

Promise and Deliverance

Student Workbook

Volume 10

Level 3

Harvey De Groot

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Preface

When S.G. De Graaf wrote his four-volume series, *Promise and Deliverance*, he showed educators how to teach Bible stories from a redemptive-historical perspective. Rather than turning Bible stories into moralistic tales, De Graaf taught us how all the Bible shows God revealing himself as the God of the covenant, who is working out His redemptive plan for humanity and all of creation.

The 80 workbooks written by Harvey De Groot are meant to supplement De Graaf's work. They are divided by volume and level number: 20 volumes with four levels per volume. Workbook lessons are written at four levels so that families with students in various grades can study the same Bible stories during the week in preparation for their classes on Sunday. Prior to class, the Sunday School teacher should study the lesson in De Graaf's book. The teacher and students can go through the workbook during class.

The levels are divided according to the following grades:

- **Level One:** Grades K-1
- **Level Two:** Grades 2-3
- **Level Three:** Grades 4-6
- **Level Four:** Grades 7-8

Each volume contains 12 or 13 lessons, and each lesson has the following sections:

- **Reference:** The volume and lesson number in De Graaf's series.
- **Scripture:** The passage from Scripture on which the lesson is based.
- **Memory Verse:** A memory verse related to the lesson.
- **Lesson Truth:** A short statement to help the class focus on the main point of the lesson.
- **Lesson:** The lesson itself, which the teacher can read in class. For older grades, the teacher may opt to assign it as homework.
- **Questions:** Items to be discussed in class. For older grades, the teacher can assign these questions as homework but should also use them as a basis for class discussion. These are not the only questions that could or should be asked. Teachers should encourage students to come with their own questions as well.

This edition was written by Harvey De Groot and edited by his son Norlan De Groot.

Lesson 1

The Power of Grace in a Time of Judgment

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 52

Scripture: II Kings 21; II Chronicles 33

Memory Verse: “Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of it, his ears will tingle.’” (Jeremiah 19:3)

Lesson Truth: Judgment came on Manasseh, king of Judah, but even then, God showed the power of His grace.

Lesson

When Manasseh was king of Judah, he led the people to forsake the Lord. He rebuilt the high places for idol worship that his father Hezekiah had torn down. This turning away from the Lord made the land of Judah and God’s people ready for judgment. Even though Manasseh the king felt the power of God’s grace and repented, the people of Judah continued in their sinful ways. The triumph of grace in the life of Manasseh points to the triumph of grace in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Manasseh was made king in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old, and he reigned for fifty-five years. He was king after his father, the good king Hezekiah, but he did not continue with his father’s reforms. Instead, Manasseh led the people to rebel against the Lord by introducing widespread idol worship. He placed an image he had carved into the temple of the Lord. The temple in which the Lord had said to David and Solomon, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever” (II Kings 21:7). Manasseh not only profaned the temple, but he also profaned the sacrifices that God had instructed the people to use for reconciliation. He made the sacrifices that should have pointed to the remission of sins through the Lord Jesus Christ into a pagan ritual. He did this by having his sons pass through the fire. In this way Manasseh provoked the Lord to His face in open rebellion. How could the Lord tolerate such rebellion?

The Lord allowed the people of Judah to remain in their own sins as they became ripe for judgment. Sin against the Lord always destroys a people, yet the Lord showed that grace is more powerful than sin. He showed this in the life of wicked king Manasseh. This demonstration of the power of grace pointed to the victory of grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. How did the Lord show His grace?

He did this in a remarkable way by having Assyria defeat Judah and Jerusalem. In this defeat the Assyrians took king Manasseh with a hook in his nose, bound with bronze fetters to Babylon. Although Manasseh ignored the prophets who were sent to warn him when he was in Jerusalem, he now thought about the God of his father Hezekiah. In his affliction Manasseh humbled himself and begged God in prayer to remove his guilt and restore him. Then an amazing thing happened! God heard his prayer.

