

BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

# Reigning Heroes

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES



## BNEXT STUDY

His Warnings, Your Wisdom : 1 Kings

His Word, Your Way : 2 Kings

His Review, Your Reward : 1 & 2 Chronicles

His Sanctification, Your Separation : Ezra

His Church, Your Challenge : Nehemiah

His Time, Your Triumph : Esther

## AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

- ▶ Solomon's Wives
- ▶ Olympic Gold
- ▶ God's Footprints
- ▶ Oh, That Detail!
- ▶ All Heaven Broke Loose
- ▶ The Power of United Prayer

STUDY **BNEXT**

**William P. Campbell**



## Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

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But if you or your descendants turn away from Me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for My Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

1 Kings 9:6-7



Watch Amazing Journey Video  
"Solomon's Wives"

### Introduction

In the original Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings were one book, as were 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. When these books were translated into Greek, around three hundred years before Christ, they were all divided into two books. The divisions were required because Greek text requires one third more space than does Hebrew, and the scrolls upon which scribes wrote were limited in length. The books of 1 and 2 Kings continue the story of 1 and 2 Samuel and include Solomon's reign followed by the succession of the kings for Judah and Israel. 1 and 2 Kings covers a period of approximately 400 years.

It opens with a kingdom growing in strength and ends with a kingdom going into exile. It starts with King David and ends with the king of Babylon. It begins with the Temple's construction and closes with the Temple's destruction. The book of 1 Kings describes clearly what led to this downward trend. It was because Solomon compromised that the kingdom eventually collapsed. Under Solomon, the kingdom reached its glorious zenith; after Solomon's reign, the kingdom was divided and eventually destroyed. We can divide 1 Kings in half, according to its two main sections. In the first 11 chapters, Solomon comes to power and reigns with wisdom. He does not carefully heed God's warnings to avoid idolatry, however. In the second half of 1 Kings, we see the sad consequences of sin divide the kingdom. May God enable us to learn from the warnings inherent in this book and to glean wisdom from our study.

### The United Kingdom Under Solomon (God's Warnings)— Chapters 1-11

The first 11 chapters of this book focus on the 40 year reign of King Solomon. It was a glorious reign. Finally, after 400 years, the dimensions of the kingdom promised to Joshua (Joshua 1:4) would be fulfilled. This new kingdom of 60,000 square miles was 10 times that inherited by David. It was a glorious kingdom. The news of Solomon's riches, strength, and wisdom spread far and wide. Among other accomplishments, a wondrous temple was built for God. The Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon's work and wisdom and stood in amazement (1 Kings 10:5). Furthermore, it was a united kingdom. Under Solomon's rule the 12 tribes of Israel would be united for their last time until the one greater than Solomon, Jesus Christ, returns to reign in greater glory (Luke 11:31). Solomon's honor, fame, and glory were all gifts from God. Solomon also received from God numerous warnings about the sure punishment to follow if he or his sons turned to idolatry.

Solomon's first warning came from the life of David and the words of the prophet Nathan. At the beginning of Solomon's reign, when David turned the kingdom over to him, the young king was only 19 years of age. The punishment David earlier received for his personal infidelity should have been warning enough to keep any future king from experimenting with sin. Further, the godly prophet Nathan, the very man who rebuked King David for compromise, had a special love for Solomon and likely mentored and taught Solomon the ways of righteousness (2 Samuel 12:24-25).

The second warning for Solomon came from the lips of David, who charged Solomon to follow the ways of God faithfully that he might not fall from his throne (1 Kings 2:3-4). The third and

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

1 Kings 11:4

fourth warnings came directly from God Himself. When God first promised Solomon riches and honor, He told him the conditions for a lengthy life and reign: “Walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did” (1 Kings 3:14a).

After Solomon rose to the heights of his splendor and completed the Temple for God, the Lord appeared to him a second time. Here Solomon was warned even more directly about the punishment that would follow if the king worshipped false gods. If Solomon turned from Jehovah, the Lord promised, “I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples” (1 Kings 9:7).

Yet, despite such clear and continued warnings, we find the sad statement about Solomon's later reign in Chapter 11, “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (1 Kings 11:4).

Solomon turned from the wisdom given him by God. God, in His wisdom, would fulfill His word to Solomon...mercifully and completely. So the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen” (1 Kings 11:11-13).

### **The Divided Kingdom After Solomon (God's Wisdom) — Chapters 12-22**

The second half of 1 Kings covers approximately 80 years during the time of the Divided Kingdom. Once God removed His protection and blessing, common in-house fighting alone would be enough to destroy the kingdom. For 300, there had been signs of jealousy between the tribes of Ephraim and Judah. Ephraim was originally promised great blessings by Jacob (Genesis 48:17-22; 49:22-26). Joshua, the great leader of the Jews, was from the tribe of Ephraim. When David became king, however, authority was transferred to David's tribe, Judah. This too was prophesied by God through Jacob (Genesis 49:8-12). Nevertheless, this change of leadership promoted further strife. If the tribes of the north resented Solomon's strong-handed approach, they completely resisted Solomon's son, Rehoboam's stricter policies.

Soon Jeroboam, from the tribe of Ephraim, was appointed as King over the 10 northern tribes (known collectively as Israel). Benjamin alone sided with Judah, and these two southern tribes came to be known collectively as the kingdom of Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria, and the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. Before they were led into captivity, Israel had a total of 19 kings, and Judah a total of 20 kings. Following Solomon's disobedience and idolatry, then, the monarchy became as unstable as water. When the Kings turned from God, their leadership was not blessed by God. God's strength in this case was revealed through human weakness. God's wisdom would be manifest through a new avenue, that of the prophets.

The greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah, was sent by God to remind the Jews that

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1 Corinthians 1:19,20

from the start and forever, God was the true leader and their only true King. The name *Elijah* means "Jehovah is My God." Like a loving parent, God the Father did not abandon the children He disciplined. As the Kings grew more unstable and sin abounded, God's enabled the prophets to speak His message clearly and simply. As has always been the case, God's wisdom makes foolish the wisdom of the world, and God's wisdom is revealed through the apparent foolishness of what is preached (1 Corinthians 1:19-21).

### Final Thought

In Solomon's time, people came from great distances to see the glory of Solomon's kingdom and to observe his great wisdom. Solomon's reign prefigured the ultimate and eternal reign of our Lord Christ who promises to return one day soon and reign on the throne of David. When Jesus appeared the first time, He came to suffer for our salvation. In His wisdom, God's plans are not only accomplished despite suffering but through suffering. Christ came to die that we might live and reign with Him when He comes the second time. Our Lord, the King who never sinned, will unite His followers from the tribes of Israel and from the nations of the world. It is this Jesus who said, "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31).

### Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series "Reigning Heroes," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read 1 Kings 1:1-53. The first two verses make us wonder about the morality of David and his followers.

a. See Deuteronomy 17:17. Was God in favor of all of David's wives? Explain.

b. Do you think this tendency to have many women was one of the root causes of David's problems including, perhaps, even the problems described in this chapter?

c. How would David's example in this regard help set the stage for Solomon's ultimate downfall?

