



# Corinth Missionary Baptist Church

*"The City of Faith"*

813 South Cherokee Road  
Social Circle, Georgia 30025



Dr. Constance Davenport  
Christian Education Director

**WINTER – 2024/2025**

*December 2024 – February 2025*

**Min. Kim Jones**  
Sunday School Superintendent

**Sis. Ruth Parks**  
Asst. Sunday School Superintendent

**Bishop William Davenport**  
Senior Pastor

Credits:  
**Jesus Is All Ministries**

Lesson summaries by:  
Montario Fletcher, Veronica Jasper, Willie Ferrell, and Kimbley Y. Baker-Richardson

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<https://www.jesusisall.com/sunday-school.htm>

“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston





**CORINTH**  
**MISSIONARY**  
**BAPTIST**  
**CHURCH**  
**ADULT**  
**SUNDAY SCHOOL**  
**CLASS**



# ADULT

## WINTER 2024-2025 SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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*You can also follow the lesson by joining live each Sunday morning via our website:*

*<https://www.thecityoffaith.org/sundayschool>*



**Sunday, December 1, 2024**

## **Lesson 1 - "Called to Proclaim" (Part I)**

Lesson Text: **Luke 1:67-80**

Background Scripture: **Luke 1:57-80**

Devotional Reading: **Malachi 3:1-4**

### **Luke 1:67–80 67**

*67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; 70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; 73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. 76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. 80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.*

### **Lesson Aims**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List three elements of praise in "Zechariah's song."
2. Compare and contrast John's role as a "prophet of the Highest" with our responsibility to proclaim Christ.
3. Write a short song or poem of praise for the area of service that God has granted him or her.

### **Introduction**

Everyone delights in proclaiming good news. We share the joy of the young couple who announce the forthcoming birth of a child, the runner who displays his first-place trophy, or the woman who tells us her cancer tests were negative. We cannot conceal our pleasure when a grandchild has excelled in school, a recipe has turned out well, or a candidate we voted for has won.

We get special satisfaction in revealing good news after having to remain silent about it for some time. We enjoy paying tribute to a colleague at a surprise reception. We revel in the facial expressions of our children when we finally tell them we are going to their favorite vacation spot. We rejoice when we can tell our spouse of a long-anticipated promotion.

The content of this week's text is the joyous proclamation of a man who had long been forced to remain silent. Zacharias was a godly priest who in his old age had been singularly blessed with a divine promise of a son. Moreover, this son would have the unique ministry of preparing Israel for their Messiah and introducing Him to them.

## Lesson Background

A genuine prophet of the Old Testament could prove that he spoke for God by being able to predict accurately what would happen. If a self-proclaimed prophet tried to do this and his prediction did not come to pass, he was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 18:20–22). But God’s prophet also had the important task of proclaiming God’s call to repentance. In the writings of the Old Testament prophets, this call to righteous living comprises the majority of their content.

Thus, foretelling and forthtelling were the two tasks of the prophet. John the Baptist came as “the prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76). In his predictive, foretelling role, John’s main task was to proclaim a message of the coming of the Messiah. His message was that “one mightier than I cometh ... he shall baptize ... he will thoroughly purge” (Luke 3:16, 17).

In the forthtelling role, John proclaimed God’s call to repentance. Like the prophet Nathan rebuking King David (2 Samuel 12) or Elijah condemning King Ahab (1 Kings 21), John confronted King Herod (Matthew 14:4). Like many of the prophets of old, John was finally killed for proclaiming God’s truth to someone who did not want to hear it. Jesus said, “Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

Unlike the prophets before John, the Bible gives us a tantalizing glimpse of the beginning of his life. Just as the angel Gabriel had promised, Elisabeth gave birth to a son in her old age. The presentation of a newborn child was a community event. So, neighbors and relatives gathered in the rural village in the Judean hill country where John’s parents lived to rejoice and praise God for this blessing (Luke 1:57, 58).

### The Mercies of God (Luke 1:67-75)

#### 1. When did the ability to speak return to Zacharias? (v. 64)

In the previous lesson, “Called to Believe,” the angel Gabriel came to Zacharias and delivered the message that he would have a son who would prepare the way

for Jesus. Zacharias’ unbelief caused him to lose the ability to speak until the son was born. When the son was born and circumcised, the neighbors and relatives wanted to name the child after Zacharias, but Elizabeth, the mother, said that the son shall be named John. In verse 63, Zacharias was still speechless, but the neighbors and relatives wanted Zacharias to make the final call. Zacharias motions for a tablet, and wrote “His name is John” on the tablet.

Zachariah regains the power of speech as soon as he demonstrates his obedience. When his tongue is loosed, his first words are words of praise to God. All the gratitude and wonder that has been bottled up inside of him for nine months comes pouring out. Even after the people return to their homes, they can’t stop talking about this special child (Luke 1:65, 66, not in today’s text). Everyone who hears the story is amazed. What must the future hold for this child?

#### 2. What happened to Zacharias soon after he was able to speak? (v. 67)

It is worth noting that his temporary lapse of faith did not disqualify Zacharias from usefulness to God. He was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 67), just as Elisabeth had been earlier when Mary greeted her. The words he spoke thus prophesied of God’s dealings with His people. Notice that Zacharias said nothing about the blessings the Lord had bestowed on him and Elisabeth through John’s birth; he spoke only of messianic blessings on Israel.

#### 3. By what title did Zacharias address God in his song? (v. 68)

Zacharias uses the title “The Lord God of Israel” in his song, which is called the Benedictus, the Latin translation of the first word, “blessed.” The Greek word translated “blessed” means “praised” or “spoken well of” (cf. vs. 64). All that Zacharias spoke of in this song brought praise to God.

The title “The Lord God of Israel” was a direct reference to Yahweh, who had graciously chosen to be Israel’s God. Since Zacharias was a Jew, it was proper for him to reference God this way. Through Israel’s Messiah God would now show Himself to be the God of all mankind.

Also notice that Zacharias did not talk about being mute for nine months after he regained the ability to speak. He did not curse God for making him mute. He was not concerned with what God did to him because of his unbelief. He simply praised God for the salvation that He was about to give Israel (and ultimately for the rest of the world, too). We should take a lesson from Zacharias' response to God's chastisement.

**4. Praise of God is still appropriate for us 2,000 years later. What avenues do you have for praising God? What tends to prevent you from pouring out praise to Him? How do you overcome this?**

We often think of praise as a corporate activity on Sunday mornings. But we can and should praise God in the privacy of our thoughts as well. Praising God is a part of our purpose and privilege (1 Peter 2:9).

Even on bad days the redeemed have much to be thankful for. Mother Teresa has been attributed with saying, "In light of Heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on earth, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel." Jesus offers us abundant, eternal life. In light of this, our proper response is praise (Luke 19:37-40).

Differences in ways people offer praise sometimes create conflict. God cares more about the sincerity of our praise and worship than the style of its expression (Psalm 150; John 4:23, 24).

**5. To whom does "horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69) refer? Why is He called this?**

"Horn" was a common Old Testament term for strength, for the horns of an animal symbolized its strength (cf. Ps. 92:10). Here, the "horn of salvation" refers to the Messiah, whose strength would deliver Israel. Since the Messiah, Jesus, is God Himself, He has all strength, and therefore the "horn of salvation" symbolizes the assuredness that each Christian should have concerning his or her salvation.

**6. Quickly think of three things for which to praise God. What do these three things say about your view of what's most important?**

If "family" tops your list, perhaps you need to read Luke 9:61, 62; 14:26 (see Lesson 13). If some material possession is most important, read Luke 12:15-21. If personal comfort is a big deal to you, see Luke 9:58. Notice that "salvation" is high on Zechariah's list. It should be on ours as well.

*To be continued...*

*Lesson summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*







December 8, 2024

## Lesson 2 - "Called to Proclaim" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Luke 1:67-80**

Background Scripture: **Luke 1:57-80**

Devotional Reading: **Malachi 3:1-4**

### **Luke 1:67–80 67**

*67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;*

*70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;*

*73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, 74 That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. 76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*

*77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. 80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.*

### **Lesson Aims**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List three elements of praise in "Zechariah's song."
2. Compare and contrast John's role as a "prophet of the Highest" with our responsibility to proclaim Christ.
3. Write a short song or poem of praise for the area of service that God has granted him or her.

### **The Mercies of God (Luke 1:67-75) ...continued**

1. **Was the theme of the messianic deliverance of Israel new in Zacharias' day? (v. 70-71)?**

God's mercies to Israel had not just recently become known; they have been spoken "by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began." Since "world" can also be translated "age," we should take this phrase to mean "from long ago" or "from of old." The theme of Israel's deliverance by the Davidic Messiah can be found in many prophetic writings of the Old Testament (Isa. 11:1-12; Hos. 3:4-5).

2. **Why was the deliverance from enemies a major theme in Israel's thinking?**

The deliverance in Zacharias' mind was probably more physical than spiritual. Over the centuries, many people had come to hate Israel. At the beginning of the nation, the Egyptians hated them, and the pharaohs oppressed them. On their way to Canaan, they were ambushed by the Amalekites and snubbed by the Edomites. The Moabites tried to have them cursed, and the tribes of Canaan engaged them in battle.

Throughout history, the Jews had been opposed, harassed, and attacked by enemies on all sides. The Good News is that God kept Israel through all those times, and we see that God kept his promise to Abraham that Israel will always remain, even today.

3. **What was the nature of God's covenant with Abraham? (v. 73-74)**

Israel's deliverance was not only foretold by the prophets; it was embedded in the covenant promises

given to Israel's forefathers. Zacharias especially called attention to the oath that God swore to Israel's forefather, Abraham. The earliest record of God's promises to Abraham is Genesis 12:1-7. He promised him land, the posterity of a great nation, and a blessing to all the earth through him. He also included blessings on Abraham's friends and curses on his enemies.

The Lord solemnized His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:7-21, stressing his descendants' inheritance of the land of Canaan. But the oath Zacharias referred to in Luke 1:73 was no doubt God's reaffirmation of the covenant in Genesis 22:15-18, given after Abraham placed Isaac on the altar. The Lord said, "By myself have I sworn" (v. 16). He reassured Abraham that all the promises He had previously made were intact and would be fulfilled.

Included in these promises was the prophecy that Abraham's multiplying seed would "possess the gate of the enemies" (Gen. 22:17). Zacharias picked up the thought when he said "that he would grant unto us...[deliverance] out of the hand of our enemies" (Luke 1:74). Thus, a prominent theme throughout his song is that Israel was about to be "redeemed" (v. 68), "saved" (v. 71), and "delivered" (v. 74).

#### **4. What was God's purpose for Israel as a covenant people? (v. 74-75)**

Zacharias knew that God called Israel to reflect His glory to the rest of the world (cf. Deut. 26:18-19). So, he saw God bestowing His mercies so that they "might serve him without fear" (Luke 1:74). What better way for Israel to bear witness before the World than to enjoy His peace?

The purpose for Israel was to be a priestly nation to the rest of the world. In other words, Israel was to intercede with God on behalf of the world. Israel was to show the other nations how to live for God. Likewise, Christians should intercede on behalf of the world and be an example of how to live a godly life. It is important for all Christians to pray for the lost souls to receive Christ and to actively preach the message to these lost souls.

#### **The Mission of God's Covenant (Luke 1:76-80)**

#### **5. What was John the Baptist's task in relation to the Messiah? (v. 76-77)**

Zacharias addresses his baby telling him that he would be called "the prophet of the Highest." He would derive his significance from the One he proclaimed, who was "the Son of the Highest" (v. 32).

John's unique prophetic role lay in his mission to go before the Lord and prepare the way for Him. He would be the prophesied voice "that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Isa. 40:3). He would be the one of whom the Lord said, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3:1; cf. 4:5-6).