Manasseh was not only allowed to return to Jerusalem, but he was also allowed to return to his throne. He became a king who ruled both himself and the people in the name of the Lord. He tried to rid

Judah and Jerusalem of the idols he had once introduced. But such is the nature of sin that when the king wanted to reform, the people continued to sacrifice on the high places. The grace of the Lord had done its work in Manasseh so that he died a man of faith. Yet the consequences of his early years of sinfulness remained. Because this king, who later repented, brought in sorcery and idol worship he was responsible for the spiritual decline in Judah.

It was evident that Judah remained under the Lord's judgment when He gave them Amon as king. Amon was a godless king who led the people into further idolatry in the two years he reigned as king. His servants who were later killed by the people killed Amon. In this way we see the disintegration of the land of Judah. Even though grace gained the victory over Manasseh, his sins contributed to the downfall of the kingdom of Judah. In spite of Manasseh's conversion, the land of Judah remained under judgment and showed the utter need for the redeeming work of Christ Jesus our Lord. In that same way you and I must trust in the redeeming work of Christ Jesus, because we are also under judgment.

Questions

1. How old was Manasseh when he became king in Jerusalem? (II Chronicles 33:1)
2. Where did Manasseh build altars that were very offensive to the Lord? (II Chronicles 33:4)
3. How did Manasseh profane the sacrifices of fire to the Lord? (II Chronicles 33:6)
4. Who seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do great evil? (II Chronicles 33:9)

5. What was the response of Manasseh and the people when the Lord spoke to them? (II Chronicles 33:10)

6. What instruments did the Assyrians use to carry Manasseh into captivity? (II Chronicles 33:11)

7. What change came over Manasseh when he was afflicted? (II Chronicles 33:12)

8. Why was it good that Amon ruled for only two years? (II Chronicles 33:22)

Lesson 2

The Need for Reformation by the Spirit

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 53

Scripture: II Kings 22–23; II Chronicles 34–35

Memory Verse: “Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him.” (II Kings 23:25)

Lesson Truth: King Josiah brought a reformation to Judah that pointed to the need of a reformation by the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus.

Lesson

Josiah was a good king of Judah who brought great reforms. The Bible characterizes him as even greater in his reforms than Hezekiah. We rejoice to see a good king restore the worship of the Lord at the temple by making the necessary repairs and removing the idols. Yet the real lesson of the reign of Josiah is that keeping the law of the old covenant was not sufficient to save God’s people. What God’s people needed was a reformation of the heart. This reformation of the heart could only come through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a reformation brought about when the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts.

The Lord in His grace would help Josiah understand that the old covenant was coming to an end. This lesson came to Josiah in a remarkable way. Josiah became king after the death of his wicked father Amon and his very wicked grandfather Manasseh. It was a blessing that Josiah’s father died when he was just a young boy. Because his father died when he was young, his godly mother and her counselors brought him up. At an early age Josiah chose to serve the Lord. He showed his love for the Lord by making repairs on the temple and by asking the people to bring offerings for these repairs.

When he was only twenty-six years old the Lord helped Josiah become aware of the Book of the Law. This happened when he sent his secretary to Hilkiah the high priest with the money he collected for temple repairs. Hilkiah agreed to count and store the money but he also informed the secretary that he had found the Book of the Law. The secretary not only brought this news to King Josiah, but he also read the Book of the Law to the king. When Josiah heard the words of the Book of the Law, which had been forgotten for many years, he tore his clothes in grief. He realized that Judah had not obeyed the law of God and was ready for the judgment the Book of the Law promised to lawbreakers.

If the land of Judah was going to be punished for breaking God’s law what could Josiah do? He acted as a man of God and sent messengers to the prophetess, Huldah in Jerusalem. He asked her for a word from the Lord. Huldah informed the king that the judgments of the Lord would surely come on Judah and Jerusalem. Yet because Josiah showed his grief that the law of God had been broken, the judgments would not come in his lifetime. Josiah now understood that the old covenant of the law was ending. He could no longer find God’s grace for His people in the old covenant. He now had to look to the new covenant where God would show His grace through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson 3

Fading Light

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 54

Scripture: II Kings 24–25

Memory Verse: “For because of the anger of the Lord this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out of His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.” (II Kings 24:20)

Lesson Truth: God allowed the reign of David and the building of the temple in Jerusalem to be a light to his people. This light slowly faded in the captivity so it might reappear in the Christ.

