

Overcoming
Fear and
Discouragement

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WHAT AM I DOING?



You are about to begin a study which will revolutionize not only your approach to the Word of God, but also your understanding and comprehension of the Word. This is the consistent testimony of those who are using this series.

The New Inductive Study Series is the first series of its kind in that it is a 15- to 25-minute daily study that takes you systematically through the Bible, book by book, teaching you to observe the text and see for yourself what it says. The more you learn to carefully observe the text and to familiarize yourself with the context in which specific texts are presented, the closer you will come to an accurate and unbiased interpretation of God's Word. This, in turn, will help you correctly apply the truth of God's Word—and to find yourself transformed in the process.

As you go through this series, remember that it is an inductive survey of the various books of the Bible. The purpose of this series is to help you get a comprehensive overview of the whole counsel of God so that you will be better able to let Scripture interpret Scripture and to understand truth in the context of the Bible, book by book and in its entirety.

If you desire to expand and sharpen your study skills, we would like to recommend two things. One, purchase

the book *How to Study Your Bible* by Kay Arthur. Two, attend a Precept Ministries Institute of Training.

The Institutes are conducted throughout the United States, Canada, and in a number of other countries. You can attend classes of various lengths—from two hours to five full days, depending on the courses you elect to take. Whatever your choices, you will join the thousands who are absolutely awed at the way God has enriched their relationship with Him and deepened their understanding of His Word. For more information on the Precept Ministries Institute of Training, call our Information Department at (800) 763-8280, visit our website at www.precept.org, or fill out and mail the response card at the back of this book.

We don't know if you have ever used one of the books in our New Inductive Study Series before, so let us acknowledge that reading directions is sometimes difficult and hardly ever enjoyable! Most often, you just want to get started. Only if all else fails are you ready to tackle the instructions! We understand—we're not into details, either. But read "How to Get Started" before you begin. This is a vital part of getting started on the right foot! The pages are few...and they will help you immensely.

HOW TO GET STARTED...



FIRST

As you study the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, you will need four things in addition to this book:

1. A Bible you are willing to mark in. Marking is essential because it is an integral part of the learning process and will help you remember and retain what you learned. An ideal Bible for this purpose is *The New Inductive Study Bible (NISB)*. The *NISB*, available in the NAS version, comes in a single-column text format with larger, easy-to-read type, and is ideal for marking. The page margins are wide and blank for note taking.

The *NISB* is unique among all study Bibles in that it has instructions for studying each book of the Bible, but it does not contain any commentary on the text. The *NISB* isn't compiled from any particular theological stance since its purpose is to teach you how to discern truth for yourself through the inductive method of study. Inductive Bible study simply means that the Bible itself is one's primary source for study. (The various charts and maps that you will find in this study guide are taken from the *NISB*.) Whatever Bible you use, just know you will need to mark in it, which brings us to the second item you will need.

2. A fine-point, four-color ballpoint pen or various colored fine-point pens (such as Micron pens) for writing in your Bible. The Micron pens are best for this purpose. Office supply stores should have these.

3. Colored pencils or an eight-color Pentel pencil.

4. A composition notebook or loose-leaf notebook for working on your assignments and recording your insights.

SECOND

1. As you study this book, you'll find specific instructions for each day's study. The study should take you between 15 and 25 minutes a day. However, just know that the more time you can give to this study, the greater the spiritual dividends, and the greater your intimacy with the Word of God and the God of the Word. If you are doing this study within the framework of a class and you find the lessons too heavy, simply do what you can. To do a little is better than to do nothing. Don't be an all-or-nothing person when it comes to Bible study.


As a word of warning, you need to be aware that anytime you get into the Word of God, you enter into more intensive warfare with the devil (our enemy). Why? Every piece of the Christian's armor is related to the Word of God. And the enemy doesn't want you prepared for battle. Thus, the warfare! Remember that our one and only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and it is enough to fell the enemy.

To study or not to study is a matter of choice first, discipline second. It's a matter of the heart. On what or whom are you setting your heart? Get armed for war! And remember, victory is certain.