John's preparation was to "give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." In the final analysis, only Jesus could accomplish what was stated here. But John would have the privilege of calling attention to the need of salvation and to the One who can provide this salvation.

#### **6. How was Jesus' arrival on the earth like a sunrise? (v. 78)**

The salvation that the Jews (and everyone else) needed had come through the tender mercies of God. From His merciful heart had come the sunrise from heaven to visit them. This is a beautiful description of Jesus Christ that corresponds to Malachi's "Sun of righteousness...with healing in his wings" (4:2).

This heavenly sunrise would cast His light abroad "to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). The similarity of this statement to Isaiah 9:2, combined with Matthew's declaration of its fulfillment in Jesus' ministry (Matt. 4:13-16), suggests that Jesus' light would reach beyond the Jews to the Gentiles (cf. Luke 2:32).

Messiah's spiritual light would also "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). In their wanderings, human beings stray into conflicts with God and one another. Only the light of salvation can bring them into the path of peace (Rom 5:1; Eph. 2:14-18).

## **7. In what circumstances did John continue to grow to manhood? (v. 80)**

In verse 80, the verb tense describes his development as continual; he kept growing and becoming strong in spirit. He was developing physically and spiritual strength as he prepared for his unique ministry.

Much of this was done in solitude—in the desert away from normal society. This may have been due in part to the deaths of his elderly parents, but God used these circumstances to prepare him for the type of ministry he would have. John, like Elijah, would never be at home in the religious establishment, and it appears that God was protecting him from its evil influence.

### **Conclusion**

John's mother, Elisabeth, stood up against the pressure of popular opinion and insisted that what God said about naming the baby would be carried out. John's father, Zechariah, was faithful as well—once he had learned from nine months of silence. He joyfully proclaimed the praise of God and the salvation of God.

Following in his parents' footsteps, John was faithful to his own call to proclaim. To people who trusted their own goodness and ancestry to save them, John proclaimed repentance. To a nation largely unaware that they sat in darkness, John proclaimed the coming of the Lord. He was the prophet—the spokesman—for God. We can learn from the example of the godly family of today's lesson. God has called His people to proclaim. Let us be faithful to that call.

### **Prayer**

Our Father, we praise You for Your tender mercy. We thank You for the remission of our sins. Loosen the self-imposed silence of our tongues so we can be bold to proclaim Your wonders. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Thought to Remember**

John was called to proclaim. So are we.

## **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson (Luke 2:1-20)**

We have waited another whole year for the Christmas season to arrive. We enjoy hearing the traditional account of the coming of God in human flesh in the town of Bethlehem, David's ancestral city. That community is now surrounded by enemies, and we should pray for its people. Let the arrival of the Babe remind us of the coming arrival of the King. Meanwhile, we can promote His cause to the world.

*Lesson summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

NOTES:

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Sunday, December 15, 2024

## Lesson 3 - "Called to Rejoice" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Luke 2:1-14**

Devotional Reading: **Luke 2:1-20**

Background Scripture: **Psalm 96:1-6**

### **LUKE 2:1-14**

*1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rejoicing in the fallen world can sometimes seem difficult to do. In spite of Paul's exhortation to "rejoice evermore" (1 Thessalonians 5:16), we are troubled because we know things are not as they should be. Natural calamities continue to exact their toll. World peace eludes politicians as national, ethnic, and religious rivalries threaten to erupt into violence. Much of humanity lives in poverty or under oppression. We are saddened to see death stalking city streets and corruption defiling political offices.

We grieve that false faiths are leading gullible souls astray while precious biblical truths are maligned.

Even the atmosphere surrounding Christmas brings distress. We find ourselves sucked into a whirlwind of commercial madness, battling crowds and scrambling to mail our gifts on time. In spite of our best intentions, Jesus is crowded out by sheer busyness. How can we rejoice? Let us hear the angel's message anew and rejoice with the shepherds.

### **Today's Aim**

- **Facts:** to focus on the arrival of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, and the adoration of local shepherds.
- **Principle:** to show that the incarnation of the Son of God had both humble human and exalted divine elements.
- **Application:** to convince people that Jesus "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

### **Royal Decree (Luke 2:1-3)**

1. **What did the decree from Augustus require his subjects to do? (v. 1)**

Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavius, founded the Roman Empire and was the grandnephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar. Having defeated Mark Antony, his rival, he reorganized the government and ushered in an unprecedented period of peace (the Pax Romana).

In this week's lesson, he is seen issuing a decree "that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1). "The world", of course, was not the entire earth but the

Roman Empire. The word translated “taxed” means the people enrolled or registered for purposes of taxation. This was the method used to number each nation by family and tribe. We, today, know this method as a “census”. A census is defined as an official count of population and recording of economic status, age, gender, etc.

## **2. Why did Joseph have to travel to Bethlehem? (v. 3)**

According to the decree, the people had to be taxed in their own city (the city from whence they originated from/the home city of their ancestors – to be registered). This was not the usual Roman practice, which had persons register at their place of residence. But registering in one’s ancestral city was not unknown to the Romans, and they may have allowed it here to keep peace with the Jews. The Romans had learned that it was wise not to antagonize their subjects.

Since Joseph originated from Bethlehem, he and his espoused wife, Mary returned there for taxation. However, we know these decisions, made at the highest levels of government, were ultimately directed by an even higher authority.

### **Humble Birth (Luke 2:4–7)**

## **3. From God’s point of view, why was it important that Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem? (vs. 4-5)**

Although, the decision to be taxed was made under the authority of Caesar Augustus, it was orchestrated at an even higher power; the power of God. God used this census (taxation) to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and there fulfill His prophecy regarding the place of the Messiah’s birth foretold by the Prophet Micah. (Micah 5:2) – “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me, the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

In obedience to the decree, Joseph left his residence in Nazareth and, with Mary, headed for Bethlehem. The journey was eighty to ninety miles long. Luke emphasized the connection between Joseph and the

line of David. Joseph was registered in David’s city because he was of that lineage.

To refer to Bethlehem as “the city of David” (Luke 2:4) is unusual, for in the Old Testament this term always spoke of Jerusalem, or the original fort of Zion there (cf. II Sam. 5:7, 9; I Kings 8:1). Nevertheless, Bethlehem was David’s original home (1 Sam. 16:1; 17:12); so it deserved to be recognized as the appropriate place for his descendants to register. It was also the right place for the Messiah, the Son of David, to be born.

As mentioned earlier, Mary accompanied Joseph along this journey however, it is not clear why. Perhaps she was required to go because she too was a descendant of David. It is more likely it was for personal reasons, for she was expecting a child. Knowing that the time of her delivery was near, Joseph would not have wanted her to give birth in Nazareth in his absence. Furthermore, they both may have remembered that since this child was the Messiah, He was to be born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy (Mic. 5:2).

## **4. Without over spiritualizing things, when have you noticed God working through the “mundane” events in life? How can we get better at noticing His work around us?**

Taxes, travel, accommodation hassles. As God’s amazing intervention into history unfolds, the miraculous is hidden within the mundane. Elizabeth Barrett Browning had the right idea when she wrote, Earth’s crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
And only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

What was true in Browning’s day (over 100 years ago) is no less true today: alert eyes are needed to acknowledge God’s work around us. The first step in doing this is to pause and actually look (see Psalm 19).

**5. Why was it important that Jesus be called Mary's firstborn son? (vs. 6-7)**

While still in Bethlehem, the time had arrived for the birth of the Messiah. Luke does not give any indication of how long the couple had been in Bethlehem when this occurred – it merely states that “while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.” Luke referred to Jesus as Mary’s “firstborn son” (Luke 2:7; cf. v. 23). It was important to establish that He enjoyed all the rights of the firstborn in the family, including the royal rights in the Davidic line. It may also hint at the fact that Mary would later have other children (cf. 8:19-20).

**6. What paradox exists between the city of Jesus' birth and the immediate circumstances of it? (vs. 7)**

In verse 7, we are given the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. After Jesus was born, Mary wrapped Him in “swaddling clothes”, strips of cloth wrapped around the child to keep the limbs straight. She also “laid him in a manger,” a feeding trough for animals. These would later be the signs given to the shepherds for identifying the Messiah (v. 12).

Since Mary is said to have done these things, we get the impression that she had no assistance in her hour of need. Although no stable is mentioned in the text, the presence of a manger suggests that Jesus was born in a place that housed animals. This is reinforced by the comment that this occurred because there was no room for them in the inn. Our modern stereotype of an inn with an innkeeper may be inaccurate, since the word used is not the usual one for an inn. It refers, rather, to any lodging place, be it a guest room in a house or a public shelter. (It is translated “guest chamber” in Luke 22:1). In any case, no lodging place was available, and Jesus was born among the animals.

Even with Luke's unadorned narrative, which merely records the facts, we cannot miss a great paradox. Though the Messiah was born in the royal city, His surroundings were anything but regal. We are impressed with His humility in coming into such circumstances.

**7. Jesus set aside great power and majesty to become human. What are some ways we can set aside our own personal power or influence? Under what circumstances should we do so?**

We may be tempted to say that we have no power to give up. But all of us have some level of influence. We exercise that influence, in bad or good ways, through whatever power of persuasion, money, talent, or position we have.

Sometimes we use our power to “make sure” that we get the credit that we think is due to us, to get our own way, or to put someone in his or her place. All these circumstances are prime candidates for deciding not to do what we have the power to do! Jesus modeled humility for us.

On the other hand, it is wrong to have a talent or spiritual gift and pretend not to have it. That's false humility, used sometimes to avoid certain areas of Christian service.

*To be continued...*

*Lesson summarized by Veronica Jasper  
Jesus Is All Ministries*







Sunday, December 22, 2024

## Lesson 4 - "Called to Rejoice" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Luke 2:1-14**

Devotional Reading: **Luke 2:1-20**

Background Scripture: **Psalms 96:1-6**

### **Luke 2:1-14**

*1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)* 5 *To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

*8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

*11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

### **Today's Aim**

- **Facts:** to focus on the arrival of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, and the adoration of local shepherds.

- **Principle:** to show that the incarnation of the Son of God had both humble human and exalted divine elements.
- **Application:** to convince people that Jesus "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

### **Angelic Announcement (Luke 2:8–12)**

#### **8. Why is it significant that shepherds were the first to hear of Jesus' birth? (vs. 8-9)**

The scene now to the nearby fields, where shepherds were "keeping watch over their flock by night." But although the scene has changed, the circumstances have not, for shepherds were among the humble and lowly of Jewish society. It was again to ordinary people that God brought His message of salvation (cf. 1:5, 26).

Although common people are not automatically godly, their lives are often less cumbered with things that could be obstacles to faith (cf. Matt. 19:16-26; Jas. 2:1-7; 5:1-6). While they are often despised by the wealthy and learned, common folk tend to be more receptive to God's revelation when they encounter it.

As these shepherds were engaged in their nightly routine, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and "the glory of the Lord shone round about them" (Luke 2:9). This is the glory of God's presence (the Shekinah) variously manifested in the Old Testament.

It had appeared to Moses in the burning bush, to Israel in the pillar of fire, and to the worshipers in the tabernacle and temple. This glory had not been seen since it departed from the temple in

Ezekiel's day. Now, after several centuries, it reappeared, this time to humble shepherds!

The combination of the angel and the divine glory terrified the shepherds. Their fear was like that of Zacharias when he saw Gabriel (Luke 1:12) and of the three disciples at Jesus' transfiguration (9:34). This was a normal human reaction to a display of divine glory.

### **9. Why was Jesus called Saviour, Christ, and Lord? (v. 11)**

The angel began his announcement by calming the shepherds' fear (v. 10). The fear was understandable, but it had to be overcome if they were to understand and appreciate God's good news. This angel has a wonderful message indeed. First, the angel quickly offers the shepherds reassuring words: Fear not. Then comes the threefold message: good tidings ... great joy ... all people. The birth of this child is indeed "good news," the beginning of the gospel. He will bring the world the joy of salvation. Note that this salvation will be available not just to those of Israel, but to everyone.