Lesson

It is heart-wrenching to learn of the decline and destruction of the kingdom of Judah. In the history of God’s people, Israel reached its zenith under the rule of David. David not only governed an expanded country, but he also made provision for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The light of God’s favor to His people shone brightly in Jerusalem under David and Solomon. In today’s lesson we learn how that light faded in Jerusalem. The kingdom of Judah was carried into captivity, just like the kingdom of Israel more than a century earlier. Still the Lord did not forget His covenant with David but preserved His faithful people even in captivity.

The Lord sent prophets to warn His people again and again. Still, they did not heed these warnings, so the decline and captivity of Judah occurred. The last four kings of Judah served more as governors for conquering kingdoms than they did as rulers in their own right. Pharaoh Necho captured Jehoahaz after only a reign of three months and placed Jehoiakim on the throne in Jerusalem. While Jehoiakim was king, Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon conquered the land of Judah. For three years Jehoiakim paid a heavy tribute to Babylon and then he decided to rebel. In response to this rebellion the king of Babylon sent bands of raiders to harass and plunder Judah.

Scripture indicates that it was the Lord who brought about the destruction of Judah. It says that: “He sent them (the raiding bands) against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord which he had spoken by His servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done” (II Kings 24: 2b-3). There is no doubt that the grace the Lord showed to His people in the glory of the house of David had ended. The old covenant was coming to an end.

Jehoiachin became a vassal king after his father Jehoiakim died. He was carried away captive to Babylon after reigning for only three months. He ruled with the same kind of disobedience as his father had ruled. Nebuchadnezzar took the king, the princes, and all the craftsmen, along with the treasures from the temple and the palace to Babylon. The light of the reign of David in Jerusalem was indeed fading. Still God’s promise to David was certain, this light would shine again in Christ Jesus.

The last vassal king in Jerusalem was Zedekiah. He was the third son of Josiah to sit on the throne in Jerusalem. Zedekiah was like the vassal kings before him, and he too rebelled against the king of

Lesson 4

A Kingdom Not of This World

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 55

Scripture: Daniel 1–2

Memory Verse: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2:44)

Lesson Truth: God gave the prophecy of the coming of the kingdom of Christ to the king of Babylon.

Lesson

Even after the house of David was carried into captivity, God showed that He had not forgotten His promise to David. He sent the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel to Babylon to bring the word of the Lord. At the same time, He sent Jeremiah to those who remained in Judah. Through these prophets God brought the message that He would establish a Kingdom that was not of this world. The unusual thing about this prophecy was that he gave it to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

Daniel and his three friends were carried to Babylon as captives after the first conquest of Jerusalem. They were among the group that Nebuchadnezzar selected to receive training to serve in the king’s court. As part of their preparation to serve they were expected to eat the king’s delicacies and drink the king’s wine. Daniel and his friends objected to this diet because they believed these foods would defile them. As the spokesman for the four Jewish young men, Daniel asked the chief eunuch if he would allow them to eat only vegetables and drink only water. Because the chief eunuch was afraid that these young men would appear malnourished if they ate only vegetables, he denied their request.

Daniel then asked if he would agree to a ten-day trial. If after ten days of eating only vegetables, they appeared underfed they would eat the king’s diet. The Lord moved the chief eunuch to agree to this test. Because Daniel and his friends had been faithful, God caused them to appear healthier than all the other young men in training. God not only made them appear strong and healthy, but He also gave them wisdom and knowledge in all the affairs of Babylon. In this way the Lord prepared a place for these young men in the court of Babylon. Through Daniel and his friends God would reveal Himself to the king of Babylon. It was for this purpose that God made them faithful to His covenant.