2. As you read each chapter, train yourself to think through the content of the text by asking the "5 W's and an

H”: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Posing questions like these and searching out the answers helps you see exactly what the Word of God is saying. When you interrogate the text with the 5 W’s and an H, you ask questions like these:

- a. **Who** are the main characters?
- b. **What** is the chapter about?
- c. **When** does this event or teaching take place?
- d. **Where** does this occur?
- e. **Why** is this being done or said?
- f. **How** did this happen?

3. The “when” of events or teachings is very important and should be marked in an easily recognizable way in your Bible. We do this by putting a clock (like the one shown here)  in the margin of our Bibles beside the verse where the time phrase occurs. Or you may want to underline references to time in one specific color. As a reminder, note on your key-word bookmark (which is explained next in this section) how you are going to mark time references in each chapter.

4. You will be told about certain key words that you should mark throughout this study. This is the purpose of the colored pencils and the colored pen. While this may seem a little time-consuming, you will discover that it is a valuable learning tool. If you will develop the habit of marking your Bible, you will find it will make a significant difference in the effectiveness of your study and in how much you retain as a result of your study.

A **key word** is an important word that is used by the author repeatedly in order to convey his message to his reader. Certain key words will show up throughout the book, while other key words will be concentrated in specific

chapters or segments of the book. When you mark a key word, you should also mark its synonyms (words that have the same meaning in a particular context) and any pronouns (*he, his, she, her, it, we, they, us, our, you, their, them*) in the same way you have marked the key word. Because some people have requested them, we will give you various ideas and suggestions in your daily assignments for how you can mark different key words.

Marking words for easy identification can be done by colors, symbols, or a combination of colors and symbols. However, colors are easier to distinguish than symbols. If you use symbols, we suggest you keep them very simple. For example, one of the key words in Esther is *Jew*. You could draw a star of David like this over **Jew** and color it blue. If a symbol is used in marking a key word, it is best for the symbol to somehow convey the meaning of the word.

As you begin this new venture, we recommend that you devise a color-coding system for marking key words that you decide to mark throughout your Bible. Then, when you glance at the pages of your Bible, you will have instant recognition of the words.

In marking the members of the Godhead (*which we do not always mark*), we use a triangle to represent the Father. We then color it yellow. Then, playing off the triangle, we mark the Son this way: **Jesus**, and the Holy Spirit this way: **Spirit**. We find that when you mark every reference to God and Jesus, your Bible becomes cluttered. However, since the Spirit is mentioned less and because many people do not have a thorough biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit, it is good to mark the references to the Spirit of God. Of course, mostly you will see references to God in the Old

Testament, but we wanted you to know what we do when we are studying other books of the Bible.

When you start marking key words, it is easy to forget how you are marking them. You may wish to use the bottom portion of the perforated card in the back of this book to write key words on. Mark the words the way you plan to mark them in your Bible and then use the card as a bookmark. Make one bookmark for words you are marking throughout your Bible, and a different one for any specific book of the Bible you are studying. Or record your marking system for the words you plan to mark throughout your Bible on a blank page in your Bible.

5. Because locations are important in historical books and they tell you “where,” you will find it helpful to mark locations in a distinguishable way in your study. Try double-underlining every reference to a location in green (grass and trees are green!). We suggest that you make a note on your key-word bookmark to mark locations. A map is included in this study so you can look up the locations mentioned in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in order to put yourself into context geographically.

6. Charts called EZRA AT A GLANCE, NEHEMIAH AT A GLANCE, and ESTHER AT A GLANCE are located at the end of each book. When you complete your study of each chapter of these books, record the main theme of that chapter on the appropriate chart. A chapter theme is a brief description or summary of the main theme or predominant subject, teaching, or event covered in that chapter.

When stating chapter themes, it is best to use words found within the text itself and to be as brief as possible. Make sure that you do them in such a way as to distinguish one chapter from another. Doing this will help you to remember what each chapter is about. In addition, it will

provide you with a ready reference if you desire to find something in the book rather quickly and without a lot of page turning.