The combination of the titles "Saviour," "Christ," and "Lord", is found in few places in the New Testament. As Saviour, Jesus came as the Deliverer of His people, both physically and spiritually (Luke 1:69-77; cf. Matt. 1:21). He was fully capable of doing this because He was the Christ, or Messiah, and also the divine Lord. It is noteworthy that the word Luke used for "Lord" is used in the Greek Old Testament about 6,150 times to translate "Yahweh" (Bock).

### **10. How would the shepherds know they had found the Messiah? (v. 12)**

In verse 12, Luke had written, there would be a sign given unto them (the shepherds) and the sign would be they would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. In light of the heavenly fanfare, one might expect to find Him in a palace. But the feeding trough, with its rustic surroundings, would better fit His mission to mankind. He would identify with the lowly (1:50-53). No one was beneath the reach of His grace.

## **Divine Praise (Luke 2:13, 14)**

### **11. What did the angels proclaim for heaven and earth? (vs. 13-14)**

During vs. 13-14, the angels were accompanied by a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. The angels praised God for the unique accomplishment of His power and grace. They ascribed glory to God in the highest. "Highest" can mean "to the highest degree" or "in the highest place." The second is more likely, since it is parallel to peace on earth. Thus, the angels saw God receiving the highest praise from the heavenly hosts themselves.

While heaven rang with God's praise, there was "on earth peace" (Luke 2:14). The Messiah would make possible a harmonious bond between God and man. "Good will toward men" could also be translated "to those on whom His favor rests" or "to those of His good pleasure." This is a designation of who will receive His peace. The peace Jesus provides brings benefits only to those who receive Him by faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **A. With Him on Earth**

With their words ringing in the ears of the shepherds, the angels departed and returned to Heaven. No heavenly messenger had ever proclaimed such a glad message. To the world had been born a Savior, Christ the Lord. We should join the humble shepherds in their excitement and amazement. This is a message that calls everyone to rejoice.

The message of the birth in Bethlehem is far more than the mere sweetness of a baby. The real message of Christmas is the coming of the Son of God to live (and give] His life as the Son of Man. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This is the miracle of the incarnation.

Jesus came to have an intimate participation in our world. He came as a baby, helplessly swaddled in tight strips of cloth. He came as a human to face hunger and thirst, temptation and persecution. He wept real tears: He bled real blood; He died a real death on the cross; He gained a real resurrection.

In all this, “he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus knew what it was to be a man. He came to earth to be Immanuel — “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

### **B. With Him in Heaven**

Jesus came to live with us on earth so that one day we can live with God in Heaven. His encounter with humanity makes possible our encounter with God in the future. Revelation 21:3 foretells the day when, “He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

Because of the messages of Christmas and Easter, we can look forward to the day when we shall join the angel’s praise: “Glory to God in the highest.” Christmas calls us to rejoice in the coming of our Savior. Christmas calls us to rejoice in the gift of God’s grace.

### **PRAYER**

Father, we praise You for sending Your Son to bring us salvation. May our hearts rejoice as we hear again the good news. As Jesus came to dwell among us, we long for the day when we shall dwell with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

The gospel is still good news of great joy for all people.

### **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Study Daniel 6:4-26, “Faith Without Compromise”, in anticipation of next week’s lesson.

*Lesson summarized by Veronica Jasper  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, December 29, 2023

## Lesson 5 - "Faith Without Compromise"

Lesson Text: **Daniel 6:4–7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26**

Background Scripture: **Daniel 6**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 119:57–64**

### **Daniel 6:4–7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26**

*4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. 6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live forever. 7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. . . . . 10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. . . . . 16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. . . . . 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. . . . . 21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. 22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. . . . . 25 Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 26 I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.*

### **Today's Aim**

- **Facts:** to show how God took care of Daniel despite Darius's decree that only he, the king, could be prayed to for a month.
- **Principle:** to realize that a believer should never set aside the right and the responsibility to pray to the Lord.
- **Application:** to encourage believers to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17).

### **Lesson Background**

In Daniel 5 we learn that there has been a regime change. The Babylonian Empire, which carried many Jews into exile, has come to an end. The famous handwriting on the wall of Daniel 5:25–28 predicted that collapse. The year was about 539 BC. With this change in regime came a new foreign policy. The Persians believed in sending exiled people home and helping them reestablish their old ways of life. That included religious practices and local governance. As long as those being resettled maintained the peace and paid regular tribute to the Persians, they could govern themselves somewhat independently.

Not all Jews accepted this invitation to go home. Daniel apparently was among these. In fact, Daniel seemed to be prospering even more under Persian rule. We learn in Daniel 6:1–3 that Daniel proved superior to all others as Darius the Mede began appointing local rulers. Daniel was on the verge of becoming second-in-command. However, the local rulers felt threatened by the prospect of Daniel's promotion (Daniel 6:1–3). So they sought to do away with him.

## **Officials Trap Daniel (Daniel 6:4–7)**

### **1. Who was involved in King Darius's administration, and who was in the top position (Daniel 6:4)?**

The administration of King Darius consisted of 120 princes who served under three presidents (vs. 1-2). Daniel became the chief president because "an excellent spirit was in him" (v. 3). He evidently was known for his integrity and honesty, as well as the special gifts that had become known in earlier administrations.

When the other leaders saw that Daniel was preferred over them, they developed a spirit of jealousy that caused them to determine to find a way to discredit him in the eyes of the king. Since these leaders were in place to ensure that the king would suffer no loss or injury, we know that they were involved in economic issues. When efforts were made to find a flaw in Daniel's work, it was soon discovered that there were no weaknesses there. He was completely honest and aboveboard in his handling of the king's affairs.

### **2. What means did Daniel's enemies decide they would have to use in order to get him removed (v. 5)?**

Daniel's reputation was so good that his enemies could find no fault in his faithful service to the king. What a compliment! However, these men know that Daniel will not compromise when it comes to faith. His weak spot (to their way of thinking) is not pride, power, or prosperity, but devotion to God's laws (v. 5). This chapter offers a picture of laws at battle. Whose law is final, God's or Persia's?

An important question for us to ask is how Daniel earned such a reputation to this point. What personal practices send such a clear message about his priorities? What patterns of speech communicate his single-minded commitment? Could people say the same thing about us that Daniel's enemies say about him? If not, why not?

### **3. What petition did they present to the king, and what did they suggest in case of disobedience (vs. 6,7)?**

Notice that these men do not appoint a representative to advocate their case before the king. Instead, they join together to flex their numerical muscle. After the obligatory salute to the king's health and immortality, they told Darius that all the presidents, princes, counselors, and captains of the nation had consulted together and come up with a proposal that they deemed should be a royal statute. This, of course, was not a true statement, because Daniel had not been included in the decision. The decree they requested was that no person in the kingdom should ask any petition of any god or man for thirty days—only the king was to be petitioned (or prayed to).

The accompanying punishment to this decree was that if anyone ignored it, that person would be thrown to the lions. If Darius established this decree and signed it into law, it would be unchangeable (Dan. 6:8), because the Medo-Persian kings did not have the same arbitrary authority that the Babylonian kings had enjoyed. Once Darius put his signature on the decree, even he himself could not rescind any aspect of it. Surely as he signed the decree (v. 9), Daniel's enemies traded gleeful glances with one another.

## **Daniel Remains Faithful (Daniel 6:10)**

### **4. What was Daniel's response to the king's decree (Daniel 6:10)?**

Daniel can protect himself in various ways. One possible strategy is secrecy. He can shut his windows and pray privately. Or he can leave his windows open, but alter his posture so others will not be able to tell he is praying (example: praying silently in bed at night). A third potential strategy is simple abstinence from prayer for the 30 days. Yet another potential strategy is political change. Daniel can use his favor with Darius to expose the agenda of the officials and undermine the law (as in Esther 8:5–8) they have forced into effect. Daniel resists this temptation as well. *Instead of viewing persecution as an ill to be avoided, he sees it as an opportunity for witness.*

So Daniel goes home, and as was his custom, he knelt down before the open windows and prayed three times. As he always did, he offered praise to God, giving Him thanks. This reveals to us the perfect peace Daniel had in his heart, in spite of the fact that his life might now be in danger. He remained deeply grateful to God.

**5. When did the king realize what had been done by Daniel's enemies, and how did he feel about it (v. 16)?**

Now the king was in a terrible dilemma, because he knew Daniel was a man of integrity and could be fully trusted with the affairs of his kingdom. He was exceedingly unhappy with himself when he realized he had been tricked. He determined that he must find some way to save Daniel from being thrown to the lions. But although Darius spent the rest of the day seeking some way, he found none. Upon the renewed insistence of Daniel's enemies, he was forced to have him arrested and thrown to the lions.

**6. What did Daniel's deliverance prove about him to the king (v. 21)?**

We can only imagine the relief Darius felt when he heard Daniel reply, "O king, live for ever" (v. 21). Once again God is the source of deliverance. Previously, God had sent an angel to protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:25). Now we see that God also sent an angel to protect Daniel by shutting the lions' mouths (compare Psalm 91:9-13; Hebrews 1:14). In so doing, God affirms Daniel's innocence. And in his innocence, Daniel can truly claim to have done the king no harm. It can never be said of God's people that they are doing what is wrong toward others when they remain faithful to Him.

**7. What was Darius's proclamation about, and what did he say in it (vs. 25, 26)?**

God uses Daniel's witness to make a believer out of Darius. Thus, Darius sets forth a new decree, this one legislating fear of Daniel's God. This proclamation was written flamboyantly to people of every nation, race, and language throughout the world, thus ensuring that everyone in his entire kingdom would get the message. The basic statement of the decree was that all people were to fear the God of Daniel.

This is followed by a detailed explanation about who God is and why He is to be honored by everyone.

In describing God, Darius stated that He is the living and enduring God, implying that other gods are merely unresponsive and passing fashions. God's kingdom would never be destroyed, as earthly kingdoms were. The dominion of Daniel's God would never end. His dominion is an everlasting one. No power will ever overcome it (see Dan. 6:26).

**CONCLUSION - Faith on Hold**

Christianity once met with widespread appreciation in the Western world. That time, however, is over. Christians are being asked daily to choose between their faith and their jobs, social standing, etc. However, while thinking about how to honor Christ in the secular workplace, we should recall that Daniel went home before he offered his prayer for all to see. Daniel didn't take some kind of "in your face" stance while at work in the king's palace.

Your boss has the right to tell you, "Please take that picture of Jesus off your cubicle wall." The boss has the right to say what can and cannot happen on company property, within the bounds of law and decency. Few, if any, companies have a policy against bowing one's head in prayer over a meal eaten in the company cafeteria! Openly witnessing for Christ is still possible in many situations in Western democracies. May we continue to demonstrate by the choices we make that we worship the same God whom Daniel worshiped.

**PRAYER** - Living God, thank You for giving us Your laws and showing us abundant life through Christ. Thank You for making us a people whose spiritual prosperity does not depend on the ebbs and flows of the nations among which You have scattered us. Make us, like Daniel, a people who never hide our faith, nor justify retreat with clever arguments. Instead, may we shine like stars in the universe. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER** - Followers of Christ should never compromise their faith. Seek God's Face. Seek God's Word.



**ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON** – Study Daniel 9, “Praying for the People: Intercession in Crisis”, in anticipation of next week’s lesson.

*Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, January 5, 2025

## Lesson 6 – “Praying for the People: Intercession in Crisis” (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Daniel 9:1—7, 17—19**

Background Scripture: **Daniel 9**

Devotional Reading: **Psalms 130**

Time: **539 B.C** Place: **Babylon**

### **Daniel 9:1—7, 17—19**

*1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: 4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; 5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: 6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.....17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. 18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.*

### LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to analyze the prayer of Daniel concerning the end of Babylonian Captivity and the encouraging answer God gave him.
- **Principle:** to realize that our Sovereign God controls events and carries out His perfect will.
- **Application:** to trust in the Lord to fulfill His prophecies according to His own calendar.