In the second year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing experience. He had a dream that seemed to be very important, but when he awoke, he could not remember the dream. He immediately called his wise men and demanded that they tell him his dream and the interpretation of the dream. The wise men protested that this was an unreasonable request. They asked the king to relate the dream and they would then interpret it. At this response the king became upset and promised that all the wise men of Babylon would be destroyed if they did not tell him his dream.

When the captain of the guard came to get Daniel to destroy him along with the wise men of Babylon, Daniel asked for a brief delay. He then asked his friends to join him in calling on the name of the Lord

Lesson 5

The Power of Grace in Babylon

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 56

Scripture: Daniel 3

Memory Verse: “Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!’” (Daniel 3:28)

Lesson Truth: God showed the power of His grace to His servants as well as to the king of Babylon.

Lesson

The people of Israel and Judah had been taken as captives to the land of Babylon. But even in Babylon God remembered His promise to David. He showed the power of His grace to the king of Babylon as well as to His faithful servants who would not bow to the image the king had set up.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had established a world empire. As he thought of the nations, he had conquered he was very proud of what he accomplished. He did not understand that God allowed him to build an empire and God could take his empire away. In his pride Nebuchadnezzar decided to build a huge statue that would represent the power of Babylon. He also decided that all the people from the nations he had conquered should bow down and worship this statue. The king decided to use music as a signal for the people to bow before the statue. He commanded that when they heard the sounds of musical instruments they should bow and acknowledge the power of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar would learn that no one has power unless God gives it to him.

When the king commanded that everyone in his kingdom must bow to his huge statue, he forgot that he had devout men of God in his kingdom. Three men who served as governors would not bow in worship to any image. As servants of the God of heaven, they remained standing while everyone else bowed. Immediately some Chaldeans reported this to the king. Because they were envious of these three men of God, they were eager to see the king’s punishment carried out against them. The king had decreed that anyone who did not bow to his image when they heard the sound of music would be thrown into a fiery furnace. He quickly brought in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be questioned. He warned them that if they failed to bow when they heard the music, they would be burned in the furnace.

The three men answered that they did not need the warning, and they did not need another chance. They testified that since they were servants of the Most High God, they would never bow down to an image. They said they were committed to worship only the God of grace, the God of Israel. They also reminded the king that their God was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. They believed God would deliver them if it was necessary to demonstrate His honor in this way. Yet they were also ready to die in the furnace if God would show His honor in some other way.

5. What question did Nebuchadnezzar ask the men brought into his presence? (Daniel 3:14)

6. In his anger, what did the king command should be done with the heat of the furnace? (Daniel 3:19)

7. What happened to the men who took up God's servants to cast them into the fire? (Daniel 3:22)

8. What decree did Nebuchadnezzar make concerning the God of the three friends? (Daniel 3:29)

Lesson 6

The Sovereignty of Israel's God

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 57

Scripture: Daniel 4

Memory Verse: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.” (Daniel 4:37)

Lesson Truth: God's authority over the whole earth was evident when He showed the King of Babylon His grace in Christ Jesus.

Lesson

The lesson from Daniel chapter four shows us God's sovereign rule over every kingdom on earth. In His grace He sent a dream to warn proud Nebuchadnezzar that he would be humbled. When the judgments that were foretold in his dream were fulfilled, the king of Babylon acknowledged that God was the supreme ruler of the earth. He acknowledged that the God of Israel was sovereign.

In Daniel 4, God inspired Daniel to write a proclamation made by Nebuchadnezzar. In his speech the king of Babylon told about a troubling dream he had and the interpretation God gave him through the prophet Daniel. The king dreamed he saw a huge tree that filled the whole earth. The animals found shelter underneath this tree and the birds lived in its branches. The tree was so fruitful that it provided for everyone.

The king then saw in his dream that a heavenly being came and cried aloud that the tree should be cut down and its branches and fruit should be scattered. Then a strange thing happened. What had been a plant in the dream now became a human creature. The heavenly being said this creature coming from the tree stump should be bound with a band of iron and bronze. The creature should graze in the grass and be wet with the morning dew. The king said the things predicted in the dream were sure to happen because it came from the holy ones.