If you develop the habit of filling out the AT A GLANCE charts as you progress through the study, you will have a complete synopsis of the book when you finish. If you have a *New Inductive Study Bible*, you will find the same charts in your Bible. If you record your chapter themes on the charts in your Bible and on the designated line at the head of each chapter in the text, you'll always have a quick synopsis of the chapter and the book.

7. Begin your study with prayer. Don't start without it. Why? Well, although you are doing your part to handle the Word of God accurately, remember that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. The words you are reading are absolute truth, given to you by God so that you can know Him and His ways more intimately. These truths are divinely understood.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10,11).

This is why you need to pray. Simply tell God you want to understand His Word so you can live accordingly. Nothing pleases Him more than obedience—honoring Him as God—as you are about to see.

8. Each day, when you finish your lesson, take some time to think about what you read, what you saw with your own eyes. Ask your heavenly Father how you can apply

these insights, principles, precepts, and commands to your own life. At times, depending on how God speaks to you through His Word, you might want to record these “Lessons for Life” in the margin of your Bible next to the text you have studied. Simply put “LFL” in the margin of your Bible, then, as briefly as possible, record the lesson for life that you want to remember. You can also make the note “LFL” on your key-word bookmark as a reminder to look for these when you study. You will find them encouraging...sometimes convicting...when you come across them again, and they will be a reminder of what God has shown you from His Word.

THIRD

This study is designed so that you have an assignment for every day of the week. This puts you where you should be—in the Word of God on a daily basis, grasping, systematizing, and utilizing truth. It’s revolutionary!

If you will do your study daily, you will find it more profitable than doing a week’s study in one sitting. Pacing yourself this way allows time for thinking through what you learn on a daily basis. However, whatever it takes to get it done, do it!

The seventh day of each week has several different features that differ from the other six days. These features are designed to aid in one-on-one discipleship, group discussions, and Sunday school classes. However, they are also profitable even if you are studying this book by yourself.

The “seventh” day is whatever day in the week you choose to think about and/or discuss your week’s study. On this day, you will find a verse or two for you to memorize and thus STORE IN YOUR HEART. This will help you

focus on a major truth or truths covered in your study that week.

To assist those using the material for discipleship, family devotions, or in a Sunday school class or a group Bible study, there are QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY. Whatever your situation, seeking to answer these questions will help you reason through some key issues in the study.

If you are using the study in a group setting, make sure the answers given are supported from the Bible text itself. This practice will help ensure that you are handling the Word of God accurately. As you learn to see what the text says, you will find that the Bible explains itself.

Always examine your insights by carefully observing the text to see what it *says*. Then, before you decide what the passage of Scripture *means*, make sure you interpret it in light of its context. Context is what goes with the text... the Scriptures preceding and following what is written. Scripture will never contradict Scripture. If it ever seems to contradict the rest of the Word of God, you can be certain that something is being taken out of context. If you come to a passage that is difficult to understand, reserve your interpretations for a time when you can study the passage in greater depth.

Your discussion time should cause you to see how to apply these truths to your own life. What are you now going to embrace as truth? How are you going to order your life? Are you going to not only know these truths but live accordingly?

The purpose of a THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK is to help you apply what you've learned. We've done this for your edification. In this, a little of our theology will inevitably come to the surface; however, we don't ask that

you always agree with us. Rather, think through what is said in light of the context of the Word of God. You can determine how valuable it is.

Remember, books in The New Inductive Study Series are survey courses. If you want to do a more in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible, we suggest you do a Precept Upon Precept Bible study course on that book. The Precept studies are awesome but require five hours of personal study a week.

EZRA

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE AND RESTORING THE PEOPLE



Ezra is one of the most encouraging books of the entire Bible. In your study of this book, you will see not only God's hand clearly moving in the affairs of men as He lovingly, fairly, and justly performs His purpose, but also how man responds to God's leading and instructions.

