life and choose to follow You, confessing Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for making Your home in my heart. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

*this week’s reading*
Prophets and Kings, chapter 60.

A special adaptation of Prophets and Kings has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.