Nebuchadnezzar immediately sent for his wise men and asked them to tell him the meaning of his dream. Not one of his Babylonian wise men was able to tell the king the meaning. Their minds were closed to truth of God's revelation. Once again, the king called for Daniel who had made known the meaning of the king's first dream. When the king told Daniel the dream the Spirit of the Lord gave him the interpretation. At first, he was filled with fear at the meaning of the dream and said to the king that he wished it referred to his enemies. Unfortunately, the judgment in the dream was for the king.

The huge tree in the dream represented Nebuchadnezzar. It was under his protection that the animals and birds had found rest. But the tree was to be chopped down and so also would the king be brought down. He would be covered with the dew in the open fields and would eat grass like an animal until seven times passed over him. Daniel begged the king to put away his pride and become humble so that God would extend his prosperity. He urged the king to remember the poor and the oppressed.

Lesson 7

Like a Potter's Vessel

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 58

Scripture: Daniel 5

Memory Verse: “And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.” (Daniel 5:23)

Lesson Truth: God showed His grace by destroying His enemies who profaned the temple vessels.

Lesson

In Psalm 2, we read that nations that speak against the Lord and against His Anointed will be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel. The story of King Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall is a story about a nation that was dashed to pieces when it profaned the name to the Lord. God in His grace removed this nation so that the hope of the coming Redeemer would continue in another nation.

The events of this story took place during the reign of Belshazzar the last king of the great empire of Babylon. During the reign of Belshazzar, the Persians conquered a large part of Babylon. Still this proud king thought he could resist the Persians and continue to rule. In his arrogance he arranged a great feast where he showed off by drinking wine before his invited guests. Then when he was intoxicated, he showed even greater arrogance by commanding that the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem be brought to his feast. He would show his guests that the God of heaven could not intimidate him. His guests were invited to drink wine from the sacred vessels of the temple. God could not tolerate such activity that profaned His Holy Name. Judgment would come on the kingdom of Babylon.

As the king and his lords were desecrating the sacred vessels from the temple, suddenly a hand appeared on the wall. The hand wrote a message that the king and his guests could not read. However, it made the king tremble with such fear that his knees knocked. Immediately he called for his astrologers and magicians not only to read the message on the wall, but he also wanted them to tell him what it meant. He felt deep inside that it was a message of judgment, so he was filled with horror. He felt the horror of all those who do not know the God of the covenant. He soon learned that his astrologers and magicians could not read the message, so he was greatly troubled.

Without the grace of the Lord in their hearts, the king and his lords were overpowered with fear. When the queen learned of the king's fear she went to the feast and reminded the king that there was a man in the kingdom who had the Spirit of the Holy God. The prophet Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his dreams and he could tell the meaning of the writing on the wall. The king wasted no time to send for Daniel and offered him great gifts if he would read the writing.

Lesson 8

Worshipping the Name of the Lord

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 59

Scripture: Daniel 6

Memory Verse: “Then Daniel said to the king, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have no wrong before you.’” (Daniel 6:21-22)

Lesson Truth: God kept Daniel alive in the lions’ den, so that the worship of His name would continue.

Lesson

The lesson today tells about an attempt of the governors of the Medo-Persian empire to forbid the worship of the God of heaven. They wanted to forbid the worship of God in order to trap Daniel so they could destroy him. By closing the mouths of the lions, the Lord not only saved Daniel, but He also maintained the worship of His name on the earth.

The story from Daniel 6 is not only the story about Daniel in the lions’ den, but also about an attempt by the Persian governors to do away with the worship of the Lord. The Babylonians had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, the place of worship that the Lord had established. Still, God’s faithful people in captivity continued to worship God in prayer. Not only did the governors want to destroy Daniel, but they also wanted to destroy the worship of the Lord.