3. a. See 1 Kings 2:1-4. David was, until the end, a man after God's heart. What evidences of this desire to please God do you find in these verses.

b. See 1 Kings 2:5-9. David was a man of war who shed much blood. Contrast the fact that David sought after God and yet had human, sinful tendencies until the end. Now look at your own life. How does your love for God contrast with your own sinful motivations?

4. Read 1 Kings 3:1-4.

a. What weakness do we find here in Solomon?

b. What impresses you about the prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 3:6-9)?



c. Notice God's answer (1 Kings 3:10-15). What lessons about prayer and about our motivations can we learn from this account?

d. Notice in 1 Kings 3:16-28 the wisdom God gave to Solomon in answer to his prayers. Take time to pray for God to guide your heart, and to give you wisdom, based on the promise of James 1:5.

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. In 1 Kings 4 we see that Solomon was a very wealthy man. Compare 1 Kings 3:13 with 1 Kings 10:23, noting that these riches were a gift from God. Compare Solomon with Christ and His disciples. During their itinerating ministry, Jesus and His followers depended, in part, on the donations of others. Discuss whether a person of great prayer, faith, and faithfulness today should expect to be rich or poor?

6. 1 Kings 6 describes the Temple that Solomon built. This house of worship was patterned after the Tabernacle constructed in the time of Moses, but the Temple was much more elaborate. Everything was bigger and better. In the Middle Ages, people thought bigger and better church buildings would bring honor to God and would perhaps bring more people into the church. Today the focus seems to be on bigger and better programs. Discuss the pros and cons of the bigger and better mentality.

7. Solomon brings the ark into the temple (1 Kings 8:1-11), gives a speech to the people (1 Kings 8:12-21), and then offers a prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:22-53), before his final benediction (1 Kings 8:54-61) and the sacrifices of dedication (1 Kings 8:62-66). Notice Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:22-53). Was Solomon aware of the dangers of idolatry and disobedience?

How did God follow up this prayer in 1 Kings 9:1-9?

Would you say that Solomon was off to a good start with God?



8. 2 Samuel 11 introduced the beginning of David's troubles. Similarly, 1 Kings 11 introduces the beginning of Solomon's downfall. In what way was Solomon's error more grievous than that of David?

In what ways were these two kings similar?

9. Read Proverbs 30:8.

a. How does too much wealth and power become dangerous for even a person "after God's heart?"

b. How does too little money become a source of trial and a potential temptation toward sin?

c. Discuss real situations in your life and for those you love. Pray for God's provision and protection in this regard.

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. When Solomon turned away from God (1 Kings 11), it led the kingdom astray (1 Kings 12-16). God responded by sending a prophet, Elijah. Skim the accounts in 1 Kings 17-19. Which story of Elijah is most challenging or helpful for you? Why?

11. The book of 1 Kings closes on a sad note (1 Kings 22:51-53). Contrast these verses with the last two verses of the Bible (see Revelation 22:20-21). Discuss why the fact that the King of Kings is coming soon should give calm to our hearts, even when earthly rulers and kingdoms become corrupt.

### Scripture for Meditation

And if you walk in My ways and obey My statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.

1 Kings 3:14



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

### Introduction

If ever human nature pushed sin to its heights and if ever humankind fell into its deepest depths, it is in the book of 2 Kings. Yet, there is much we can learn from this book, and we would be much amiss not to read and study its pages. “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The world today finds itself wrapped in storm clouds of darkness not unlike those tempests that darkened the sky during the time of the Kings.

Historians have come to recognize that the dynasties described here provide essential historical data found nowhere else. Archaeologists have unearthed more evidence to demonstrate the veracity of the book 2 Kings than any other book. Might it also be the case that as average Christians, you and I might discover truths for living in this book? As we study 2 Kings may it become a light to our paths in a world that grows darker with each new generation. The Psalmist declared, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). In this study, we will note how crucial was the Word of God to light the paths of Kings and God’s people in history. May God’s truth also brighten the way before us as we study the examples who have walked before us. In this book, we will consider two great themes: (1) Your Way: Two Paths Before You; (2) His Word: The Light That Guides You.

### Your Way: Two Paths Before You

In 1 Kings, we saw the division of the kingdom of the Jews. In 2 Kings, we are given opportunity to follow the two paths chosen by the two kingdoms. The direction chosen and the consequences realized by each path can be significant and instructive for our lives. Note in general:

The Northern Kingdom (called Israel, with Samaria as its capital) consisted of 10 tribes and had 19 rulers (none of them followed God), beginning in 931 BC with Jeroboam and ending in 721 BC. This kingdom lasted 210 years until it was brought into captivity through the Assyrians. It never returned from its dispersion.

The Southern Kingdom (called Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital) consisted of two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and had 20 rulers (eight of them followed God), beginning in 931 BC with Rehoboam and ending in 606 BC. This kingdom lasted 325 years until it was brought into captivity by the Babylonians. A remnant would later return to Jerusalem to rebuild the ruins.

The tragic truth about the Northern Kingdom is that the 10 tribes would be dispersed, never to be reunited until the coming of our Lord Jesus for His Second Advent. The happy truth about the Southern Kingdom is that a remnant was allowed to resettle in the land of Judah. The line of David would be preserved so that the promise of the Messiah might be complete when Jesus came to redeem his people during His First Advent. It was only by the sovereign, protective hand of God, that the lineage of Jesus would be preserved, and that His lineage could be traced legitimately all the way back to David (Luke 2:23-38).

Why such calamity for the peoples of the North? It is recorded of each of their kings that they “did evil,” (2 Kings 3:2-3; 10:31-32; 13:2-3, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18,24, 28; 17:2) except for Shallum, whose



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... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, 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

reign was hardly long enough to record...only one month. Why God's mercy for the peoples of the South? It was recorded of eight of their kings that they "did right" in the eyes of the Lord: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah (2 Chronicles 14:2; 17:3-4; 2 Kings 12:2; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 18:3; 22:2). Let us move the spotlight of our study upon the lives of two of the best kings of Judah, and we will see that they found the way of blessing because they found the Word of God.

### **His Word: The Light That Guides You**

Of the 20 kings who reigned in Jerusalem, eight kings were righteous. We will focus on the two who served God most boldly and faithfully, Hezekiah and Josiah. It was stated about Hezekiah that "Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses" (2 Kings 18:5-6). We note the distinguishing fact surrounded this great statesman's life was his love for God's Word.

The Biblical authors show Hezekiah's record to be equaled or surpassed by only one other gentleman, Josiah. About this great reformer and king, we read, "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses" (2 Kings 23:25). The Biblical writers seem at odds to know which king deserves more praise and honor. Yet for both, the reason for their success is perfectly clear: they loved the Law of the Lord.

The story of great King Hezekiah can be found in 2 Kings 18-20 (and 2 Chronicles 29-32). This king repaired and restored God's house, reactivated the priesthood, reinstated the Passover, destroyed the idols of the pagan deities, and pushed back the enemies. Under Hezekiah, the people of Judah experienced a revival that brought back reminiscences of the sweet blessings once experienced under David and Solomon.

