

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 1 **The Decree of Cyrus, King of Persia**

Point to Emphasize: We should expect answers to prayers, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Reading Reference: Ezra 1—2

Memory Verse: You will pray to Him, and He will hear you... (Job 22:27a)

Story Sample

We have had some interesting stories recently about Daniel. Which one did you like best? (See how the children answer.) Our memory verse from last week was Daniel 6:10b. Who can tell me what that verse says? (And three times daily he knelt on his knees and prayed and gave thanks before his God...) That's right! It is about Daniel praying. Now, if we prayed three times every day for around seventy years, what should we expect? AN ANSWER!!! Yes, we should expect God to answer. Daniel was surely expecting God to answer his prayers and to fulfill His Word concerning the children of Israel returning to their land. And today we will begin the story of how God answered those prayers. But how He answered those prayers will surprise you.

During this period of history in the Old Testament, there were kings who ruled vast areas of lands and people. Today we have different countries on the earth—like the United States, Canada, and Mexico. But when Daniel was praying there were kings with kingdoms. He was in Babylon. This was the Babylonian Empire. They were the ones who took the children of Israel captive. Then a king from another empire came and conquered them. The whole area now became part of the Persian Empire and it was ruled by King Cyrus. It was through this king that God answered Daniel's prayer and fulfilled what He had promised in His Word.

Now, King Cyrus was not an Israelite and he did not worship God. But he was a most powerful king and God used him. Cyrus made a proclamation—an official public announcement throughout all his kingdom—and put it into writing. He declared that Jehovah, the God of heaven, had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, and that He had charged Cyrus to build His house in Jerusalem. WOW! This is some declaration. Let's consider it a little more.

So, was Cyrus claiming that he had won all the wars and conquered all the peoples to gain such a huge empire? (Let the children discuss this.) No, Cyrus gave all the credit to God. Many kings would never have made this kind of proclamation. Most kings would have said, "I, the greatest king, have conquered so many peoples with my powerful army so that now I rule over such a great empire!" They would have taken all the credit for themselves. But, Cyrus the king of Persia, did something amazing. He said that God had given this great empire to him.

And he did something even more amazing! He proclaimed that he would build God a house in Jerusalem and declared that any of the children of Israel under his rule were free to leave and return to Jerusalem to build. This was the answer to Daniel's prayer. Daniel had been praying around seventy years and now God was answering those prayers. This was the fulfillment of His promise in His Word! Can you believe God used a great powerful king who did not even worship him and was not one of His people to do this?? Well, He did!! God is so wise and faithful to answer our prayers!

God does answer prayer! *[Storyteller, include a simple story of how God answered your prayer.]*

Sometimes we expect God to answer our prayer right after we pray to Him. But often, like in the story of Daniel, prayers are answered after a long period of time and in ways we don't expect.

I hope all of us would talk to God every day. Maybe when you are older you will be able to share your stories of how God answered your prayers.

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 2
Response of the Children of Israel Led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua

Point to Emphasize: We can be those who do things willingly.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1—2; 3:1-6

Memory Verse: Your people will offer themselves willingly... (Psalm 110:3a)

Story Sample

Many among the children of Israel were excited when they heard Cyrus's proclamation. Now they would be free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God. What excitement there was among those willing to return!

One time our teacher announced that there was going to be a contest in the school, and whichever class won the contest would go on a field trip! We were all so excited! Participating in the contest, though, meant that each one had to give up some free time each week. We were all so excited that we willingly gave our time for this contest. *[Storyteller, insert an example of how you or someone willingly gave.]*

The children of Israel were also excited and willing to return to Jerusalem to rebuild. They could not wait to return to their own country and to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God. Forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty (42,360) among the children of Israel who were in the Persian Empire volunteered to return. That is a lot of people! This means that they would leave their jobs, friends, relatives, and houses. They would not have the same easy kind of living that they had in the Persian Empire. Everything in Jerusalem had been destroyed 70 years before, but they were still excited! These ones wanted to return!