### INTRODUCTION - Learning How to Pray

We know that prayer is central to healthy faith. The New Testament instructs us to pray (example: Romans 12:12). It also provides examples of people who made prayer a priority. Jesus left the crowds to speak to His heavenly Father (Matthew 14:23). The apostles were committed to prayer (Acts 6:4), as was the earliest church (Acts 2:42).

Sometimes, however, we are curious about what people actually said while praying because we find ourselves wondering about what to say when we pray. Jesus' model prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) and unity prayer (John 17:20–26) are great places to start. Luke 22:42 and Acts 1:24; 7:59 provide more examples of the specific content of prayers in the New Testament. But the nature of those particular prayers, given the situations in which they were offered, may leave us hungering for even more insight.

The Old Testament is extremely helpful in this regard. The book of Psalms contains a rich supply of prayers that cover a wide range of topics and situations. In addition, the narrative portions of the Old Testament contain many lengthy prayers. By

studying how our ancestors in faith prayed through their situations, we can learn how to pray in the situations we face.

Think about Daniel's situation. In his lifetime, Daniel had seen God begin to fulfill His promises for His people, but this fulfillment caused Daniel to be confused. Part of the confusion and distress concerned the length of time involved in fulfillment, as we shall see. Many of us experience the same thing in our lives and the lives of our churches—things just (to our understanding) take too long! So, how do we go about praying when we long for God to intervene and “hurry up” to finish the good work He began in our lives? Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 is a helpful place to start.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Daniel, a Jew, served as a captive in the king's palace in a foreign land. Daniel spent most of his life there, from about 606 BC (Daniel 1:1) until at least 538 BC (1:21). More than one foreign ruler esteemed him highly (2:46–48; 5:29; 6:1, 2). More importantly, Daniel was highly esteemed by God (9:23; 10:11, 19).

Daniel 1–6 focuses on key events in the lives of four Jewish men who remained faithful to God while exiled in Babylon. Daniel 7–12 focuses on the future from Daniel's perspective, particularly how God was to restore His people after subduing those who had oppressed them. We are concerned with how Daniel responded to the plight of his people and how his prayer can teach us to pray.

### **Cause for Concern (Daniel 9:1-3)**

#### **1. From what source did Daniel discover some information that caught his attention (Daniel 9:1)?**

Historical records indicate that Darius the Mede was probably appointed chief administrator over Babylon by Cyrus the Persian around 539 B.C. By then Daniel had been in Babylon for over sixty-five years and was probably well into his eighties. It was during the first year of the reign of Darius that Daniel came to an understanding of something he found in the writings of Jeremiah. The term “books” in Daniel 9:2 refers to Scripture containing the prophecies of

Jeremiah, which are here attested as the very words of the Lord to him.

From these scrolls of Jeremiah, Daniel learned that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years, during which the people would serve the king of Babylon. Following that time, God would deal with Babylon for her iniquity, and the people of Judah would be allowed to begin returning to their homeland. Daniel found this information in Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10–14. The latter text explains that God still had a future hope in mind for Israel in spite of the desolation He would allow to come upon them. His thoughts for them were for peace, not evil.

God had also said that when the people cried out to Him in prayer at that time, seeking and searching for Him, He would listen and respond (Jer. 29:12–14). This was all the motivation Daniel needed to drive him to earnest prayer.

#### **2. What did Daniel learn, and why did it inspire him to pray fervently (v. 3)?**

What drove Daniel to pray was his realization that the prophesied seventy years was almost completed. John Walvoord has given this insightful information: “The implication is that Daniel had now come into the full comprehension of Jeremiah's prediction and realized that the seventy years prophesied had about run their course. The time of the vision recorded in Daniel 9 was 538 B.C., about 67 years after Jerusalem had first been captured and Daniel carried off to Babylon (605 B.C.)” (Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation, Moody).

The sincerity of Daniel is seen in his own description of how he had sought the Lord by pleading with Him in prayer, fasting, wearing sackcloth, and covering himself with ashes. We get a clear picture of him purposely turning away from everything else that might be a distraction and concentrating on approaching God in prayer. The word “supplications” indicates earnest entreaties. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes were all evidences of mourning, either in grief or in repentance, both of which were true of Daniel at this time.

## Confession of Sin (Daniel 9:4-7)

### 3. What did Daniel acknowledge about God (v. 4)?

It was confession, in fact, that Daniel expressed first [in his sincere prayer to God]. His approach was to describe God's holy character. Only after that, did he express his concerns. He referred to God as "great and dreadful" (Dan. 9:4), indicating that He most certainly should be feared for what He might do when we disobey Him. We do not need to live in a state of constant fright, like those who serve false gods, but neither should we take lightly the fact that God is holy and righteous. We should not limit the fear of God to mean only some vague idea of mere respect.

Daniel knew that God keeps His promises and extends mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. The problem was with the people of Israel, not with God.

### 4. Are there ever times when you approach God with less than proper reverence? How do you keep this from happening?

As we pray, we must never forget the one to whom we are praying. We are guilty of being flippant in our prayers, when we fail to approach God with the reverence He is due, or with the awe we should feel.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 reminds us that when all is said and done the end of all things is to "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Arrogance is seen when we demand things of God instead of seeking His will. Psalm 63:1-5 reveals that our greatest longing should be for the Lord's presence in our lives. This kind of prayer leads us to seek to glorify God and not to exalt self.

### 5. What were the things Daniel said his people were guilty of doing in straying from the Lord (vs. 5,6)?

Scripture attributes no incident of sin to Daniel, and he is one of very few so exempted. But he identified himself with his sinful people by using the pronoun "we" in this confession. There is a fourfold expression of how far God's people had strayed from Him. Daniel confessed, "We have sinned," meaning

that they had strayed from what is right. God's standards of righteousness had been ignored. Daniel confessed, "[We] have committed iniquity," meaning they had been crooked and perverse. He confessed, "[We] have done wickedly," indicating willfully evil living. Instead of being holy, God's people were guilty and worthy of condemnation. Finally, Daniel confessed, "[We] have rebelled." The Oxford American Dictionary defines the verb "rebel" as to "resist authority, control, or convention."

God's people had refused to acknowledge and obey His authority over them. This happened because they had distracted themselves from a proper focus on God's commandments and His standards of justice. They had also ignored God's calls for them to repent. Daniel stated that they had ignored the prophets whom God had specifically sent to them in order to turn them back to Him. Furthermore, the prophets warned every level of society: kings and princes, as well as the common people. The term "our fathers" in Daniel 9:6 extends the guilt to many generations, not merely the one taken into captivity. The fact that God had warned them repeatedly makes the magnitude of their sin even greater. Israel had simply refused to listen to those who had been sent by God.

### 6. How did Daniel contrast God with His people?

Because of their refusal to listen, Daniel now contrasted the unfaithfulness of the people with the righteousness of God. While God is wholly righteous, the actions of the people made them shameful. The Hebrew word translated "confusion" in Daniel 9:7 is bosheth, and it means "shame." It is an all-encompassing word that includes the feeling of shame, the condition of shame, and the cause of shame. Whether the people realized it or not, they were shameful in the sight of God, who is righteous. The reason was "we have sinned against thee" (v. 8). Their living had been treacherous, unfaithful, and in total rebellion against what God intended for them. Again, Daniel included himself; they were all guilty.

*To be continued...*

*Lesson summarized by Kimbley Y. Baker-  
Richardson  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, January 12, 2025

Lesson 7 – “Praying for the People: Intercession in Crisis”  
(Part II)

Lesson Text: Daniel 9:1—7, 17—19

Background Scripture: Daniel 9

Devotional Reading: Psalm 130

Times: 539 B.C. Place: Babylon

Daniel 9:1—7, 17—19

*1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: 4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; 5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: 6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.....17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. 18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.*

God’s Glorious Gathering (Isaiah 43:5–7)

LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to analyze the prayer of Daniel concerning the end of Babylonian Captivity and the encouraging answer God gave him.
- **Principle:** to realize that our Sovereign God controls events and carries out His perfect will.
- **Application:** to trust in the Lord to fulfill His prophecies according to His own calendar.

Petition for Help (Daniel 9:17-19)

7. What could Daniel not offer to God as he prayed for Israel? What did he rely on instead (vs. 17,18)?

Verses 8–16 (not in today’s text) offer Daniel’s lengthy recounting of the sins of God’s people. The wrap-up of the prayer is verses 17–19. These two segments build upon one another in ways that involve repetition.

Daniel asked God to listen to him and hear his requests, to open His eyes and look at them. And this time too it was because wicked people had triumphed over God’s people. Daniel asked God to take note of the terrible condition of desolation in Jerusalem and then listen to what Daniel requested from Him. At the same time, he recognized that he had no righteous deeds of the people to offer in support of his requests. He was asking, rather, because God is merciful. He is willing to forgive and restore.

## 8. What encouraging lesson can we learn about God's forgiveness?

The encouraging lesson that we can learn about God's forgiveness is that we too can stop and confess our sins and claim God's forgiveness. First John 1:9 tells us that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." With that cleansing comes the restoration we need after we have sinned.

From Daniel 9:4, David A. Hamburg summarizes Daniel's "made my confession" statement in the following way. "A legitimate confession is one that says the same thing about a wrong deed that God says. The God of righteousness is never swayed or impressed by any of the clever "spins" men try to put on their sin in order to avoid judgment.

## 9. How can we tell that Daniel was intent on getting God to listen (v. 19)?

Daniel concludes his prayer with a sense of urgency as he entreats God four times. He asks God to hear, forgive, and act, doing these quickly (defer not). He was pleading with God to not delay or wait until a future time. Daniel understood that after seventy years there was to be a restoration in Jerusalem, so he pleaded with God to act as prophesied.

## 10. For whose sake was Daniel praying?

To increase the intensity of his request, Daniel reminded God that it was for His own sake that this restoration should take place. It was also, however, for the sake of the city of Jerusalem and for the sake of those who were known to be God's people. Only good would come when God acted on His promises. Disgrace and evil would come if He delayed any longer. Daniel's prayer was according to God's own will.

## CONCLUSION - Daniel's Prayer Answered

While Daniel was still praying, God sent the angel Gabriel to answer the prayer (Daniel 9:20-27). Gabriel informed Daniel that he was greatly, beloved. We should strive before God to be able was greatly, beloved. We should strive before God to be able have the same words spoken of us. Certainly, Daniel's great concern for God's honor, and for his

people, must have been part of the reason he was so dearly loved of God.

Gabriel told Daniel that God's people were to be restored after "seventy weeks." Seventy weeks meant, literally, seventy units of seven, or seventy times seven. Almost "all expositors," ancient and modern, have seen this as signifying seventy units, each composed seven years, making a total of 490 years.

Six things dealing with sin and righteousness would be accomplished during the 490 years. The first three are negative, and the final three positive:

(1) To finish the transgression has reference to rebellion against God;

(2) To make an end of sins could quite naturally in this context refer to sin being put away during the Messiah's reign;

(3) To make reconciliation for iniquity speaks of an atonement for sin on the basis of some sacrifice. This was no doubt fulfilled in Christ's own sacrificial death on the cross;

(4) To bring in everlasting righteousness. With sin taken care of (in the first three statements), righteousness can now be a reality. This will be applied to Israel at Christ's glorious second coming at the conclusion of the Tribulation Period and will usher in the predicted righteous government of the Messiah (Isaiah 9:7; 11:3-5; Jeremiah 23:5-6);

(5) To seal up the vision and prophecy. There will come a time when all visions and prophecy will be fulfilled or consummated, and thus will no longer have a function. There are yet, of course many prophecies that must still be fulfilled; and

(6) To anoint the most Holy. The most natural usage would be a reference to the anointing of a future temple when Messiah's reign will be inaugurated with righteousness. Such a temple is predicted in Ezekiel 40-48, which will commemorate Christ's death, on the cross.