Every Christian should read carefully and prayerfully the account of Hezekiah's life and reign. We will not recount here the great events of Hezekiah's life. Rather, let us note a contribution made by Hezekiah that is largely overlooked by modern readers. This king so loved God's Word that he became a major influence in the assemblage and transmission of the Old Testament. Note the inscription at the front of Proverbs 25 to see evidence that Hezekiah had a hand in assembling the book of Proverbs. This great king had his own guild of men who guided literary works (2 Kings 18:18). Hezekiah drew from the well of writings of men as rich and deep as Isaiah, the most prolific and skilled writer of all the prophets (2 Kings 19:2).

It is curious to scholars of the ancient biblical Hebrew texts that attached to the end of many books were the three letters, "HZK," which are the first three letters of "Hezekiah" in Hebrew. Could it be that this king had a hand in assembling and approving with his stamp much of the Old Testament that we enjoy today? Of one thing we can be sure. Hezekiah loved God's Word.

Following Hezekiah's death, his son, Manasseh, earned the reputation of becoming the most wicked of Judah's kings. How shocking that one of the best kings would have one of the worst sons. How sad that this worst of kings would reign longer than any other—55 years. The land

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following Him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook.

2 Kings 18:5-7

became truly dark during the reign of Manasseh. The only good thing we can say about this abominable man is that he repented before he died (2 Chronicles 33:19). God's mercy often shines brightest through the darkest of lives. And God's Word shines brightly in the darkest of times.

This truth became evident once again when, after king Amon's short two year reign, young king Josiah was placed on the throne. Under Josiah, the Southern Kingdom of Judah would find one last revival during its final century and before its dispersion. Never has an account of the power of God's been made so clear and striking. The book of the law had been lost, or perhaps hidden for safe-keeping, during the bitter reign of Manasseh. By the goodness and grace of God, it would be relocated by Hilkiah the priest under the reign of Josiah. When the king heard God's word, he tore his clothes as a sign of repentance for he recognized the commands and guidelines of God had long been neglected (2 Kings 22:11). Thus began a great re-turning to God that would continue among the people of Judah during the reign of Josiah.

### Final Thought

During the four centuries that Kings reigned in God's land of promise, their success or failure depended on how faithfully they followed the Word of God. The Divided Kingdom formed two lines of kings who followed two distinct paths—one into the wilderness of dispersion, and one toward the promised Messiah, the son of David. May God help us to chose the way of David, who said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105).

### Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series "Reigning Heroes," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read 2 Kings 1:1-18.

a. What happened to King Ahaziah?

b. From whom did he initially seek for help?

c. How did Elijah respond?

d. What does this story tell you about the importance of seeking God's wisdom before seeking the wisdom of the world?

e. In what ways can we seek God's wisdom for our decisions and challenges today?

2. Read 2 Kings 2:1-18.

a. How did Elijah ascend to heaven?

b. Why did the servants search for Elijah after he was gone?

c. From what you know about Elijah, how would you characterize the man and/or his ministry?

d. Is there a need for such a man today? See Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 17:1-12.

e. In what ways has God encouraged believers to continue to long for the spirit and power of Elijah to be manifest on earth? Pray to the Lord about the needs of Church and society today, asking for a ministry like Elijah's to arise, to prepare the way for the Lord's Second Coming?



### Discussion (Small Group Study)

3. Read 2 Kings 2:19-25. Here Elisha's ministry is confirmed among his followers and his enemies. Now skim chapters 3 and 4, noting the other miracles God worked through Elisha. If God were to raise up a prophet like Elisha in our day, how do you think the average church would receive him?

How about our nation's political leaders?

4. Read 2 Kings 5. What lessons did Naaman learn in this story?

What lesson did Gehazi learn? Discuss how each lesson can and should be applied to your lives.

5. Read 2 Kings 6:8-23.

a. Retell this story in your own words.

b. How did the band of Syrian raiders come to stop their attacks on Israel?

c. How does this Old Testament story illustrate New Testament truths? See 2 Kings 6:17.

d. Do you believe that angels protect us from danger (See also Matthew 18:10 and Hebrews 1:14). Why do you think there is so much emphasis on angels in today's society?

e. How can such an emphasis be healthy?

How can too much emphasis on angels be damaging for our spiritual lives.

6. See 2 Kings 13:14-25 for the last account regarding Elijah.  
a. How was Elisha's prophecy to Joash (Jehoash NIV) fulfilled (2 Kings 13:25)? Using the account of arrows pounded on the ground (2 Kings 13: 18) as an analogy for prayer, discuss the importance of praying boldly and persistently about God's will until it is accomplished in our lives.

b. Give examples of answers to prayer in your life to encourage each other to pray faithfully and without giving up.

c. List and pray together as a group for specific needs and concerns of which you are aware.

8. Read 2 Kings 22:1-20.

a. How is Josiah an exemplary king?

b. What crucial find made the difference in this man's life?

c. In what ways do we need to make such a find again in our day

9. Read 2 Kings 23:1-25. Consider all that Josiah did in his day to restore righteousness and truth. If Christians were to individually take a stand like Josiah's and collectively fight for what is right, how might society and our country be effected? Make a list of things you can do to restore righteousness. Pray for these very things to happen in our day.

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

7. What insights or questions from the book of 2 Kings would you like to pursue further in discussion or study?

#### Scripture for Meditation

The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

2 Kings 23:3



... acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

1 Chronicles 28:9

### Introduction

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, originally one book in the Hebrew text, present us with the only historical summary of the period between Genesis and 2 Kings. From the Garden of Eden to the destruction of Jerusalem, vast expanses of time are bridged in this document through genealogies. The Biblical period most fully covered in 1 and 2 Chronicles is that of the Kings (1 Samuel through 2 Kings), and the two central figures in this account are King David and King Solomon. Ancient Jewish tradition claims that Ezra, the scribe, wrote the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. While it is true that modern scholars suppose the time of writing to be around the time of Ezra, there is no way we can definitively prove this priest to be the author of Chronicles. Chronicles may be summarized as follows:

Genealogies	1 Chronicles 1-9
David's Reign	1 Chronicles 10-29
Solomon's Reign	2 Chronicles 1-9
The Kings of Judah	2 Chronicles 10-36

The author of Chronicles was very selective in material covered. He focused on God's people, God's work, and God's Temple, to the exclusion of a world of alternative topics. The subtle message of this book speaks quite clearly to the reader who will stand back to listen. Our lives, too, should focus on God's Kingdom to the exclusion of all competing ideas and ideals. As we study this book, we are called to review the past with one eye on the reward in the future. For one day, our lives will come under the scrutiny of a historical review. Every deed, each word, and even the motives of our hearts will be revealed (1 Corinthians 4:5). In the day that we meet our Creator before the Great Throne of Judgement, we will joyously receive the reward that men like Ezra sought, only if we have adopted the priorities stressed in Chronicles (Revelation 20:11-12). Let us then observe the way the chronicler reviewed history and contemplate the reward people will receive from God if their life story fits with this history.