You will see God, through His prophets, announcing His future plans hundreds of years in advance; predicting the reigns of kings and kingdoms even before they exist; pre-declaring a precise time schedule that is kept to the very minute; and stirring the hearts of all kinds of people in order to accomplish His will.

In this study, you'll be warned of the penalties that result from disobedience. You'll be encouraged by the lifestyles of those who know His Word and keep it. You'll be comforted by the overwhelming evidence that God continues to work mightily among His creation, regardless of man's responses. And at the same time, you'll be challenged to study His Word, learn His commandments, listen to His voice, and walk in His ways.

On the surface, Ezra appears to be a book about obedience—man's responsibility—but it has a deeper message about the unwavering faithfulness of a sovereign God whose commitment and compassion for His people never changes. His heart is to have an intimate

relationship with His people—those who believe in Him. If that relationship is broken by our rebellion against His will, His passion is for the restoration of that relationship!

Ezra was a man who “had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Ezra’s passion for knowing God caused even the nonbelievers of his day to recognize that “the good hand of his God *was* upon him” (Ezra 7:9). He understood the absolute necessity for man to know the Word of God and to respond appropriately to its commands. Ezra stated it this way: “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against those who forsake Him” (Ezra 8:22b).

When we seek Him, He is favorably disposed. When we forsake Him, His power and anger are against us. Yes, He is there moving and working on our behalf. And yes, what we know and what we do does make a difference. Let’s begin seeking Him through our study of the book of Ezra. Come study with me and experience His favor.

DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHAT CHOICE I MAKE?



Have you ever made a bad decision and felt like God had distanced Himself from you because of that incorrect choice? Have you ever wanted to just give up? To quit? Have you ever thought it would be impossible to get it all back together again?

Is there any hope? Any way out? Can your relationship with God and others be restored? Will God forgive you? Does God still want to have an intimate relationship with you?

God's answer to all of these questions is a resounding "Yes!"



DAY ONE

Read Ezra chapter 1, asking the "5 W's and an H" kinds of questions. (You were instructed how to do this in the "How to Get Started" section on page 8. If you have not read that section, stop and do so now. It will be very helpful to you as you complete the daily assignments.)

You may have asked some questions such as the following:

☞ **Who** is Cyrus, king of Persia?

- ☞ **Who** is Jeremiah?
- ☞ **What** did Jeremiah say that is now being fulfilled by Cyrus?
- ☞ **What** “house” is God referring to that He has appointed Cyrus to rebuild for Him?
- ☞ **Why** were all the articles from the house of the Lord carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of Nebuchadnezzar’s gods?
- ☞ **Who** is Nebuchadnezzar?
- ☞ **Who** were the exiles? **Why** were they exiled?
- ☞ **Who** sent them into exile? **When** did they go into exile? **How** long were they to be in exile?

Since the answers to some of these questions are not found in the text of Ezra itself, we will look for them in other books of the Bible. Discovering these answers will help us establish the historical setting in which the book of Ezra was written. All of your assignments this week are designed to help you lay a solid historical foundation not only for Ezra, but also for your future studies in the books of Nehemiah and Esther.

Let’s complete today’s time together by reviewing some basic biblical history that will help you understand the background of this book. This background will prove very helpful in understanding Ezra. We will clearly see why the Israelites went into captivity.

Let’s begin by seeing how the nation of Israel, the people who are in exile, came into being. First of all, God chose a man named Abram (later called Abraham) and promised him three things:

- 1) To give him a land (often referred to as “the Promised Land” and later to be called “Israel”)
- 2) To make him a great nation (later to be called the nation of Israel)
- 3) To give him a seed (Jesus Christ—Galatians 3:16) through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham had a son named Isaac who had a son named Jacob. God changed Jacob’s name to “Israel.” Israel (the person from whom the land and the nation derived its name) had 12 sons who became the “12 tribes of Israel.”

Because of a famine in the land, the nation of Israel ended up in Egypt, in slavery to a pharaoh. God chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of that bondage of slavery (see the book of Exodus) and eventually took the Israelites into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua (see the book of Joshua). While en route to the Promised Land, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). Later, He gave them some other laws, ordinances, and statutes that were designed to help them live their daily lives as a chosen nation for God (the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers).