## Daniel's Prayer Applied

We are to remind ourselves, as Daniel did, that God's purposes for us are not complete. Though the power of sin was defeated on the cross, it still rears its ugly head in our lives. Christ is the fulfillment of our hope, but we await a day to experience the fullness that God has in store for us in the heavenly Jerusalem.



Until then, we can follow Daniel's lead in prayer. We draw near to God not only in speech but also in action. Fasting and signs of contrition can help as we own up to individual and corporate sins, confessing them to God and one another. We must renounce all thoughts of entitlement, as if God were obligated to answer our prayers to our liking. We must commit ourselves to Him and remain true to His purpose for us in this world, for it is the Christian who bears the name of Christ. We were saved not for comfort or pleasure, but for God's mission for the church.

Daniel prayed like this, and God answered him. Let us pray likewise.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

- We cannot understand our own times if we do not understand the Bible (Dan. 9:1—2).
- Prayer is not merely mouthing requests; it is seeking the Lord and His will (v. 3).
- The key to genuine, heartfelt confession is understanding exactly who God is and what He is like (v. 4).
- Although our sins might harm others, they all are offenses against Him (v. 5—7).
- goal of all our prayers should be to honor the Lord, not to make life easier for ourselves (v. 17—19).

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER** - Petition God humbly and urgently.

### **PRAYER**

O God who hears our prayer, teach us to pray like Daniel. Like him, we are often baffled by Your timing. We cannot see the big picture, and we get hung up on the details. Please give us the faith to wait for You. We confess to You our sins, we submit to You our unworthiness, and we call upon Your mercy. Hear us when we pray, for Your name's sake and for the sake of Your world, in Jesus' name, Amen.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson comes from Haggai, one of the minor prophecy books that is often neglected. It was in the second year of the reign of Darius that Haggai was told by God to tell Jewish leaders back in Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. It is suggested that you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to get background details for the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. May 4th's lesson is titled, "Setting Priorities: First Things First." The lesson text is Haggai 1:1—4, 7—10, and 12—15. You should read Ezra 5 and Haggai 1 in preparation for this lesson. The devotional reading is Psalm 84:1—4. The time is 520 B.C., and the place is Jerusalem. Good studying!

*Lesson summarized by Kimbley Y. Baker-  
Richardson  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





**Sunday, January 19, 2025**

## **Lesson 8 – “First Things First” (Part I)**

Lesson Text: **Haggai 1:1-10, 12-15**

Background Scripture: **Haggai 1; Ezra 5**

Devotional Reading: **Psalms 84:1-4**

### **Haggai 1:1–10, 12–15**

*1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. 3 Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? 5 Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. 10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.....*

*12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. 13 Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. 14 And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,*

*15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

### **Lesson Aims**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- **Examine:** describe how the cultural, economic, and religious climate in Haggai's day worked against the rebuilding of the temple.
- **Principle:** to make it clear that building for God must go forward despite opposition.
- **Application:** suggest a plan to correct one misplaced priority in order to obey God more fully.

### **Introduction - Priorities**

There is not enough time in life to do everything that we would like to do, and some things in life are crucial to do, like it or not. For example, if we put off paying our electric bill long enough, the utility company will shut off the power. Paying that electric bill becomes an increasingly high priority as time goes by.

So how does a busy person make sure that the most important things actually get done? One efficient way is to write out a priority list. Of the things that could be done today, what is the most important one? That goes at the top of the list. Then come the second, third, and fourth most important items, and so on.

Once the list is made, one goes down the list and tries to accomplish as many items as time allows. Those things that cannot be accomplished then go on the next day's list. Low priority items at the bottom of the list may never get done, but this system makes sure that the most important things do get done.

But many times, I do not operate in this efficient way. I start not with what is most important, but with what I want to do—no matter how trivial. I desperately

need to pay the bills, but I watch the news or surf the Internet instead. As a result, some things that absolutely needed to be done that day may have failed to get done. *The problem was that my priorities in action did not correspond with the real priorities in my life.*

The same problem comes in the spiritual life. The Christian should have the things of God as a priority in life. But all too frequently other matters, both important and trivial, crowd out the things of God. The book of Haggai reminds us that we need to make God and His service our priority.

### **Lesson Background**

Solomon began to build the temple around 966 B.C. After its completion, it stood for nearly four centuries as the grand religious monument of Solomon's reign. The temple replaced the tabernacle as Israel's focal point for worship. The Israelites came to the temple for three annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). Standing as the symbolic dwelling place of God in the midst of His people, the temple had a fond place in the hearts of pious Israelites. For example, in Psalm 84:1-4 the psalmist expresses some sentimental jealousy for the sparrows that built nests in the temple's structure, longing like them to remain always in its courts.

But a catastrophe befell the temple during the reign of Zedekiah. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians devastated Jerusalem. The temple was looted and burned (2 Kings 25). The period that followed is known as the Babylonian exile, a time in which large numbers of Jews were deported from Judah to live in Babylon.

The exile came to an end shortly after Cyrus, king of Persia and Media, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. In late 539 B.C. or early 538 B.C., Cyrus issued a decree allowing Jews who so wished to return to Judah and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). About 50,000 went back.

The Jews who returned from exile were eager to take advantage of Cyrus's decree and rebuild the temple. They succeeded in rebuilding the altar and began once again to conduct sacrifices (Ezra 3:1-6). They even succeeded in laying the foundations for a new temple (Ezra 3:7-13), but the temple proper remained unfinished for the better part of two

decades after Jewish exiles had returned with plans to rebuild it.

After this long time of inactivity, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached in the year 520 B.C. about the need to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:1, 2). These are the same prophets who wrote the books of the Old Testament that bear their names. The book of Zechariah gives an account of his prophetic encouragement regarding the rebuilding of the temple (see Zechariah 1:16; 4:9).

The book of Haggai gives that prophet's perspective on how he preached in this regard and how the people responded to his message. The book of Haggai consists of four prophetic messages, dating from August to December of 520 B.C. Each prophecy begins with the declaration "came the word of the Lord" or "the word of the Lord came" (Haggai 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20). Today's lesson takes us to the first of these four.

### **Temple Neglected – Hag. 1:1-4**

#### **1. Who were the political and religious leaders of the returned captives from Babylon? (Hag. 1:1)**

Judah's return from Babylon came in three stages. The first group returned in the year 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who became their governor, and Joshua, their high priest. With both political and religious leaders in place, everything was set for a successful reestablishment of their nation and its system of worship. But after the opposition, the temple stood in its uncompleted condition for many years. Then God raised Haggai with a challenge.

#### **2. How do we know the time of Haggai's message to his people? (v. 2)**

Haggai's first message is very specifically dated. Reference to the second year of Darius is used because there was no current king in Israel to reckon by. The sixth month, Elul, corresponds to parts of our August and September. Historians tell us that the first day would be the same as our twenty-ninth day of August and that the year was 520 B.C. It was the day of the new moon, so it might well have been a festival day in Jerusalem. Many people would have been

there, giving Haggai a ready audience for his message.

**3. What was the main message Haggai had for the leaders and the people, and what were they doing wrong? (vs. 2-4)**

In verse 2, God breaks His silence by sending a message to Zerubbabel and Joshua. Notice that He refers to His people as “this people.” This emphasizes the displeasure that God had for his people. His people were not doing what they should have been doing. They were making excuses for not rebuilding God’s temple. Haggai states that the people thought it was not time for them to start building God’s temple.

However, they may have been suffering from a spiritual problem: they simply didn’t care whether God’s house ever got rebuilt, as long as their own living conditions were comfortable. Either way, their excuse was wrong and without validity to God’s ears.

**4. Why was it important for Judah to have a temple for God?**

Throughout the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple represented the presence of God. The temple was essential for Judah to have a right relationship with God. One of the events that occurred in the temple was the sin offering. Whenever someone needed forgiveness of sin, an animal had to be brought to the priest, who would sacrifice the animal so that the person’s sins would be covered. In addition, the high priest would have to sacrifice an animal for the entire nation once a year so that the sins of the nation would be covered. Without the temple, it was impossible for Judah’s sins to be forgiven.

There was no temple at all. The people’s priorities had become skewed and needed reorganizing. How could the people of Judah build and live in homes of luxury while neglecting God’s temple? That temple should have been the focal point of their relationship with Him. It had been when Solomon built it. And prior to that, the tabernacle had been the center of their spiritual lives for many generations. But it did not seem so important to this group of Jews to reestablish that same importance. Initially, fear of

opposition had stopped the work, but that was no longer a valid excuse.

*To be continued...  
Lesson summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, January 26, 2025

## Lesson 9 – “First Things First” (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Haggai 1:1-10, 12-15**

Background Scripture: **Haggai 1; Ezra 5**

Devotional Reading: **Psalms 84:1-4**

### Haggai 1:1–10, 12–15

*1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. 3 Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? 5 Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. 10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.....*

*12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. 13 Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. 14 And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, 15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- **Examine:** describe how the cultural, economic, and religious climate in Haggai's day worked against the rebuilding of the temple.
- **Principle:** to make it clear that building for God must go forward despite opposition.
- **Application:** suggest a plan to correct one misplaced priority in order to obey God more fully.

### Blessings Forfeited -Haggai 1:5-10

1. **What evidence was there that the blessing of God had ceased to be upon these returned captives? (vs. 5, 6 not in lesson text)**

Haggai 1:5-6 reveals that as a result of their misplaced priorities, God was withholding his blessing from them. They worked to accumulate food, drink, clothing, and income, but there was never enough. If they were to stop and realize what was happening, they would understand that God was opposing them instead of blessing them. On the other hand, they might have been so far away from God that they may have forgotten who God was. Sometimes, we experience similar circumstances when we fail to put God first in our lives. God must be first priority in our lives if we want to be fully blessed by Him.

2. **What are some personal priorities that you have allowed to displace God's priorities? How do you stay alert to this danger?**

## **Change Explained—Hag. 1:7-10**

### **4. How did God describe what He did when they attempted to get ahead? (vs. 9, 10)**

Here we find God reiterating what was stated earlier. Although the people continually strove for increased wealth, they continued to experience a marginal existence. God said this was because He repeatedly blew away what they brought home. The Hebrew word that was translated “blow” means to “breathe upon,” along with various implications associated with doing so. The idea represented here is of a scourging wind that laid waste to whatever they brought home and scattered it away from them, leaving very little.

But God did not merely describe His actions without explaining His reasons. Anticipating the question that would come from the people upon hearing this, God Himself asked why and followed with a precise explanation. Everything came back to the fact that they continued to neglect the rebuilding project while leaving the temple in ruins. The temple lay in ruins while the people enjoyed their luxurious homes. God described them as running to their own homes to avoid any thought of responsibility for the condition of His temple.

God has decided not to bless them materially. In particular, rains have not come in a timely way, so the crops are meager (see also v. 11, not in today’s text). But obedience will mean that God will reverse that according to the promises of blessings in Deuteronomy 28.

As Christians, we must remember that we cannot hide from God. When God asks us to do something through His Word or revelation, we must be willing to follow His instructions. God withholds blessings from those who are not willing to serve Him fully.

People can get their priorities mixed up, as in the case of those living in Haggai’s day. Jesus seemed to be talking about mixed up priorities when He addressed the problem of becoming anxious about basic needs. To allow one’s thinking to become consumed by such worries is to show a lack of faith that God is able to provide (Matthew 6:25–34).

Sometimes our priorities are not even needs but merely self-centered desires. This problem seems all too common in a culture that looks out for self instead of following God and trusting Him to provide. Regular study of the Word of God allows Him to speak to us about priorities.