### His Review

Chronicles begins with genealogical listings. To a scholar of Scriptures, the names not listed are more conspicuous than those which are. When the author of Chronicles omits genealogies, he chooses to omit names of people who are not part of the chosen people of God through whom eventually would come the Messiah. The first few verses of the book (1 Chronicles 1:1-4), for example, give the record from the creation to the flood (Genesis 5:1-32). Cain and Abel are not mentioned for the author is interested in the chosen line, through Seth. The genealogical records become full and focused around the sons of Jacob (1 Chronicles 2-9). They serve as the stage on which the drama of the Messianic promise is enacted.

King David, through whom the Messianic line was established, is the central figure in 1 Chronicles. Saul, the king who preceded David, is allotted only one chapter, describing his death. This account of Saul provides a segue into the following 19 chapters, detailing the reign of David (1 Chronicles 10-29). 2 Chronicles devotes a full nine chapters to Solomon, and the remaining 27



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You know when I sit and  
when I rise; You perceive  
my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out  
and my lying down; You  
are familiar with all my  
ways. Before a word is on  
my tongue  
You, LORD, know it com-  
pletely.

Psalm 139:2-4

chapters follow the line of Judah's kings. The kings of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, are only mentioned in passing.

From the beginning of 1 Chronicles to the end of 2 Chronicles, it is clear that the author was selectively writing the history of God's redemptive plan by which God elected and graciously preserved the line of David. Kings and Samuel tell of the depth of corruption and degradation that pulled down kingdoms of Israel and Judah to their final collapse, providing explanation for the sacking of Jerusalem and the captivity of God's people.

The book of the Chronicles, however, focuses on the good things the Lord accomplished as He preserved a remnant people, through whom would come the Messiah. The Chronicler's accounts of David and Solomon seem almost idealized when we compare them with the stories in Samuel and Kings. Regarding David, references to the seven-year reign in Hebron and the wars with the house of Saul are omitted. David's difficulties with Michal, the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, the sin with Bathsheba, the conspiracy and overthrow by Absalom, the rebellions of Sheba and Shimei...these accounts are all overlooked in Chronicles.

Similarly, the Chronicler shows Solomon to ascend neatly to the throne. No mention is made of the attempted coup by Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5-53) or of Solomon's swift execution of those who had wronged David (1 Kings 2:13-46). The account also avoids mention of Solomon's foreign wives and his gross idolatry. Even the blame for the eventual division of the kingdom is not placed on Solomon's shoulders in Chronicles.

Some people, seeing how selective the story line is in Chronicles, charge the author with bias and unfair historical reporting. In so doing, they fail to recognize the central focus of the book. If Chronicles were a mere repetition of the content of Samuel and Kings, there would be no reason or need for the book. Chronicles reviews the past with an eye on a great reward in the future.

### Your Reward

The notion that Ezra was the author of Chronicles finds support not only through the similarity in style with other books attributed to him (Ezra and Nehemiah) but also in the same driving purpose found in all three of these books. Ezra was a priest of the line of Judah who provided leadership for the Jewish remnant which returned to Jerusalem following the captivity to rebuild the Temple. We see THE TEMPLE written all over Chronicles.

The genealogies in Chronicles were written to provide credibility to the priests who would serve in the Temple. Most of the space devoted to David and Solomon in Chronicles relate to their constructing, dedicating, and organizing the Temple and its worship. The history of the Kings of Judah accented the purpose for, and preservation of, the Temple. When we understand that the Temple was the major concern of the author of Chronicles, his selectivity in writing makes perfect sense.

Ezra (or one like him) wrote with the driving hope that history might motivate God's chosen people to once again seek God. Ezra himself led the people to rebuild the altar and to construct

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.

Genesis 15:1b

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

again the Temple of God. This was the goal that drove Ezra forward against seeming insurmountable odds. To come into the presence of God through Temple worship would be the ultimate reward for Ezra and God's people.

One day, we will meet God face to face at the Throne of Judgement and our lives will be reviewed in detail. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). At that time, God will reward us for the things that we have said and done, toward the up-building of the Temple, the Church of God (1 Corinthians 3:14). Our greatest reward will be God Himself and His Christ (1 Corinthians 8:6). Let us, like Ezra, long for the Temple, the presence of God. Let us structure our lives and make history around this one concern, and we will not be disappointed!

### Final Thought

It is interesting to consider the vast source of material available for the Chronicler to draw from. Over half of Chronicles was drawn from Samuel and Kings. Other sources from which this historian drew included the Pentateuch, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and other sources not now available to us (*The Book of the Kings of Israel; The Book of the Annals of King David; The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel; and The Annotations on the Book of the Kings* – 2 Chronicles 20:34; 24:7; 27:24; 28:26). Like a marksman looking steadily at his target, the Chronicler unflinchingly pulled together the things most important to point people toward a renewed worship of God. We too would be wise to carefully edit our every activity and priority assuring that what we do today will last for eternity.

### Spending Time With God

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SERIES

REIGNING HEROES | ISRAEL'S HISTORY

LESSON 3

His Review, Your Reward | 1 & 2 Chronicles

### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Skim 1 Chronicles 1.

a. What names do you recognize here?

b. Consider the legacy left by the people of God for you and for me. What legacy you are leaving for your children and their descendants?

2. In 1 Chronicles 2–9, we find historical records and genealogies.

a. How does the fact that the Scriptures are so carefully rooted in real people, real events, and real history encourage your faith?

b. How would you answer a person who stated, “The Bible is a good book, but why all the wasted pages in 1 Chronicles that are filled with names and records of history?”

3. Skim 1 Chronicles 10-22. Seek to find two or three specific truths through the lives of Saul and David that inspire you to live fully for God today.

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Skim 1 Chronicles 23-27.

a. Categorize the various lists found in these chapters.

b. Why do you think it is important that such lists be included in the Biblical account?



c. Why is it helpful and even important for us to recall people within our families and churches, and the significant deeds they have accomplished through history?

b. Skim 2 Chronicles 32 and describe some of Hezekiah's challenges.

5. Skim 1 Chronicles 28-29 and 2 Chronicles 1-9. What stories described in these accounts (and already studied during the past few lessons in the books of the Kings) are (or have been) most inspirational for your life and your walk with God? Why?

7. a. In what other books are we told we can locate details about Hezekiah's life (2 Chronicles 32:32)? Search those books to find details about the miracle surrounding the sundial.

6. The remainder of 2 Chronicles describes the remaining kings. We will jump ahead to the reign of Hezekiah.

a. Skim 2 Chronicles 29-31 and describe some of Hezekiah's reforms.

b. What can we learn from this story for today?



SERIES

REIGNING HEROES | ISRAEL'S HISTORY

LESSON 3

His Review, Your Reward | 1 & 2 Chronicles

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

8. What insights or questions from the book of 1 or 2 Chronicles would you like to pursue further in discussion or study?

9. Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-2 and skim the rest of the chapter. a. How is it that a righteous man like Hezekiah could leave the world a wicked son like Manasseh?

b. Do you know people (family or friends) whose lives have such paradoxes?

c. What lessons are to be learned for our own lives through these examples?