During the time of Moses, God instructed him to build a portable tabernacle where the people could worship Him. God would also manifest His presence among the people in the form of a Shekinah glory cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. That cloud of glory would come down and rest or reside in the Holy of Holies section, which was a part of this tabernacle worship facility.

Many years later, the nation of Israel decided they wanted a king like all the other nations around them. God

granted their request and gave them a king named Saul (1 Samuel 10). When Saul died, David became the king of all Israel (2 Samuel 2).

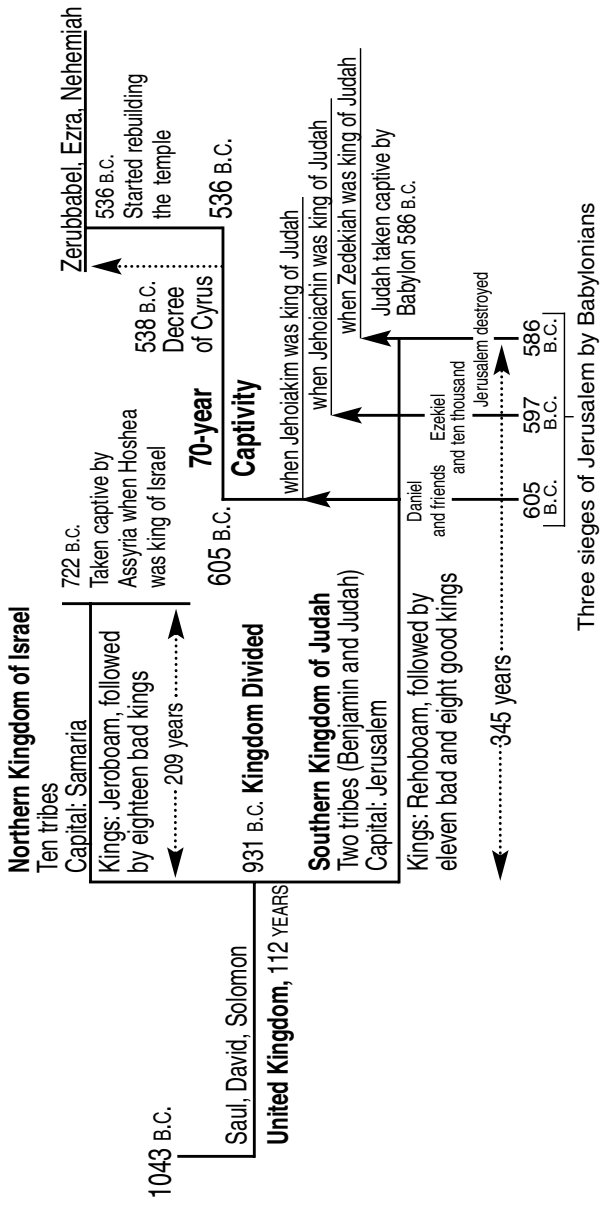
David wanted to replace the tabernacle with a more permanent place of worship, a “house for God.” He wanted to build a temple in Jerusalem, the capital of the nation of Israel. God would not allow David to build Him a temple, but allowed David’s son Solomon to do it (2 Samuel 7). Solomon completed the construction of the temple in 959 B.C. Then in 931 B.C., Solomon died and the united kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms, the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms, over a dispute about taxation. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) was comprised of ten of the tribes of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) had two tribes.

Look at the chart entitled ISRAEL’S DIVISION AND CAPTIVITY (page 25). Beginning with the date 931 B.C., locate these dates so that you may become familiar with this chart. This will help you understand Israel’s history in light of the book of Ezra.

Notice on the chart that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. For centuries God had pleaded with the Northern Kingdom to turn from their idolatry and immorality, but they would not listen to His messengers. They made a choice which left God with no other choice but to punish them for their disobedience. Assyrian captivity was the consequence of their sin.