King Darius devised a great plan for governing the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. He appointed one hundred twenty governors to govern areas of the kingdom. In addition, he appointed three of these governors as supervisors to whom the others would give an account. Daniel was one of these three supervisors. Because Daniel was especially attentive to his duties, the king thought about putting him in charge of the whole kingdom. Daniel’s success made the other governors jealous, so they decided they would find a way to discredit him. The only problem was that they could not find any fault in Daniel so they could accuse him. They finally agreed that the only way they could trap him was to create a law that would forbid him to worship the Lord. In order to get such a law passed the governors appealed to the king’s pride. They asked him to make a law that for thirty days no one could pray to any being except to the king. They also got the king to agree to throw anyone who broke this law into the den of lions. They were confident that Daniel would break this law and be destroyed, because he always prayed to God three times each day. Could these governors do away with the worship of the Lord?

Daniel was aware of the new law and the penalty for those who did not obey this law. He also knew that this law was not just, and that the command to worship the Lord was greater than the law of the king. So Daniel went to his upper room and with the window open toward Jerusalem, he prayed three times each day as usual. Of course, the governors immediately went to the king to report that Daniel broke the new law. They also reminded the king that this was a law of the Medes and Persians that could not be changed. The king was greatly troubled and tried to find a way to rescue Daniel.

Lesson 9

The Temporary Restoration of the Lord's House

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 60

Scripture: Ezra 1–6

Memory Verse: “And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: ‘For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel.’ Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” (Ezra 3:11)

Lesson Truth: The building of the temple by the returning exiles pointed to the time when the Spirit of Christ would live in the hearts of God's people.

Lesson

It all happened just like God's word said it would. Isaiah the prophet told about God using Cyrus as a servant to make sure the temple of the Lord was rebuilt in Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied that God's people would return from exile after seventy years. The first six chapters of the book of Ezra tell about the first return of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

God's people had been in captivity in Babylon nearly seventy years. The Babylonian empire had been conquered by the Medes and Persians, and Cyrus was the Persian king. In his first year as king, Cyrus issued a proclamation that any Jews who wanted return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of the Lord, could do so. Not only could they return to Jerusalem, but they would also be supplied with gifts of gold, silver, and other produce to pay the expenses. Cyrus also acknowledged that it was the Lord God of heaven who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. And it was the God of heaven who commanded him to rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

The return of the exiles came about just as King Cyrus commanded. The leaders from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah lead the group of returning exiles. A few members from the other tribes also joined them, so that once again they were the twelve tribes of Israel when they returned to Canaan. It was the Word and Spirit of the Lord who moved the exiles to return. Once again, the power of God's grace was evident among His people. The citizens of Cyrus's kingdom also followed his command to give gifts to the Jews who were returning to Jerusalem. They gave gold and silver as well as livestock and other precious things. The return of God's people was truly the fulfillment of word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah the prophet.

King Cyrus also honored the God of heaven when he gave the vessels from the temple to Zerubbabel to take back to Jerusalem. The king wanted the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple to be restored to their original service. What a joy among the people as they returned to rebuild the temple of the Lord. The first thing Jeshua and Zerubbabel did when they arrived in Jerusalem was to build an altar to God to offer burnt offerings as written in the Law of Moses. Zerubbabel hoped for a complete restoration of the communion between God and His people. But the old covenant was not restored. The people would have to look forward to the new covenant in which God's people enjoy full communion with the Father through the Christ and His Spirit.

Lesson 10

The Law Reinstated

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 61

Scripture: Ezra 7–10

Memory Verse: “O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!” (Ezra 9:15)

Lesson Truth: Ezra urged the people to live righteously in obedience to the law.

Lesson

The children of Israel had been in captivity for seventy years just as the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied. The captivity was now over and many of God’s people returned to the Land of Promise in two major groups. Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the first group and Ezra led the second group some seventy-eight years later. Ezra was a priest and a scribe, one who feared the Lord. He returned to the Promised Land to urge the people to live righteously by living in obedience to the Law.