10. Read 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. a. How is this a happy ending to a long and often sad account?

b. Compare it with the last few pages of the Bible. How is the end of the story of the Scriptures an encouragement for your life?

c. Do you often take heart in the hope that is set before you?

d. List and share with one another favorite verse(s) about the promises of God for the future, and take time to offer prayers and praise to the God of hope.

#### Scripture for Meditation

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. Any of His people among you may go up, and may the LORD their God be with them."

2 Chronicles 36:23



I am the LORD... Who says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'"

Isaiah 44:24B-28

### Introduction

The book of Ezra describes the period in which the Jewish remnant return from exile to rebuild the Temple. Tradition attributes authorship of this book, along with Nehemiah and Chronicles, to the priest Ezra. Because only part of the book of Ezra is written in the first person (Ezra 7:27–9:15), some scholars have concluded that the book is the combined work of several writers and one compiler. However, the general harmony and uniformity of the book as a whole support the notion that Ezra wrote the whole. And shifting from first to third person is a writing technique used by both classical (e.g., Thucydides) and Biblical (e.g., Daniel) writers. Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book. Together they describe three groups of Jewish pilgrims returning from exile to Jerusalem.

Date	Leader	Foreign King	OT Prophet
537 BC	Zerubbabel & Joshua	Cyrus the Great Cambyses (Ahasuerus) Gaumata (Smerdis) Darius I (Hystaspis)	Haggai Zechariah
458 BC	Ezra	Artaxerxes	Ezra
445 BC	Nehemiah	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah

The first two groups of pilgrims and their mission are described in the book of Ezra. Let us consider them separately while noting their common theme—separation unto God.

### The Return to Rebuild (Ezra 1-6)

The book of Ezra begins with one of the most astounding fulfillments of predictive prophecy related to secular kings in all the Bible (Ezra 1:1-4). Cyrus is the first of at least seven different kings named in the book of Ezra. Cyrus was leader of the third great empire to rule the world and to be used as God's instrument to chasten and awaken the Jews. These empires, successively, are the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the empire of Media-Persia. The Medes and Persians were united under Cyrus the Great, a Persian. These two nations enjoyed similar customs and religions and shared the throne until an insurrection caused the dethroning of the final Median king in 559 BC. Cyrus, in the course of only 12 years, conquered most of Asia and secured for the Persians 200 years of dominion as a world empire.

Cyrus, unlike the rulers of Assyria and Babylonia, permitted the nations under his kingdom to return to their homelands, to rebuild their towns, and to restore their religions. This apparent kindness was in keeping with Cyrus' policy to conciliate captive peoples and their religions, as described in the Cyrus scroll (Ezra 6:2). What astounds us about the king's decree is how specifically he was fulfilling God's plan as described two centuries earlier by the prophets (Isaiah 44:25-28; 45:1, 5; Jeremiah 25:12). Not only did God foretell the timing of this release from captivity, but God even mentioned king Cyrus by name!

The first remnant to return to Jerusalem numbered approximately 50,000. Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, was their leader. We see in 1 Chronicles 3 that Zerubbabel was of the generation born in captivity (1 Chronicles 3:17-19). The name *Zerubbabel* means "descended of Baby-



Watch Amazing Journey Video  
"Oh, That Detail"

So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.

Ezra 6:21

lon.” Zerubbabel would be a leader who could relate to the people because, like Christ, he lived among them and was one of them. And yet, like our Lord, Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David...the great-grandson of king Jehoiachin (2 Kings 14:8-16). In the book of Ezra, Zerubbabel is also called *The Tirshatha* (Ezra 2:63), a Persian title meaning “governor.” Indeed, he was appointed as governor over the returning Jewish remnant. He is also given the name “Sheshbazzar” (Ezra 1:8, 11; 5:14-16), which was his Babylonian (Chaldan) name.

More significant than his name was Zerubbabel's mission. He led the people out of Babylon and into Jerusalem. There, amidst much opposition, God's people would rebuild the altar and the Temple of God. The first and greatest challenge, however, would be for the people to be willing to separate themselves. More than a generation had passed in the land of exile. Persia was no longer to them a foreign land as it had been to their parents, but it was their home. Life here was tolerable, if not comfortable. Separation from this world would be difficult. To caravan 700 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem (a five-month trip) would be grueling. To arrive amid desolation and to rebuild would be more than they were willing to endure.

God's people forgot the obligations of their covenant with God. They were not willing to separate themselves from the comforts of the world. Only a remnant returned to the land of promise. Less than 50,000 of a great multitude would have the privilege of laying the foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:1-13), standing against opposition (Ezra 4:1-24), completing the Temple, and celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1-6:22). Between the departure from Babylon in 536 BC to the completion of the Temple in 515 BC, it was only those who were willing to separate themselves who would join in the final celebration (Ezra 6:19-22).

### The Return to Revive (Ezra 7-10)

If Zerubbabel was God's instrument to restore the Temple, Ezra was the leader appointed to restore the people. Between chapters 6 and 7, a period of 58 years silently passed. Those who had remained in the land of Persia during this time were nearly crushed and annihilated, as described in the book of Esther. Those who lived in Jerusalem became sadly compromised.

With the blessing of king Artaxerxes, a godly priest named Ezra (meaning “help”) led less than 2,000 Jews back to Jerusalem. Ezra was a lineal descendant of Israel's original high priest, Aaron. He was a scribe (teacher), an expert instructor in the Word of God (Ezra 7:6). Jewish tradition assigns Ezra the highest of honors. He is claimed to be the founder and president of the “Great Synagogue,” a council of 120 teachers who together were instrumental in forming the system of local synagogues. Further, this council is said to have compiled the Old Testament “canon” (rule or final standard) in its three-fold arrangement of Law, Prophets, and Writings. Of these traditions we cannot be certain. But the reputation for Ezra as a man of the Word is made clear in the Biblical text, “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” (Ezra 7:10).

When Ezra and his small band of the faithful arrived in Jerusalem, they soon discovered that over the course of time the settled remnant had fallen into sin. Despite the repeated commandments of God to not intermarry with Canaanite women, the Jews took women of the land for their wives (Ezra 9:1-4). The leaders among the people were the worst offenders. Ezra fell before

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.

Ezra 7:10

the Lord in desperate confession (Ezra 9:5-15). The people, seeing the contrition of this godly leader, were pierced to the heart. They soon gathered around him in repentance and promised to separate themselves unto God. The stirring account of this revival is detailed in Ezra 10:1-44. It stands as a reminder to us of the need to be sanctified, separated from the world, and set apart as the people of God.

### **Final Thought**

Under Zerubbabel's leadership, all willing Jews were separated from the world of Persia and set apart to do the work of God. Under Ezra's leadership, all willing Jews were separated from foreign wives and set apart to be the people of God. Today, under Jesus Christ's leadership, all willing believers are separated from the world of darkness to walk in the light of life. Christians are called to separate themselves from any compromise, even those found within the structures and traditions of the Church, so that they might live wholly for God. We read in 2 Corinthians 6:17 that we are called to "be separate." This applies not just to marriage ("Do not be bound with unbelievers" —2 Corinthians 6:14), but to every aspect of our lives. For it is God's will that we be "sanctified" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). That big word means to be separated from the ways of the world and to be separated unto the purposes of God.