King Cyrus had also declared that any one of God's people who remained in Persia could support the work of rebuilding by willingly giving silver, gold, cattle, and other goods. Many of the Israelites responded willingly to give. The leaders of God's people rose up, and all those around them gave vessels of silver, gold, cattle, precious things, and goods! Then King Cyrus brought out all the vessels of the house of Jehovah. Many of these vessels had been taken 70 years before by another king who destroyed God's house in Jerusalem and took the people captive. There were five thousand and four hundred vessels of gold and silver. Cyrus gave them all back to those returning to build up God's house. He returned them for worshipping God in the house of Jehovah.

Then in the seventh month, they all gathered in Jerusalem to build and began to serve and worship God.

This story makes me wish I could have been among those who left captivity in the Persian Empire and willingly returned to build the house of God! We may not be captives to the Persian Empire now, but there are many ways we can show our willingness today. Have you ever gone with your parents to clean the meeting hall or arrange the chairs? Many times children may not want to help with certain tasks or responsibilities, but these tasks are real opportunities to prove that we are willing. We can go and we should go with our parents and help. It would be great if all the families could rise up together and be willing to complete these responsibilities together. Then we would be like the children of Israel who willingly volunteered to rebuild the house of God!

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 3

The Plan Was Carried Out According to Instructions

Point to Emphasize: We can be those who follow instructions given by God and by the ones who lead and supervise us.

Reference Reading: Ezra 3:1-6

Memory Verse: Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven... (Ezra 7:23a)

Story Sample

It was wonderful that those who returned to Jerusalem had such a good attitude and helped willingly! But sometimes, just being willing isn't enough. Often we need instructions so that we can be helpful. Just imagine thousands of people willing to build with no instructions. It would be chaos!

Where would they start? What materials would they use? How would they know what goes where? Where do you think the children of Israel got the exact instructions on how to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem? They got their instructions from the Bible! They were able to go back and look in the law of Moses to find exactly how the first temple had been built. They did not come up with their own way of doing things. They went back to the Bible to do everything exactly as God had instructed years back.

They began by building the altar so that they could worship God. Then they held the Feast of Tabernacles, to present their offerings up to God. This was also "as it is written." This instruction was in the Bible, the Word of God. For 70 years they had not worshipped God according to the instructions. But now they followed Jeshua and Zerubbabel to go back to God's Word.

Many times we don't pay attention to instructions. So often a teacher gives an assignment but then when you turn the assignment in, it turns out that you did it wrong because you did not take care of the instructions. *[Storyteller, give your own example of this. In your example encourage the children that when we follow instructions we will see the best results.]* It is too easy for us to think that we "know how" to do something so we do not pay any attention to instructions. But the children of Israel who returned to build the house of God went back to the instructions.

This was not a building project that could be done in a week or a month. This was going to take them at least a few years. They not only needed to see the instructions God had given, but the work could only go well if there were ones to direct and supervise. During the first year of work Jeshua and Zerubbabel took the lead to meet this need. As the building work was going to continue onto the second year, they needed to appoint others to supervise. Moving forward, everyone from the tribe of Levi over 20 years old was to help with the oversight of the work on the house of God.

Sometimes it is not so easy to be under someone's direction. But we need to learn that even as we grow up we will most likely be in situations where we are under someone's supervision. Have you ever wondered why we have lunch or recess monitors at school? Why do we have crosswalk guards? *[Bring in a discussion showing that without supervision we will not always conduct ourselves as we should and will result in getting into trouble.]*

I hope that we can see that by reading the Bible, we can learn who God is and how He wants us to behave and do things. God has commanded many things for us. God has told us how He wants us to respond to our parents. God has told us that we need to love one another. God has told us that we need to forgive one another. If we follow God's instruction according to what we see in the Bible and follow the ones God has appointed to direct and supervise us, we will grow in the best way!

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 4 **The Rebuilding of God's House**

Point to Emphasize: We can be those who encourage and strengthen others instead of being those who trouble and discourage others.

Reading Reference: Ezra 3:8, 10-14; 4:1-5, 24; 5:1—6:15

Memory Verse: Therefore comfort one another, and build up each one the other...
(1 Thessalonians 5:11a)

Story Sample

When the Israelites first began to rebuild God's house, it was a big deal! They were full of praise, and some even shouted for joy. Others were so touched about the rebuilding that they wept. The Bible says that the weeping and shouting were both so loud that you couldn't tell them apart! It was such an important and special thing to God's people that they cried out in all these ways.