Now notice on the chart that the Southern Kingdom of Judah followed in the footsteps of its sister and was taken into Babylonian captivity. This captivity, however, was in three distinct sieges. The first siege was in 605 B.C., the second in 597 B.C., and the third in 586 B.C. Also notice on the chart that the captivity was to last 70 years beginning in

Israel's Division and Captivity



605 B.C., the time of the first siege. You will also see that Jerusalem was totally destroyed in 586 B.C., including the temple that Solomon had built and completed in 959 B.C.

What did the Southern Kingdom do that caused God to allow it to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians? Was it because of idolatry and immorality like the Northern Kingdom? Or was it for other reasons? We will look at that tomorrow.



DAY TWO

Today we will continue to look at the historical setting for the book of Ezra. Read Leviticus 25:1-7. This is one of the many ordinances or statutes that God set before the children of Israel. In your notebook, as briefly as possible, record the main points of God's instruction according to this ordinance. (See the "How to Get Started" section for an explanation of the notebook. It would be good to go back and read this section if you have skipped over it. It contains vital information that you'll need to benefit from this study.)

Now read Leviticus 26:27-35. Record in your notebook what God said He would do to the sons of Israel if they did not obey Him. Be sure to include in your list what would happen to their land and to their sanctuaries.

According to the passage you just read, disobedience to the clear instructions of God has severe consequences. Read Leviticus 26:40-45 and make a list of what God wanted the punishment to do in their hearts and attitudes. Pay particular attention to the long-range commitment to His people that God clearly states in this passage. Note what He says He will not do to His chosen people, the Israelites.

All the facts that you've just observed from these three passages will help you understand what the children of Israel had done wrong and why God had to discipline them. However, we have to gather some more information to make the picture totally clear. Tomorrow we will lay a few more foundation stones in this historical background.

DAY THREE

Read Jeremiah 25:1-12. Jeremiah was a prophet of God during the time when the Southern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. As you read these verses, underline the phrase *you have not listened*¹ with a red pen. (If you don't have a red one, use any color.) Also, make a list of the truths you learn from these verses. Make sure that you answer the following questions in your list:

- ☞ Did the sons of Israel listen to Jeremiah? Did they obey what God had said through him?
- ☞ Whom did God say He would send against them to destroy them and make their land desolate?
- ☞ According to verse 9, how did God describe Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon?
- ☞ What purpose was Nebuchadnezzar accomplishing for God?
- ☞ How long would the children of Israel serve the king of Babylon?
- ☞ When the end of the captivity came, what did God say He would do to the king of Babylon?




 DAY FOUR

We've seen what law the Israelites failed to obey. We've seen what punishment God was forced to invoke. And we have seen whom God was going to use to discipline His chosen people. Now today let's see how God's servant, Nebuchadnezzar, executed the judgment of God.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. In your notebook, record the answers to the following:

- ☞ What do you learn about God from this passage?
- ☞ What do you learn about Zedekiah, the king, all the officials of the priests, and the people?
- ☞ What happened to the house of God, to all its articles, and to the wall of Jerusalem?
- ☞ What happened to those who escaped the sword?



 DAY FIVE

Obviously the children of Israel had disobeyed many of God's ordinances, statutes, and laws, but specifically they had disobeyed the one regarding the sabbath rest for the land. For 490 years they had not allowed the land to rest every seventh year, thus the accumulated time of rest due the land was 70 years. God would send His people into Babylonian captivity to collect that which was due. But what would happen when the 70 years were over? What would God do then?

Today, read Jeremiah 29:1-14. In your notebook, make a list of God's promises from these verses and answer the following:

- ☞ What does He promise for those who seek Him?
- ☞ Is He through with the children of Israel?
- ☞ What does He tell them to do even in the midst of their time of punishment?
- ☞ Does He have a future plan for them?
- ☞ Once the punishment for sin is complete, what is God's desire for His children?

Now then, think about each of these questions and apply it personally to your own relationship with God. For example, what does God promise you if you seek Him? If you do sin and disobey God, is He through with you? Are you to pray to Him in the midst of your chastisement? Does He leave you during this time of punishment? Does God have a future plan for you? Is restoration His desire for you?