### **Spending Time With God**

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### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Ezra 1:1 and compare with Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10. Jeremiah's ministry began during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC) and continued through the reign of Zedekiah (597-586 BC). His prophetic announcement regarding the return of a remnant to Jerusalem was thus fulfilled long after his ministry was concluded (538 BC). How does that apply to your life today?

2. Read Daniel 9:2-3. Contemplate how Daniel, one of the exiles, struggled as he awaited the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

3. Do you take Biblical prophecy as seriously today?

Do you think you should be more serious about the study and understanding of prophetic teaching (Revelation 1:3)? Explain.

4. Read Ezra 1:2-6. Note how God moved the kings' heart (Ezra 1:2-4), and how God moved the people's hearts (Ezra 1:5), and how God even moved their neighbor's hearts (Ezra 1:6). Can you think of other Biblical stories to support the notion that "when God wants to move, He moves"?

5. Read Ezra 2:1-70. How does this writing remind you of the book of Chronicles? Why is this list an important part of the historical record?

6. What is the focus of Ezra 3? What would be the parallel concern for our lives today? Pray that God would move your heart and the hearts of His people to be so willing to sacrifice for God's kingdom.



### Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Review the context of Ezra (questions 1-5). Read Ezra 3:1-6. Why was the altar of great importance?

9. Ezra 3:7-13 describes the laying of the foundation for the Temple. Notice the emotional reactions of the people as the work was completed (Ezra 3:11-13). Why so much emotion? Why the mixed reactions?

Why do you think the Jews feared those around them (Ezra 3:3)?

10. See Ezra 4:1-24. Summarize what happened here. Does persecution usually stop or strengthen the work of God? Can you give examples from the world today or from history to support your answer?

8. The Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the seventh month (Ezra 3: 1). What do you know about that feast (see Leviticus 23:33-36)?

11. Read Ezra 5:1 and Haggai 1:1-4. Note the message of Haggai and the effect it had on the people. Give examples of a time(s) when preaching, or an exhortation from a person, or from Scripture, motivated you to get going for God.



12. In what ways do you need to get moving for God today? How does the Church need to be motivated in God's work? Pray as a group for God's Spirit to stir us into action for the sake of God's kingdom.

15. From Ezra 10:1, how were the people further moved by Ezra's contrition?

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. What insights or questions from the book of Ezra would you like to pursue further in discussion or study?

16. Describe the reforms that occurred in Ezra 10:2-44. Pray for God to affect leaders of the Church today that we too might experience reformation.

14. Read Ezra 9:1-15. What was Ezra's main concern here?

Why was this important? Note Ezra's personal repentance and grief, and how the people were moved by his example.

#### Scripture for Meditation

If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14



...on this rock I will build  
My church, and the gates  
of Hades  
will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18

### Introduction

The book of Nehemiah opens with the sad news that the city of Jerusalem remained a city without walls. It had been about 90 years after the first relay of people arrived in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel to rebuild the altar and Temple. Then some 30 years later, a second group of returnees arrived in Jerusalem with Ezra. Yet after all this time, there were still no protective boundaries around God's city. At this time in history, it was both dangerous and dumb to keep valuables in a town without walls. There was no other conventional way to keep the goods inside and the thieves outside. Yet, after nearly a century, the priceless Temple ornamentation and furnishings (composed of gold, silver, and other precious materials) were apparently still intact—but not without trouble (Nehemiah 1:3). In the book of Nehemiah, we learn about the third migration from Persia to Jerusalem—this time led by Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king. In the first half of the book, Nehemiah leads God's people to rebuild the walls of the city. In the second half, Nehemiah guides the people within those walls to rebuild their spirituality. We can outline the story of Nehemiah by its chapters:

#### Rebuilding the Walls (Nehemiah 1-6)

Chapter 1:	Nehemiah Prays about the Walls
Chapter 2:	Nehemiah Inspects the Walls
Chapter 3:	Builders of the Walls
Chapter 4:	Opposition Outside the Walls
Chapter 5:	Conflict Inside the Walls
Chapter 6:	Completion of the Walls

#### Rebuilding the People (Nehemiah 7-13)

Chapter 7:	The People Listed
Chapter 8:	The People Hear God's Word
Chapter 9:	The People Confess Their Sins
Chapter 10:	The People Make a Covenant
Chapter 11:	The People Regroup
Chapter 12:	The People Dedicate the Walls
Chapter 13:	The People's Final Reformation

We can also outline the book thematically with a variety of approaches. In this lesson, we choose to approach the book with an eye on the New Testament analogy of Christ and the Church. Nehemiah leads the people to build the walls, each using their abilities, each standing against opposition, all working together...this is a wonderful picture of who we are as the Church under Christ's leadership (Nehemiah 1-6). With the walls completed, however, the people were not to sit back and rest. Their challenge was to hear God's Word, to confess their sins, to choose God's way, to bring others into their midst, and to continue the process of reformation until the end (Nehemiah 7-13). Let us now consider *His Church and Our Challenge*.

### His Church (Nehemiah 1-6)

Nehemiah presents to us a wonderful picture of Christ Jesus. At first appearance to the western reader, Nehemiah's position as cupbearer to the king appears rather insignificant (Nehemiah 1:11). This title, however, was assigned to one of the most honorable and influential positions



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Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

Nehemiah 2:17

before the king. Nehemiah would willingly put aside all the privileges and comforts of the great Persian empire, the ruling world force, to live with and guide the humble and simple people of God in Jerusalem. Likewise, Christ descended from the heights of glory to become our Savior. Nehemiah was given full protection and provision for his mission by King Artaxerxes, the same king who sent Ezra on his mission three decades prior. In the same manner, Christ was provided angelic protection and heavenly provision for His journey from the kingdom of heaven to earth, where He would build His Church.

Nehemiah had an Ezra to prepare the way before Him, in much the same way that Christ was preceded by John the Baptist. Before Nehemiah launched his plan, he first examined the walls by night (Nehemiah 2:15). Similarly, before our Lord raised the Church, He experienced His own dark night—being crucified on our behalf and bearing the punishment of sin for our salvation. When Nehemiah called the people to rebuild, he expected all to work, each according to their ability, each where they lived (Nehemiah 3:1-32). When Jesus built His Church, His method was to equip each one of the saints with spiritual gifts and to lead each of us to serve God by working together, each in the context of our own gifts, calling, and location (1 Corinthians 12:1-31).

Nehemiah and the people faced serious opposition to their task as did the early Church when she faced severe persecution (compare Nehemiah 4:1-23 with Acts 8:1). The Jews in Nehemiah's time needed to care for their poor as did the Christians under their Christ (Nehemiah 5:1-19; Acts 6:1-7). But whether opposition came from without or conflict arose from within, the work of God would be accomplished according to the plan of God (Nehemiah 6:15-19; Acts 1:8; Matthew 16:18). It took approximately 50 days for the people to complete the wall, under Nehemiah's leadership. It was on Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection, that the Church was birthed, under Christ's Lordship. May we never forget leaders, like Nehemiah, who led God's people to rebuild the ancient city of Jerusalem. Let us always remember that the ultimate fulfillment of their example is Christ Himself, who is still building His Church, of which we are part today.