### **3. What did God specifically want the people to consider (vs. 7,8)?**

This is the second time God called upon the people to consider their ways (v. 5). The idea is that they needed to give very careful thought to and reevaluate how they were living. Things needed to change drastically right away if they wanted to please God.

This kind of consideration on their part was to lead them to an attitude of repentance. Repentance is not just confession. Rather, it is a change of thinking that leads to a different life direction. God gave them specific instructions about what that direction should be. He did not just say, “Get to work on the temple and finish it.” He gave detailed instructions. They were to begin by going up into the mountains to get wood for the temple project. This would start them on the path to pleasing God and becoming worthy of His blessings.

It should always be our desire to please God and in doing so to give Him glory. It is encouraging to realize that what we do can give God genuine pleasure. If we take time to think about God watching us and experiencing pleasure the way we do when something is fully enjoyable, perhaps we will be motivated to be more consistent in endeavoring to live for Him.



## Work Started – Hag. 1:12-15

### 5. What was the response of both the leaders and the people of Haggai's message? (vs. 12, 13)

The two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, along with the people, immediately responded to Haggai's message. Two verbs in Haggai 1:12 describe the response: Everyone "obeyed" and the people "did fear" the presence of God. This was exactly the effect God had in mind, and it brought a quick response from Him. Notice the repeated emphasis on the Lord in verse 13: Haggai was "the Lord's messenger" who brought "the Lord's message" to the people, promising that the Lord's presence would be with them from then on. This indicates God's great pleasure at seeing the obedient response of His people. Their repentance led to His blessing.

### 6. How long did it take for the work on the temple to get started, and how do we know God was in it? (vs. 14-15)

Using the dating referred to earlier in this lesson, we find that the work on the temple began on the twenty-first of September 520 B.C., just twenty-three days after Haggai's message. God was sovereignly moving in the hearts of the people to accomplish His work: "The Lord stirred up the spirit." He did this in Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people. Reference to the remnant reminds us that God has always preserved a remnant of Israel because He still has a future for them. We can almost sense the excitement and enthusiasm projected when we read that once the Lord stirred up their spirits, they came and began the work on the house of the sovereign Lord, their God.

### 7. What can we learn about priorities from the lesson?

Jesus taught from the Sermon on the Mount that we should all first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. As a result, all of our needs will be met (cf. Mat. 6:33). This lesson emphasizes the importance of putting God's will before our will. We should strive to serve God, even to the point where it is uncomfortable for us to do so. If we choose to pursue our agenda instead of God's agenda, then He will withhold blessings from us. We should

remember that God will reward our sacrifice on earth and/or Heaven, so we should not worry (cf. Luke 12:23-31).

## Conclusion - Our Priorities or God's

Although God is not calling us to build Him a temple of stone and wood, He certainly calls us to worship and serve Him. Often, however, we fail to make God and the things of God a priority in our lives. It is easy to fall into laziness, selfishness, or a life of comfortable self-indulgence.

The book of Haggai reminds us of the need to put God first, not ourselves. It exhorts us to be willing to make the sacrifices and the effort necessary to glorify God and further His work in the world. That sometimes involves the bricks and mortar of building physical buildings, such as churches or housing for the poor. Or it can take the form of building God's spiritual building, the church, by evangelizing and making disciples. Both kinds of work require putting God's priorities above our selfish desires.

For larger tasks on behalf of God, there is also the importance of good leadership. Had the prophets Haggai and Zechariah not stepped up to preach and exhort others to action, no temple would have been built. If the people refused to follow the leadership of their governor, Zerubbabel, and their high priest, Joshua, the temple would not have been built.

Each of us has a role to play. God calls some to lead and others to follow in order that greater works can be accomplished for Him. Part of our setting priorities is determining what God is calling us to do as individuals: to lead or follow others whom God has raised up. Then our priority must be to live out that calling.

**Prayer** - Lord, help us to set aside our sinful selfishness and make You and Your work in the world a priority in our lives. Like Haggai, help us to encourage others to do Your will, and like the people of his day help us respond to Your exhortations conveyed through others. Raise up leaders with the courage of Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Joshua to help Your church accomplish great things. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Thought to Remember** - If we do not make God our priority, He won't make blessing us His priority.

**Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

A rebuilt temple in Jerusalem would be open to attack if the walls of the city remained broken down. It was the mission of Nehemiah to urge his people to restore the stone walls and the gates, which the Babylonians had burned. The Jewish remnant needed Nehemiah's visionary leadership to rise to the occasion. Study "Following a Visionary Leader" Nehemiah 2:1-8, 11, 17, 18.

*Lesson summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





**Sunday, February 2, 2025**

## **Lesson 10 - "Following a Visionary Leader" (Part I)**

Lesson Text: **Nehemiah 2:1-8, 11, 17, 18**

Background Scripture: **Nehemiah 1,2**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 137:1-7; 138:1-5**

### **Nehemiah 2:1-8, 11, 17, 18**

*1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. 2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 3 And said unto the king, Let the king have for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. 6 And the king said, unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into; And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.....*

*11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.....*

*17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.*

*18 Then (told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Just as there were three deportations of Judah into captivity, so there were three returns. The first occurred under Zerubbabel and Joshua in the year 538 B.C. The second took place under Ezra in the year 458 B.C., and the third was under the leadership of Nehemiah in 445 B.C. Nehemiah was an official serving under King Artaxerxes. As the king's cupbearer, he was highly trusted by the king.

Nehemiah's constant presence with the king would have allowed him to know many of the administration's secret dealings, and it probably gave him the opportunity to know some of the king's personal affairs. While Nehemiah was faithfully carrying out his duties one day, his brother Hanani stopped in for a visit. He had been to Judah and had come back with a report on the conditions there. But the report was not a good one. The people were suffering, the city walls were destroyed, and the city gates were charred ruins.

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Nehemiah, whose name means "the Lord comforts," was a devout Jew who lived in the fifth century B.C. That was the period of the Persian Empire. This empire came to prominence when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.

Nehemiah served as cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, the Persian king who reigned from 464 to 424 B.C., an area that is now southwest Iran. Artaxerxes was the son of the biblical Ahasuerus (Ezra 4:6, also known as Xerxes), who was the husband of Esther. Ahasuerus's kingdom stretched "from India even unto Ethiopia" (Esther 1:1). Artaxerxes I came to the throne after his father was assassinated. As cupbearer

to Artaxerxes, Nehemiah had direct, personal access to this powerful Persian emperor.

In November or December of 445 B.C., Nehemiah learned from Hanani that those who had returned from exile to Jerusalem were in distress. It had been more than 90 years since the first exiles had returned to the holy city, and the place was still a ruin (Nehemiah 1:2, 3). This news, which Nehemiah found surprising, may be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Yet this was old news by Nehemiah's day. Instead, Hanani may have been referring to some more recent catastrophe.

Nevertheless, Nehemiah began praying and considering over a period of four months what he could do to help his fellow countrymen in Judea (Nehemiah 1:4-11). His prayers culminated in asking God to grant him favorable reception by King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11).

#### **TODAY'S AIM**

- **Facts:** to learn that God caused King Artaxerxes to sympathize with Nehemiah and authorize him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall despite the obstacles there.
- **Principle:** to be aware that God appoints certain leaders to do His work and expects other believers to follow them.
- **Application:** to help those committed to God to discern who His chosen leaders are and to give them their support.

#### **Sadness Noticed (Nehemiah 2:1-3)**

1. **What was it that allowed Nehemiah the opportunity to make a major request of King Artaxerxes? (Nehemiah 2:1)**

The month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king is March or April of 444 B.C. When we compare this date with Nehemiah 1:1, we see that about four months have passed since Nehemiah heard the news about Jerusalem's distress. Thus, Nehemiah has a lot of time in which to think, weep, and pray before his encounter with the king (Nehemiah 1:4-11).

What allowed Nehemiah the opportunity to make a major request of King Artaxerxes was his position. Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer which was a very important office. According to one ancient Greek writer, the cupbearer tastes the king's wine for poison and guards the royal apartment. Such a trusted person can become a confidant and informal counselor of a king and so can influence the king's decisions. Like Esther in the book that bears her name, God has placed a Jew at the right place and time in order to help His people.

2. **What caused the king to open the conversation that led to Nehemiah's request? (v. 2)**

While Nehemiah was carrying out his normal duties for the king, the king observed that he had a sad countenance on this particular day. Since this was unusual for Nehemiah, the king immediately inquired about it. He knew that Nehemiah was not normally sad. The moment the king inquired about his sad countenance, Nehemiah was immediately afraid. No one was allowed to reveal sadness before the king.

We assume that to appear sad in the presence of the king might have been a cause for punishment. No doubt Nehemiah had not realized that his grief so affected him that it showed on his countenance. After four months, however, his concern had weighed heavily upon him and had now begun to show outwardly. Notice that Nehemiah specifically stated, "Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence" (Neh. 2:1). Until now he had maintained his composure and consistently presented a normal countenance as he carried out his duties.

3. **What prevented Nehemiah's fear from overwhelming him in talking to the king? (vs. 3-4)**

Nehemiah was a man who prayed consistently (cf. 1:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). His fear did not paralyze him to the point of inertia. Instead, he was able to offer the king an explanation of how he was feeling which showed Nehemiah's courage. Now that the opportunity was at hand, Nehemiah was glad to offer an explanation.

Nehemiah was not at all unhappy with Artaxerxes. His unhappiness was a natural response to the destruction of his homeland and its capital city, Jerusalem. He described it as the place where his ancestors rested in their tombs. This place that was so dear to his heart lay in ruins with its gates in ashes. This would cause anyone sadness. Nehemiah's plan was to ask permission to return home and help with the bleak situation.

#### **Opportunity Seized (Nehemiah 2:4-8)**

#### **4. How did the king respond to Nehemiah? (vs. 4-6)**

Artaxerxes responds by offering a royal favor to help Nehemiah. This is exactly what Nehemiah has been praying for (Nehemiah 1:11). Now it appears that God is granting an answer to his prayer. Before Nehemiah makes his request, he prays. Even though he may have been thinking about this moment for several months, he still recognized the importance of God's leading in how he would answer. Before daring to respond, therefore, he prayed. It could not have been a long prayer, because the king was sitting there, looking right at him, waiting for an answer. After praying, Nehemiah addressed the king.

It was important however, that Nehemiah follow the proper etiquette for addressing the king, especially when he was going to present the kind of request he had in mind. That is why he began with "If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight." He had prayed much, though, so he was ready to present his actual request immediately. He spoke directly to the heart of need. He wanted to return to Judah and the city of his fathers' tombs for the purpose of rebuilding it.

The king, in the presence of the queen, asked Nehemiah how long he thought he would need to be gone and when he would return. After Nehemiah saw the king was granting him permission to leave, he gave the king a set time on when he would return.

#### **5. Why should we take risks for God? Or is it ever proper to think of service for God as risky? Explain.**

Did Nehemiah take a risk in asking the king to allow him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? Did Jonathan take a risk when only he and his armor bearer went to fight against an entire Philistine garrison in 1 Samuel 14? To be willing to lose one's life in the service of God is to truly find life (see Luke 17:33).

Men and women of the Bible risked all they had on numerous occasions. As a result, great things were accomplished. These people put their faith and trust in God in a very real way, and they were rewarded. When we step out on faith, we are able to see God's working more clearly; this encourages further steps of faith. From an eternal perspective, to step out on faith not risky at all since God is in control. From that viewpoint, to fail to step out on faith is the real risk!

*To be continued...  
Lesson summarized by  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, February 9, 2025

Lesson 11 - "Following a Visionary Leader"  
(Part II)

Lesson Text: Nehemiah 2:1-8, 11, 17, 18

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 1, 2

Devotional Reading: Psalm 137:1-7; 138:1-5

**Nehemiah 2:1-8, 11, 17, 18**

*1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. 2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 3 And said unto the king, Let the king have for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. 6 And the king said, unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into; And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.....*

*11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.....*

*17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. 18 Then (told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.*

**Opportunity Seized (Nehemiah 2:4-8)**  
*...continued*

- 1. What added things did Nehemiah ask for above his initial request, and why were these things important? (vs. 7-8)**

Nehemiah goes on to request letters permitting him to travel through the empire. Such papers will provide the royal permission needed to travel through regions of other governors.