The return of the exiles from Babylon after seventy years is a striking event. It is striking because the return of God’s people was clearly directed by God. Before the first group returned, King Cyrus made an official proclamation urging God’s people to return to build the temple. Cyrus did exactly what Isaiah prophesied more than a hundred years earlier. In the second return God directed Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to not only allow God’s people to go, but also to support them with gifts.

God moved Ezra the priest to go to Jerusalem and the Promised Land. The first group of returning exiles had built the new temple so the worship of God could be restored. Their leaders, Zerubbabel and Jeshua were no longer living, and the people forgot the law of God. Now God called Ezra to lead a group of returning exiles and to teach the people to live in obedience to the Law. God also caused the heart of Artaxerxes, the present king of Persia, to encourage this return. Artaxerxes gave Ezra a letter that described his support for this return. He promised silver, gold, and produce as well as military help to bring Ezra and the returnees to Jerusalem.

Ezra urged both priests and Levites to accompany his group as they returned to Jerusalem. He wanted these priests and Levites to help him reinstate the righteousness of the Law of God. When Ezra and his group of exiles returned to Jerusalem, God made the people in Jerusalem receptive to them. They accepted Ezra as their leader as someone sent by God. As he served as the leader in Jerusalem, officials came to him and told him about a serious rejection of God’s Law. The people rejected God’s law when they married pagan wives. God’s Law clearly forbade this practice, yet they did it anyway.

When Ezra heard this report, he was so grieved that he tore his clothes and pulled hair from his head and beard. He thought about the horror of the judgment that would come because of this sin. Then Ezra acted as Christ would act on behalf of the people. He took this sin of the people upon himself. After the evening sacrifice he knelt before the Lord in a prayer of confession and penitence. He said: “O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our

Lesson 11
A Witness

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 62

Scripture: Esther 1–10

Memory Verse: “For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.” (Esther 10:3)

Lesson Truth: Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther were witnesses to God’s name in Persia.

Lesson

God’s hand of providence and protection is evident in the book of Esther. Both Esther and Mordecai served as witnesses to God’s name when the wicked Haman devised a plot to destroy God’s people. Many of the people from Israel and Judah were comfortable in the land of their captivity and were disobedient in not wanting to rebuild God’s house in Jerusalem. In spite of this disobedience the Lord provided Mordecai as a deliverer when Haman plotted to destroy them.

The story of the book of Esther is about the remarkable way that directed the affairs of a pagan nation in order to save His people from destruction. The story begins with King Ahasuerus calling a huge feast for the nobles of his kingdom, which was followed by a seven-day feast for the people. At the seven-day feast the king became drunk. In his drunken pride he decided he wanted to show off his beautiful queen, Vashti, to the nobles of his kingdom. Because Vashti knew the king was drunk, she refused to parade before him. This made the king furious and with the advice of his wisemen, he deposed Queen Vashti. He then decided to search for a new queen by recruiting girls to his harem. The king planned to select a queen from his harem after they had been conditioned. Cousin Mordecai who raised Esther as his own daughter after her parents died, brought Esther to the king’s court to join the harem. When the days of conditioning were completed the king chose Esther to be his queen. This was the means God used to bring Esther to the king’s court.

We understand how God used Esther to save His people when we learn of Haman’s wicked plot to destroy the Jews. It happened after Haman was promoted to the second ruler in the kingdom. Because of his rank all the people bowed down when Haman appeared, except Mordecai, Esther’s cousin. Because he served the Lord, he would not bow to a person. This made Haman very angry, and he decided he had to destroy Mordecai. His hatred was so intense that he wasn’t content to destroy Mordecai alone; he made a plan to destroy all the Jews. When Mordecai learned of this plan, he called on Esther to intervene. He asked her to go to the king uninvited to beg for the lives of her people. Esther knew the court rule that anyone who came to the king uninvited would be put to death unless the king held out his golden scepter. When she shared this with Mordecai, he reminded her that the Lord might have brought her to the king’s court for just this purpose. Mordecai told Esther that he was confident that if she did not go in to the king; God would deliver His people in another way but she would not be spared. Esther then agreed to go in to the king uninvited, with the attitude, if I perish, I perish!