### Your Challenge (Nehemiah 7-13)

It took only 52 days to build the walls, but it would be 12 years before the walls were dedicated, with great celebration. Beginning in Nehemiah 7, we find description of a task more important than building the walls of the city—God's work was not yet finished in the hearts and lives of the people. So it is today. The glorious Church, the Bride of Christ, has been established. But the purification and preparation of the Bride for the final and great celebration before God are still in process. When God calls us to Himself, He loves us as we are. However, God is not content that we remain in spiritual infancy. With loving care, the Good Shepherd leads us through dark valleys and into green pastures (Psalm 23). He calls us by name, and cares for each of us as though we were His only child (John 10:1-14). This divine love for each individual is highlighted in Nehemiah 7 where the exiles are listed by name.

Central to the work of God in our lives is the Word of God. In Nehemiah 8, the Jews are stirred to seek their God after hearing an extended reading of the Scriptures by Ezra. As a result, they gather as one to confess their sins to God (Nehemiah 9) and to make a new covenant with God (Nehemiah 10). Today the Temple is composed of living stones, the gathered saints of God. Nev-

As you come to Him, the Living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

ertheless, the centrality of God's Word in worship, the need to confess our sins for salvation and cleansing, and to dedicate ourselves to God for service...these things remain keystones in the corporate worship of God's people. If Scripture, repentance, and dedication to God are laid as a foundation, then we are well established for building and growth.

In Nehemiah 11, a tithe of the people was moved from outside the city to inside the walls, giving strength to the city. Any healthy church carries the same vision. Christian congregations are not islands but lighthouses pouring out light on paths of entrance for the darkened world.

Nehemiah 13:6-7, read in context, makes clear that the grand celebration on the walls of Jerusalem (described in Nehemiah 12) did not occur until 12 years later, after Nehemiah's excursion back to Persia and home again. The dedication of the walls was crowned when two grand choirs marched triumphantly in opposite directions on top of and around the walls. "And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away" (Nehemiah 12:43).

### Final Thought

Like God's people in Nehemiah's day, we too can celebrate with great joy in the presence of God. Our Lord Jesus has returned to His heavenly kingdom for the time (as Nehemiah returned to Persia), but He will come back, and we will be gathered for a celebration unlike any other. For not only will the walls be complete, but the work of God to purify us will be brought to its conclusion. In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah led the people into a final reformation. The work of God's grace to cleanse and purify will be complete when we celebrate together in the New Jerusalem, the eternal city of God. With this day of rejoicing before us, let us work together daily to build up one another in our most holy faith as Jesus builds us into the temple of God. This is our challenge!

### Spending Time With God

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SERIES

REIGNING HEROES | ISRAEL'S HISTORY

LESSON 5

His Church, Your Challenge | Nehemiah

### Devotion (Personal Study)

Paul:

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-3. Describe the problem Nehemiah faced.

Jesus:

2. How did Nehemiah react to this problem (Nehemiah 1:4-11)?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very little and 10 being very high) how great is your passion for God's people? Write a prayer asking God to give you a heart like Nehemiah's for the Church.

Read the following references and briefly describe the passion for God's people (like Nehemiah's) shown by Moses (Exodus 32:31-32), Esther (Esther 4:15-16), Paul (Romans 9:1-3), and Jesus (Matthew 23:37).

Moses:

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. What insight or question from your personal study, or from the commentary this week would you like to discuss and explore further with the group?

Esther:



5. In Nehemiah 2:1-9, we see the beginning of the miraculous answers to prayer experienced by Nehemiah. What do you find most amazing about the way God moved mountains before Nehemiah?

8. In Nehemiah 3, the people worked together to build the walls, each doing his or her part. What do you believe your primary contribution is or can be in God's kingdom-building work today?

6. Jesus promised answers to our prayers (John 15:7) and challenges along the way (John 15:20). Early in Nehemiah's journey, the opposition began to mount (Nehemiah 2:10). What obstacles do you face today in your effort to obey God?

9. Skim Nehemiah 4-6 and take note of qualities in Nehemiah's life that enabled the miraculous rebuilding of the city's walls in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Which of these qualities do you wish to emulate in your own life, family, and ministry?

7. From Nehemiah 2:11-20, what wise principles can we draw from Nehemiah's approach to his huge task?

Why?

### **Digging Deeper (Further Study)**

10. Describe the spiritual renewal that occurred in Nehemiah 8 as the people were instructed through God's Word.



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What inspires you most about this account?

13. What truths have you learned from the book of Nehemiah?

11. Nehemiah 9-12 describe the confessions and promises of the people. Yet after Nehemiah left the city to fulfill his duties to the king, the people's behavior lapsed (Nehemiah 13; note v.6). Once again, the people were called to obedience. What can we learn from this account?

Pray as a group for God to enable you to embrace and obey the truths you have learned.

12. Complete this thought: "The primary insight I wish to remember from the book of Nehemiah is ..."

Scripture for Meditation

Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Nehemiah 8:10c



The King loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight...

so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen.

Esther 2:17 ESV

### Introduction

This story has all of the elements of a good fairytale: a beautiful but poor girl, a powerful king, an evil schemer, a protective guardian, certain death, and a happy ending. It even has a search for “who’s the fairest of them all?” The book of Esther is no frothy fable, though. It shows us the power of the hand of God on His people, even when they are in exile and under attack. It shows us the power of a praying people, relying on God when all hope seems lost. And it shows us that with courage, faith does win in the end.

One writer proclaimed that the Book of Esther is the one “most beloved and well known by the Jews.” It tells of the origins of the celebratory Feast of Purim, but more importantly, it tells of God’s protection in the midst of persecution. “It is a book that remains forever new because Jewish enemies will not allow it to grow old.”

One might wonder how Christians can relate to a book so specifically directed at the Jewish people. How are Christians supposed to read it? The sad news is that Christians are facing more persecution now than they have since the days of the early Church. The International Society for Human Rights reported recently that 80% of religious persecution in the world is now directed against Christians. Christians are fleeing countries in the Middle East in alarming numbers. The government of China has announced new crackdowns against house churches. Even in the US, we are seeing growing harassment of Christians, especially when we take a stand for God’s truth in a relativistic society.

When faced with these kinds of pressures, even dangers, how will we respond? Will we hide ourselves in our huddles and pews, or will we be willing to stand before the king and say, “If I perish, I perish,” trusting that God has called each one of us “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14-16)

### The Persian Exile

The story of Esther takes place during the exile of the Jews, under the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus (486-465 BC), also known by his Greek name, Xerxes. Xerxes’ reign followed that of Cyrus and Darius, the kings who permitted Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the Temple and walls in Jerusalem. Many exiles returned to Jerusalem with Ezra and Nehemiah under the reign of the Persians, but thousands of Jews remained scattered across the vast empire which stretched from India to Ethiopia. Different families had different reasons for not returning. Some were comfortable where they were and had established new lives for themselves; others were afraid to go back because Jerusalem remained an isolated and unprotected city.