In light of what you have learned from the Word of God, if you sin, is it over? Finished? What is your part?


DAY SIX

Today, read Isaiah 44:24–45:7. Mark every reference to Cyrus in a distinctive way by drawing a circle around his name and any pronoun that refers to him. Observe what you learn about him. What would Cyrus do? Make a list of these facts in your notebook.

Isaiah spoke this prophecy regarding Cyrus 175 years before Cyrus was even born! God was raising up another servant to perform His will in the history of man! In 539 B.C. Cyrus, king of Persia, and Darius the Mede, conquered Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and set the stage for the release of the children of Israel.

With all the information you gained this week about the historical setting, read 2 Chronicles 36:22,23 and Ezra 1:1-4. Now you can see that Ezra is a continuation of the story about the children of Israel, God's chosen people.

To end today's assignment and this week's homework, you need to do one more thing. Go back to Day One and review the questions that came out of Ezra chapter 1 to see if you answered them all. Review your lists in your notebook for the answers.

DAY SEVEN



Store in your heart: Jeremiah 29:11.

Read and discuss: Ezra 1; Leviticus 25:1-7; 26:27-35, 40-43; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Isaiah 44:24-45:7.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- ☞ Who took the Northern Kingdom into captivity? What year did that occur?
- ☞ What were the dates of the three stages of the Babylonian captivity?
- ☞ How long did the Babylonian captivity last? Under what siege did the time of captivity begin?
- ☞ In Leviticus 25:1-7, what did God tell the children of Israel to do with the land they were promised and were about to enter?
- ☞ According to Leviticus 26:27-35, what did God say He would do if the children of Israel disobeyed this ordinance? What will God do to you if you disobey His ordinances?

- ☞ According to Jeremiah, how long would the captivity last? What would God do at the end of this period of time?
- ☞ Did God fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem?
- ☞ What did you learn about the character of God from Leviticus 26:40-43? What must the people of Judah do for the sin of disobedience? What must you do if you sin?
- ☞ From Jeremiah 29:10-14, what did God promise the children of Israel He would do at the end of the 70 years of captivity? What kind of plans does God have for His children? In these verses God promises that when they call to Him, He will "listen" to them. How does this compare to what they would not do when God sent His prophets? Are you listening to God?
- ☞ When you read Isaiah 44:24–45:7, what did you learn about Cyrus? When was this prophecy given to Isaiah? When did Cyrus, king of Persia, conquer Babylon? How many years are between those two events?
- ☞ According to Ezra chapter 1, did God do what He said He would do, when He said He would do it?
- ☞ What are the consequences of disobedience?
- ☞ Does God discipline those who disobey? Is His discipline always immediately after the act of disobedience?
- ☞ Does God still discipline His followers who disobey? Whom could He use in His discipline? Believers? Unbelievers? Both?

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

God has given us the Bible so that we may know His commandments, statutes, ordinances, and laws. If we know His Word, we can obey it! The more we know and understand His principles and precepts, the more likely we will be to make the right choices. Our responsibility is to know His Word, choose to trust Him in what He says, and choose to obey what He tells us to do.

God has also given us the Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, and teach us all things. God has given us everything we need in order for us to know what He wants us to do, to think, and to say. Our problem is that sometimes we just make bad decisions. Sometimes it's because we don't know any better. Sometimes it's because we just want to do what's right in our own eyes. We know what to do, but we just choose not to do it. Sometimes we just don't "listen" to His voice or to those messengers He sends our way.

God will go to great lengths to bring us back to the point of obedience. Sometimes He uses unbelievers to accomplish His will. He loves us enough to create and destroy kings and kingdoms and even move us from place to place, if that is what it takes to get us to listen. He faithfully does His part. He desires fellowship with us...whatever the cost on our part or His. His desire is that we confess our sin, change our mind about what we have done, turn from that type of behavior, and return to a life of obedience. Even when we've made a bad choice, we can still make the right choice.