Esther did approach the king, and the king held out the golden scepter and spared her life. When he asked her to state her request, she requested that the king and Haman come to her banquet. Following this request Haman built huge gallows on which he would hang Mordecai,

The providence of God is again evident when the king could not sleep at night. Because he could not sleep the king asked to review the court records. As he reviewed the court records, he found a record of Mordecai exposing a plot to murder the king. He inquired if Mordecai had been honored for this heroic deed. When he was advised that no honor had been given to Mordecai, the king inquired who was in his outer court. It happened that Haman was there to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared. The king brought Haman in and inquired what should be done to the man the king wanted to honor. Because Haman thought that he was the one the king wanted to honor he was lavish in his suggestion for this honor. The beginning of Haman's downfall came when he was instructed to honor Mordecai according to his suggestions.

After a second banquet for the king and Haman, Esther begged the king for her life and the life of her people. She also told the king it was Haman who had plotted to destroy her people. At this the king was very angry. He was also provoked that Haman threw himself on Esther's couch to beg for his life. Just at that time his attendants told him about the gallows Haman had prepared for Mordecai. The king commanded that Haman be hung on the gallows he had built. The Jews were allowed to fight for their lives and were spared in a miraculous way. Following their deliverance Mordecai was promoted to the second ruler in the kingdom. The Jews kept the feast of Purim in thankfulness for God's grace.

Questions

1. Who was king of the 127 provinces of Persia when Vashti was queen? (Esther 1:1)
2. What was the decree the king sent out concerning queen Vashti? (Esther 1:19)
3. Who brought up Esther as his own daughter and placed her in the king's harem? (Esther 2:7-8)

The Temporary Restoration of the City of God

Reference: De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, Volume 2, Lesson 63

Scripture: Nehemiah 1–13

Memory Verse: “You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.” (Nehemiah 9:6)

Lesson Truth: The rebuilding of Jerusalem was temporary, yet it pointed to the building of the Kingdom of God.

Lesson

Nehemiah was the leader of third return of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. Not only did he rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but he also worked tirelessly to help God’s people remember what their true purpose was. Nehemiah enlisted the help of Ezra to read the law and to reestablish Israel’s basic institutions. In order to stop the spiritual and moral decline of God’s people Nehemiah and Ezra brought drastic reforms involving their religious and political life. Nehemiah knew that if the Promised Messiah was to come from God’s people their spiritual decline had to be reversed.

Nehemiah was a man of high position in the court of Artaxerxes the king of Persia. He was the trusted cupbearer to the king. This was an office of great responsibility for the safety of the king. Although he had a responsible office, Nehemiah remained faithful to the Lord and to God’s people. He made it a point to inquire about God’s people in Jerusalem and Israel whenever he had the opportunity. When he received a report of the terrible conditions of walls of Jerusalem and the spiritual decline; he determined to ask the king if he could go back to his country to rebuild and instruct. Before Nehemiah asked the king if could return, he spent time in prayer, remembering the promises the Lord made to His people and asking for guidance. One day when he appeared downcast as he served the king, he was given the opportunity to make his request. The king asked him why he was so sad. In response he shared with the king the conditions in Jerusalem and asked if he could return to build the walls. The Lord touched the king’s heart so that he sent Nehemiah with letters of support to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

When Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem, he first inspected the walls. He then shared with the city officials the terrible condition of the walls and his purpose for coming. The Lord also made Nehemiah’s words effective in making the hearts of the people receptive to his plan. They sensed that God’s grace was turning to them again. In response to God’s grace, they were ready to begin rebuilding the walls. Nehemiah then assigned everyone, no matter what rank, to build the wall in their section of the city. As they began building, they soon learned of the hatred of their enemies and of their plans to disrupt the work. It became necessary for the builders to work with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other. The workers worked day and night, encouraged by Nehemiah who was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