The Persians would often invite the best of their conquered peoples into the king’s court, to draw from the wisest and strongest in the known world. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were four such examples, and in Esther, we meet her cousin Mordecai and his arch enemy, Haman.

The feud between Mordecai and Haman had ancient roots. Haman was an Amalakitite, the warring people who were the first to attack the Israelites when they escaped out of Egypt and



Watch Amazing Journey Video  
“The Power of United Prayer”

Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Jeremiah 29:7

later attacked Israel during the reign of King Saul. Mordecai's ancestor was Kish, the father of King Saul. Haman's direct ancestor was Agag, king of the Amalakites. 1 Samuel 15 tells the story of the prophet Samuel instructing Saul to destroy the Amalakites and all of their plunder. Saul killed most of the Amalakites as he had been told, but he “and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good” (1 Samuel 15:9). When Samuel returned and heard the bleating of sheep, he confronted Saul about his disregard of a direct order from the Lord. “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,” Samuel told Saul, “he has rejected you as king” (1 Samuel 15:23). That moment led to the downfall of Saul's kingdom and the rise of King David.

Now, hundreds of years later, descendants of Kish have a chance to obey the word of the Lord and complete the instructions given hundreds of years before.

### Help Wanted: Queen

In Chapter 1 of Esther, we meet King Xerxes and his queen, Vashti. The king was triumphant and proud of his splendor, and he decided to throw a banquet for everyone in the capital city of Susa. Wine flowed liberally, and on the seventh day of celebration, he decided he also wanted to show off his wife. He demanded that she come from the women's banquet into his party, but she refused. We do not know the exact reasons for her refusal. Perhaps he wanted her to appear “unveiled,” which was immodest for a queen to do. Perhaps she had gotten irritated at his drunken revelry. Whatever the reason, Xerxes was furious at her response. His advisors feared that this insolence would spread to other women, so they recommended that he replace her with a new queen – and issue an edict saying that all women must respect their husbands.

In Chapter 2, Esther is presented as a striking contrast to Vashti. She is young and beautiful, and, most importantly, submissive. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means “myrtle” – often a symbol of the Lord's mercy and forgiveness in Hebrew tradition (see Isaiah 55:13). Her Persian name means “star,” perhaps for the star-shaped flowers on a myrtle tree.

When she was brought into the harem, she immediately pleased Hegai, the head eunuch, and submitted to his guidance and advice. After the required full year of beauty treatments, Esther was ready. Although she could have chosen anything from the treasury to adorn herself, she chose nothing other than what Hegai suggested. With this air of humility and grace, she “won the favor of everyone who saw her,” including the king himself (Esther 2:15). He declared Esther his queen and called a for a great feast.

### The Plot Thickens

Mordecai had instructed Esther to keep their Jewish heritage secret, and that served them well, until Haman was promoted to a position of great power in the kingdom. All were supposed to bow before him, but Mordecai refused (reminiscent of the command to worship the golden statue of the king in Daniel 3). When Haman discovered that Mordecai was a Jew, he plotted to kill not only Mordecai but all of his people. He cast lots to determine the day of the

Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.

Esther 4:14b

annihilation and manipulated the king into signing it into law.

Suddenly the only hope for the Jewish people rested in the hands of Queen Esther. Mordecai told her she had to go before the king and beg for mercy. She sent a message back saying it was certain death to appear without being summoned. The king had already shown his willingness to get rid of a disobedient queen. Would he do it again?

Mordecai reminded her that she faced death already because of Haman's edict and told her, "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Sobered by his challenge, Esther asked Mordecai to bring the people together to fast and pray for three days, and then she would go before the king. Her faith was declared to her uncle and echoes still in our ears through the daring words, "And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:15).

### The Tables Turn

With God's protection, Esther was granted favor before the king. Then, like an unraveling yarn, all the schemes Haman had knit together fell apart. First, Mordecai received the great honor that Haman himself thought he would get. Then, after Esther revealed Haman's plot against the Jews, and against herself, Haman was executed on the very same gallows he had built for Mordecai.

By Persian law the king was unable to revoke his order for the Jews to be attacked, but instead he issued an edict allowing the Jews to defend themselves. The Jews triumphed over their enemies, and those days of triumph have been commemorated by the feast of Purim (which means "lots") ever since.

### Think About It

Esther's first response to the call for courage was to offer an excuse and try to take the easier path. As our culture grows more and more hostile to our faith, it is tempting to hide our heritage and "go along to get along." However, there may soon come a time when each of us has to decide—what is the true cost of discipleship? In a world of compromise, will we be bold enough to say, "If I perish, I perish"? Perhaps we too have been called for such a time as this.

### Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series "Reigning Heroes," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Esther 1 and 2. Describe one or two character traits of King Xerxes, based on his actions.

2. Why did the king's advisors believe it was important to discipline Queen Vashti for her disobedience?

3. After his experience with Vashti, what might the King have been looking for in a new queen?

4. In Esther 2:10, why might Mordecai have asked Esther to conceal her nationality and family background?

5. Have you ever felt caught up in circumstances beyond your control? If so, how did God guide you through the situation? Pray for the Lord's guidance now for any difficulties you currently face.

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. What insights did you draw from the personal study questions, or commentary reading which were especially encouraging or challenging for you?



SERIES

REIGNING HEROES | ISRAEL'S HISTORY

LESSON 6

His Time, Your Triumph | Esther

7. Describe someone you have seen demonstrate great courage.

10. Read Esther 3. When Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, he knew he was exposing himself to danger, and yet he had to (literally) take a stand. When should we support those in authority (like Jeremiah 29) and when should we stand against them?

What do you admire most about what they did or said?

8. As the culture changes around us, Christians need to demonstrate new courage to stand up for our faith. What issues do you think are especially difficult or challenging?

11. Read Esther 4. What is the choice that Mordecai gives Esther? How does she respond?

9. In Jeremiah 29:7, the Lord says, "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile." Mordecai does this by protecting the life of the king. Do you find this command challenging or easy? Explain.

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Discuss any insights from your small group discussion or personal study that were especially helpful for you.



13. It is striking that the author of Esther chooses not to mention God directly in this book, though his presence is everywhere. Describe two or three specific instances where you see God at work.

15. List specific areas you can pray for your family, your church, Christians in your country, and Christians around the world, so that they may have courage to stand up for their faith.

14. The Bible is full of stories of people standing up for what they believe. Some end triumphantly, like Esther. Stephen was one who had a different experience (see Acts 6 & 7). What are some of the similarities and differences between Esther and Stephen?

#### Scripture for Meditation

Go, gather together all the jews who are in Susa, and fast for me... i and my attendants 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.

Esther 4:16



## BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

### MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

### ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

## ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

**Group Size:** Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

**Group Leaders:** Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

## ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

## BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org).

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

## LEADING THE CLASS

### First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at [ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/](http://ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/).

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
  - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
  - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
  - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
    - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
    - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
    - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
  - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
    - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
    - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
    - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
  4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
  5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
    - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
    - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
  6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
    - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
    - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
  7. Dismissal

### Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
  - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
    - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
  2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
    - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
    - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
    - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
  3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
  4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
  5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
    - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
    - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
  6. Dismissal