Nehemiah knows he will need construction material. So he asks for timber to be provided by a certain Asaph, the official in charge of the king's western forest. Asaph is a Jewish name, so it might be that he, like Nehemiah, was a Jew who had achieved a high ranking in the empire. He would have been sympathetic to Nehemiah's cause, but he would need permission from the king to provide the needed lumber.

Nehemiah specified three projects for which he needed this material. First, he needed beams for the fortress to be built near the temple. This was for the purpose of protecting the temple, their holy place of worship. Second, he needed material for the city wall. Third, he needed it for the house he would occupy while in Jerusalem. Miraculously, the king granted his entire request. Nehemiah gave all the credit to the fact that God was blessing him in his endeavors.

**Task Initiated (Nehemiah 2:11, 17, 18)**

The intervening verses (vs. 9-10) tell us not only that Nehemiah had the necessary letters but also that he was accompanied by some of the army and cavalry of the king. This was quite a display of the king's authority and is an indication that Artaxerxes was well aware of the tendencies of the various rulers to



act independently. As we might expect, the enemies of the Jews were not at all happy about the situation. Sanballat and Tobiah are mentioned. To them, Nehemiah posed a threat.

**2. How long did Nehemiah wait after arriving at Jerusalem before surveying the extent of the problem? (v. 11)**

The text does not describe what certainly is an arduous journey of nearly 1,100 miles from Shushan to Jerusalem. Naturally, Nehemiah's first priority is to get some rest upon arrival. It is unwise to undertake a great task when one is exhausted. But no doubt Nehemiah already is planning what he will do.

There must have been some traditional importance associated with waiting this amount of time, for we read the same thing about Ezra's arrival many years earlier (Ezra 8:32). Nehemiah probably used this time for rest, prayer, and maybe getting acquainted with some of the people in order to determine who could help in the work. It was not until after this time that he selected a few trusted men to do a secret nighttime survey with him to assess the damage (Neh. 2:12).

**3. Why and when is it important to take rest? What have been your experiences (good and bad) in this regard?**

Before Nehemiah began the task of rebuilding the walls, he spent three days resting. God instituted a day of rest for the Israelites to remember both Him and the time when they had been slaves and had no day of rest (see Deuteronomy 5:14, 15).

The human body needs rest in order to recover, heal, and grow. Exhaustion is dangerous, for our spiritual defenses are weaker at that time. Satan chose a time of physical exhaustion for Jesus to tempt Him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). An exhausted person does not have the energy to begin a project well, let alone complete one.

A well-rested person, on the other hand, has the strength of body and the clarity of mind to take on the Lord's task. To be sure, a sluggard is condemned (see Proverbs 6:9-11; compare Mark 14:37, 38). Yet God's servants need their rest in order to accomplish

His work. The modern "24/7" idea of activity is a recipe for disaster.

**4. How extensive was Nehemiah's survey of the damage? (vs. 13-15, not in lesson text)**

Nehemiah's survey was thorough (Neh. 2:13-15), including various gates and portions of wall. The text tells us that Nehemiah purposely did not tell the officials of the city or any of the religious rulers where he had gone or what he was planning to do (vs. 16). He knew that his planning needed to be comprehensive and complete before he presented his plan.

**5. To whom and how did Nehemiah finally present his plan, and what was the response? (vs. 17-18)**

After much careful consideration, Nehemiah was ready to present his plan to others. The ones he presented it to were the Jewish leaders mentioned at the end of verse 16, because they were the ones who would have been concerned about the city in the same way that Nehemiah was. He challenged them to look around and realize anew what the conditions around the city were like.

The word "waste" (in verse 17) means "parched and ruined," referring to that which has been destroyed. This was the overall condition of the city and the gates. Nehemiah's challenge was a straightforward call to get busy building the wall of Jerusalem. His reason was that the ruined conditions reflected badly upon them and their relationship with God. He said they were a disgrace, a cause for shame. Judah's national and spiritual heritage was being given a negative reputation. It was their honor that was at stake.

In order to help them accept this challenge, Nehemiah gave personal testimony of how God had been with him, directing him (v. 18). He probably recounted for them the series of events that had occurred since the time he had heard from Hanani and had begun praying earnestly about the situation. He especially wanted them to hear how the Lord had worked in the king's heart, causing him to let Nehemiah go, provide a military escort for him, and order the local people to help him with the needed building materials. God was leading this work. When

the people heard this and recognized the hand of God at work, their response was a readiness to get on with the task.

## CONCLUSION

Nehemiah comes across as an ideal leader of God's people. First, Nehemiah was concerned for others. Though he himself was a worldly success, having risen to an important office in the service of the Persian state, he remained concerned about his countrymen who were less well off. When he heard of the distress of his people in distant Jerusalem, he began to look for an opportunity to help. The New Testament likewise calls us to help others (see 1 John 3:17; etc.).

Second, Nehemiah was willing to step out on faith. By showing concern for his people before the Persian king, Nehemiah jeopardized his own rank and privileges. The New Testament calls us to do likewise (see Mark 10:29, 30).

Third, Nehemiah was willing to make sacrifices. Nehemiah voluntarily stepped down from his position in the royal court and traveled an enormous distance to serve God's people. The New Testament does not call every Christian to travel to a foreign land, but we are to live lives of sacrifice (Mark 12:43, 44; Acts 2:45).

Fourth, Nehemiah was a man of prayer. As a godly Jew, he was concerned about the fact that the holy city of Jerusalem, symbol of God's presence among His people, was in disarray. When his opportunity before King Artaxerxes presented itself, he first sent up an arrow prayer to God. But months of prayer by Nehemiah had prepared the way for his request before the king. And Nehemiah clearly saw that the unfolding opportunity was from the hand of God. Great Christian leaders are people of prayer, even when they are also people of action (Acts 20:36).

Fifth, Nehemiah took time to plan things out. He waited months for just the right time before making a request to the king about rebuilding. When he made the request, he knew just what he needed to ask for because he had thought things through. When he

arrived in Jerusalem, he took time to think and plan before speaking to others about his dreams. Planning ahead is not a failure to walk by faith, as Nehemiah's example shows us. Paul's work reveals him to be a man of planning (2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5).

Sixth, Nehemiah knew how to motivate others. He had no power by himself to build the wall of Jerusalem. He needed help and cooperation. But without manipulation he skillfully mobilized the people behind his plan. The fact that the community of faith joined him was confirmation that God had in fact raised up Nehemiah for this purpose. Today as then, God does not call all of His people to be super-duper motivational leaders as Nehemiah was. But we all can be good followers. Whether a leader or a follower, the prelude to action is personal holiness (1 Peter 1:13–16).

**Prayer** - Lord, thank You for godly leaders like Nehemiah who have the vision to see the tasks You would have them do and the courage to carry them out. Help us to have the same kind of passion that Nehemiah had. May we have also Nehemiah's zeal and wisdom to accomplish what You would have us do. In Jesus' name we ask this, amen. Thought to Remember God still honors courage.

**ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON** – Finishing the task. Study Nehemiah 4:1- 6:19 in anticipation of next week's lesson.

*Lesson by  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

NOTES:

Lined area for notes



Sunday, February 16, 2025

## Lesson 12 - "Finishing the Task" (Part I)

Lesson Text: **Psalm 71:1–6**

Background Scripture: **Nehemiah 4–6**

Devotional Reading: **Nehemiah 4:1–3, 6–9, 13–15; 6:15**

### **Nehemiah 4:1–3, 6–9, 13–15**

*1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. . . . . 6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work. 7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. . . . .*

*13 Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. 15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

### **Nehemiah 6:15**

*15 So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.*

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

As we saw last week, Nehemiah was the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes of Persia (reigned 464–424 B.C.). When Nehemiah heard about the condition of the city and its gates, he prayed to God and approached the king to seek permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild. Artaxerxes granted his request. As God’s chosen man, Nehemiah arrived to inspect the ruined walls and lead the people in a campaign to rebuild them.

Nehemiah 3, which occurs between last week’s text and today’s, shows us Nehemiah and his work crew in action. Great progress is made in building the wall, despite the anger of some neighboring officials. But the opposition is about to kick things up a notch!

### **TODAY’S AIM**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Describe how Nehemiah overcame opposition in rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls.
- Give an example of faith that overcomes adversity.
- Make a plan to identify, take charge of, and complete a project or ministry that is facing opposition.

### **Opposition (Nehemiah 4:1–3)**

1. **Why did Sanballat and Tobiah act with so much opposition to what Nehemiah and the Jews were doing (Nehemiah 4:1)?**

We first meet Sanballat in Nehemiah 2:10. He is governor of Samaria (confirmed in secular literature), and Tobiah was probably one of his closest advisers. They felt very threatened by

Nehemiah's presence and the project he was undertaking.

Opposition toward what is good and right starts in the heart. Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem to promote "the welfare of the children of Israel" (Nehemiah 2:10) draws Sanballat's initial displeasure. As the work to rebuild the walls proceeds, his displeasure turns to great anger. He does not want the city of Jerusalem to be strengthened, possibly because he wants to be governor of Judea as well as Samaria.

When we are engaged in God's work, we should not be surprised when opposition comes. The enemies of God will be angry at attempts to build Christ's kingdom (John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12).

## **2. Why should we expect opposition when working for God? How has God strengthened you to overcome opposition?**

A very real conflict exists between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. Satan (which means "adversary") uses his servants, both demonic and human, to try to interrupt the good that God's servants attempt to do. Since this may happen daily, we need to take precautions daily (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Those who opposed Nehemiah had vested interests in doing so. Christ also faced opposition from those who had vested interests that they were trying to protect: "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:48). If what we are doing is important enough for an enemy of the cross to oppose us, sometimes that can tell us that what we are doing is right!

## **3. In what ways did Sanballat mock the Jews publicly when he heard of their progress on the wall (vs. 2,3)?**

Now when Sanballat heard that the wall was progressing, he became furious and filled with rage and mocked with increased intensity. Sanballat expressed his disdain through a series of questions (4:2).

Sanballat's address was a public one probably given to the political group surrounding him as well as to

the army of Samaria. He obviously wielded a large amount of influence in the area and was determined to get everyone on his side in this situation. Mockery always seems to draw a following, and Sanballat proceeded with his questions. He referred to the Jews as feeble and implied they would never succeed in fortifying themselves. He mocked the idea that they would redevelop their worship system.

He then made fun of the fact that the Jews were trying to revive something meaningful out of a pile of burned rubbish. He implied that the Jews were totally naive if they felt for one moment that they could bring something good out of the mess they faced. His entire attitude was one of contempt, and it was echoed by his sidekick, Tobiah, who sounded much like a puppet figure instead of a man capable of independent thinking. He jeered that if even a little fox jumped up onto the wall, it would crumble back to the ground.

## **Determination (Nehemiah 4:6–9)**

Between verses 3 and 6 is a prayer of Nehemiah against the enemies. We notice in this prayer that Nehemiah directs his reaction to God, not to the enemies. The prayer looks like what we see at Jeremiah 18:23.

## **4. To what human reason did Nehemiah attribute the wall's progress (v. 6)?**

Having expressed his heart and mind to God, Nehemiah returned to the task at hand. With everyone busy working on the wall, it was not long before it was connected all the way around the city and up to half its designated height. Nehemiah 4:6 includes a pertinent reason for such success: "the people had a mind to work." The word translated "mind" means "heart." The hearts of the people were into this project, so they worked wholeheartedly.

Because they have a mind to work, they do not allow the attempted distractions to stop them from achieving their mission. They continue to move forward, setting their hearts on completing the work God has given them instead of wallowing in their difficulties.

We can see the value of teamwork as God's people join together in a single minded work. Everyone does

his or her part, and no part of the wall is left undone. Cooperation means that the wall goes up at a rapid pace.

**5. Where did the allied forces getting ready to attack Jerusalem come from (vs. 7,8)?**

We now see more enemies mentioned, namely the Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites. The large multitude of people mentioned here surrounded the city of Jerusalem. Samaria, Sanballat's territory, was to the north. The Arabs were to the south. The Ammonites were east, and the Ashdodites were west. Ashdod was one of the five Philistine cities near the coast of the Mediterranean.

The plan within this large confederacy was to carry out a direct attack on Jerusalem. The closing of the gaps in the wall indicated that the restoration process was moving along well. The anger level of the opposition grew immensely, and determination to put a stop to the project propelled these groups to action. Since Sanballat had failed in his attempts to verbally intimidate the Jews, he now had to call on his allies for assistance. The growing threat needed further attention.

**6. What did Nehemiah do with the people when he discovered the plan of the enemies to attack (v. 9)?**

While the enemy conspires, Nehemiah prepares to face the opposition by combining faith in God with action. The faith and action take the forms of prayer and setting a *watch*.

Before Nehemiah does anything else, he seeks God's protection and guidance. (See how Nehemiah prays in Nehemiah 1:5–11; 4:4, 5; 5:19; 6:9b, 14.) Having confidence in God's protection and favor does not rule out the obligation that the godly person has to watch out for the traps of the enemy. The Scriptures match together the ideas of watching and praying (see Matthew 26:41; 1 Peter 4:7).

God will protect those who watch as well as pray. It has been said that prayer without watchfulness is presumption and watchfulness without prayer is sinful self-confidence. The two truly work together to enable the worker to keep going in the face of opposition.

*To be continued...  
Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell  
Jesus Is All Ministries*





Sunday, February 23, 2025

## Lesson 13 - "Finishing the Task" (Part II)

Lesson Text: **Psalm 71:1–6**

Background Scripture: **Nehemiah 4–6**

Devotional Reading: **Nehemiah 4:1–3, 6–9, 13–15; 6:15**

### **Nehemiah 4:1–3, 6–9, 13–15**

*1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. . . . . 6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work. 7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. . . . .*

*13 Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. 15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

### **Nehemiah 6:15**

*15 So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.*

### **TODAY'S AIM**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- Describe how Nehemiah overcame opposition in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.
- Give an example of faith that overcomes adversity.
- Make a plan to identify, take charge of, and complete a project or ministry that is facing opposition.

### **Victory (Nehemiah 4:13–15; 6:15)**

The enemy's mocking does not discourage the workers in and of itself. But when fatigue and the threat of force is added, the people began to lose heart (vs. 10–12, not in today's text). So Nehemiah takes special action to reverse this morale problem.

- 1. Since the Jews did not have a standing army, how did Nehemiah arrange for their protection (v. 13)?**

Nehemiah shows his shrewdness in military tactics and human nature. He sees certain areas that need to be strengthened, and he does so. He supplies the weapons necessary for defense. Positioning those with weapons after their families provides another reason to work and defend the city together.

- 2. What challenge did Nehemiah offer after he organized the people to be ready to defend themselves (v. 14)?**

Nehemiah then issued a stirring challenge intended to inspire faith and courage in the face of possible danger. They did not need to fear but only to remember their God, who was great and awesome. They were to courageously fight in order to protect the ones they loved the most, including their brothers (probably all fellow Jews), sons, daughters, and



wives. Nehemiah was confident that as they fought, God would be the real Protector.

**3. Are the steps Nehemiah took to overcome ungodly opposition still valid today? Why, or why not?**

Before Nehemiah did anything, he brought the matter before God in prayer. This is still a valid first step when (and before) we face opposition. Next, Nehemiah set watchmen up in preparation for the enemy attack. We can serve as watchmen over our own character, attitudes, or actions; we should not give the enemy a valid reason to accuse us in these areas because of our own carelessness. A failure of vigilance invites disaster (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8; 1 Peter 5:8). Finally, as Nehemiah did with his people, we can encourage our fellow workers to stand fast in the face of opposition. With God’s help, we can be victorious.

**4. What happened when the enemy found out that the Jews were ready to face opposition (v. 15)?**

The planned surprise attack by Nehemiah’s enemies is no longer a surprise. So the enemies abandon their plan. It is difficult to assault a fortified position when the defenders are expecting an attack and are prepared to fight back. The sight of God’s people standing strong on the partially rebuilt wall, prepared to defend themselves against an attack, is enough to discourage the opposition.

Nehemiah’s tactics succeed, but he gives credit to God. This is not the first time God has caused His enemies to despair (Exodus 15:14–16; 23:27, 28; Deuteronomy 2:25). The focus of this and other texts is on what God achieves within a community of believers. It is evident that God is working through the people’s prayers and actions to protect and strengthen them. Knowing that God is working through them and that He has brought the enemies’ plan to nothing leads the Jews to return to work. They have confidence in God’s protection and provisions.

**5. How long did it take to complete the wall, and what were the important factors behind such success (Nehemiah 6:15)?**

The enemies said it couldn’t be done! “They are too feeble.” “It will never work.” “If a fox jumps on it, it will break down.” When the ridicule doesn’t work, the enemies contemplate using force, planning to attack the Jews. Their plan is frustrated and the wall is now finished. From start to finish, the entire project took just fifty-two days. When we realize all the obstacles that arose during that time, we discover it was amazing. The completion of this project in such a short time is a testimony to the power of God and the zeal of the workers.

The month of Elul corresponds with the latter part of August and the beginning of September on our calendar. The year is 444 BC. Nehemiah’s vision has become a reality—and we are less than halfway through the book of Nehemiah at this point!

Despite opposition that comes both from within and without (6:10–14), Nehemiah never loses sight of his mission and for whom he is working. Nehemiah will continue to seek the guidance of God through prayer. Nehemiah will continue to encourage his fellow workers all the way.

**Conclusion  
Finishing the Task**

The fruit of the efforts by Nehemiah and the workers brought glory to God (Nehemiah 6:16). The efforts resulted in emotional and physical security for the Judeans. Undoubtedly there was joy at accomplishing a task against tremendous odds (compare Ezra 3:10–13).

We have a wonderful example of godly and devout leadership in Nehemiah. He was a man of prayer who had his heart in God’s work. We see Nehemiah engaging in self-denying labor while inspiring others to do the same. He was steadfast in his work, not easily sidetracked. He depended on God and was ready to give Him the glory.

God has called the church to a tremendous task of strengthening its members and taking the gospel to a lost and dying world. It is important that the church be led by people who exemplify the characteristics of

Nehemiah. There will be opposition— there always has been—but as God’s men and women join together with the same goal in mind, we will be able to accomplish great things for the glory of God.

What has God called you to do? Whatever it is, do not let the size of the task or the amount of time it will take to complete it keep you from setting your heart and hand to it. No job is too big and no problem is too great when we are following God every step of the way. God has called us and equipped us to finish the tasks of the church despite the opposition.

### **Prayer**

Holy Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to Your people and to Your work. Without the assurance of Your love and guidance toward us, we would not be able to stand. Strengthen us to accomplish what You have called each of us to do. Cause our focus to remain on Your great character when we are faced with a difficult task. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Thought to Remember** - Focusing on God leads to victory!

### **Anticipating Next Week’s Lesson**

In preparation for next week’s lesson, you should study 1 John 3:11—24. The Golden Text is 1 John 3:14, and the subject is “The Test of Love.”

Consider the following questions in your studies:

- Why did Cain kill Abel?
- Why must believers love one another?
- How did Jesus show His love for His brothers?
- Why must we help brothers in need?
- How can we have confidence toward God?
- How are obedience and prayer connected?
- What is God’s command to us?
- Who helps us realize that God abides within us?

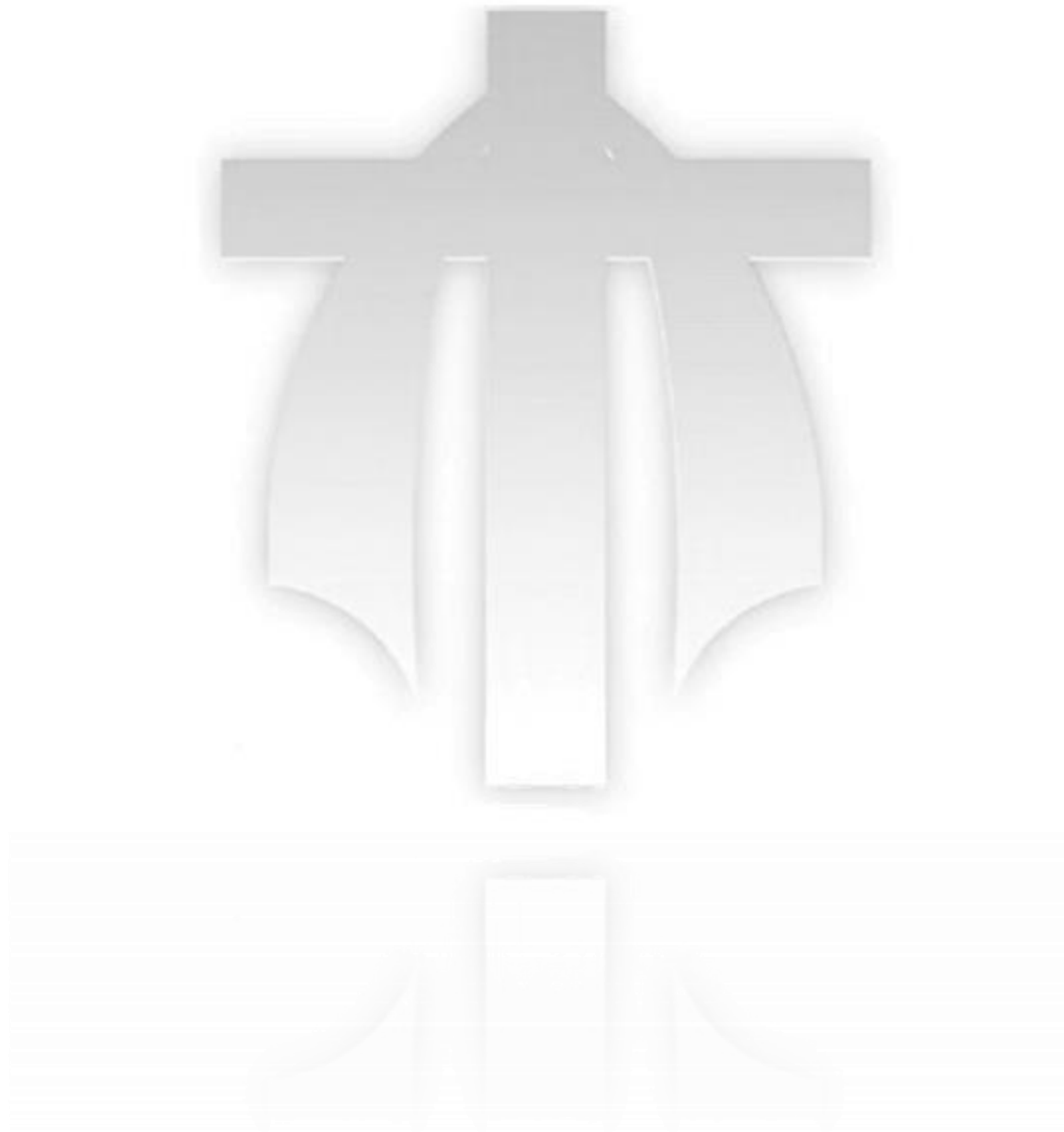
This lesson will teach that “attitudes make a difference.” Good studying!

Lesson summarized by Willie Ferrell  
Jesus Is All Ministries



# NOTES:

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