But there were some people that weren't so happy about the rebuilding. They were some of the inhabitants of the land, and they wanted to cause trouble for God's people. So instead of helping with the building, they made trouble. The Israelites did their best to turn these people away, but the ones who trouble them in building did not stop. They really affected the Israelites, too; the Bible says they "weakened the hands of the people of Judah." That means they discouraged them; they made it harder for them to work well.

Have you ever been in a situation like this? Where you are really excited to do something, but someone comes along and discourages you? Recently a group of children were having a good time singing some songs. They had been enjoying themselves for a while, but then another child came in late. Instead of joining in with the others, this child started making faces and making fun of the songs. This discouraged the other children, and some lost their joy in singing.

That is kind of what happened to God's people who were rebuilding. The ones who trouble them in building discouraged them and made it harder to build. They would not leave them alone, either. They even wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes accusing God's people and saying that they would rebel against the king if he let them keep building. The accusations were not true, but the king believed them anyway and he ordered the building work to stop.

The work stopped for quite a while—maybe even as long as sixteen years! The Israelites were weakened and discouraged, so God sent in two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to strengthen His people. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied about the rebuilding of God's house, and eventually through them the Israelites were strengthened to begin working again.

By the time the building work began again, there was a new king, a king named Darius. King Darius had some questions about the building work, and so he looked into the situation and learned that King Cyrus had given permission for this rebuilding work a long time ago. Once he learned that, King Darius issued his own decree. He would do as King Cyrus had ordered and allow the Israelites to build. He even made sure that the ones who were rebuilding God's house got all the supplies they needed. This was a big support, and because of this support, the Israelites were able to finish their work—God's house was finally rebuilt!

I told you the story about the children who were singing the song, and how one boy became a distraction and made everyone a little disheartened, but there is a little more to that story. Even

though the boy was troubling everyone, there was another boy who did not let himself get bothered. This boy was still so excited to sing. He did the hand motions happily and sang with a joyful, loud voice. Because he acted that way, the other children were able to enjoy singing again, too. Eventually, even the misbehaving boy joined in the singing.

We all want to be those who are able to do our work and accomplish our goals, even if others are trying to discourage us. But sometimes we need a little help. The Israelites had to stop building for a while, but because there were some who encouraged and strengthened them, they were able to rebuild again—all the way until the work was done!

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 5
Ezra—A Scribe who Taught God’s Law to the Children of Israel

Point to Emphasize: It is important for us, as God’s people, to know God’s Word.

Reading Reference: Ezra 7

Memory Verse: For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah and to do it and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. (Ezra 7:10)

Story Sample

A good number of years after the return from Babylon to Jerusalem, after the house of God was rebuilt under Zerubbabel’s leadership, God put it into the heart of Ezra, a scribe (or teacher of God’s law) to go up to Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt, but now the people needed to learn God’s way of doing things. Up to this point, they had been learning the Babylonian ways, so they needed to be taught God’s ways. Ezra saw that there was a need for someone to go to teach God’s law to the people, so he set his heart to go.

Ezra realized that the first return was not complete. Zerubbabel had known how to govern and was very helpful in the first return to rebuild the temple. The children of Israel had returned to the right place. They were not in Babylon anymore, they were in Jerusalem. They were rebuilding the house of God. But they were still behaving like the Babylonians because they did not know God’s law. They did not know how to behave according to God’s law. So, now Ezra realized that there was the need for someone who was skilled in the law of God to help the people know God’s Word. Not only to know the Law in a general way but according to what God had spoken. Ezra was able to understand and teach God’s word, so he volunteered to go to the king, Artaxerxes.

It’s important to learn and know what God says in His Word. I’m sure you will all be so happy and grateful one day for all the things you have learned from your parents, children’s meeting serving ones, and others who love God. I know I am! I can look back at many times I have learned something in the Word because of someone teaching me.

I’ll share with you one of the moments where I realized my mom was teaching me God’s Word. One day I did something wrong to my mom. I spoke back to her in a very rude way. That night, when I went to bed, she sat down with me and read the Bible verse “Honor your father and your mother...that your days may be extended” (Exodus 20:12). In this verse we see that God expects us to honor our parents. There is a promise in that verse—if I honor, my days will be extended (I will have a long life)...So my mom was showing me the Bible in the same way that Ezra opened God’s law to the children of Israel. We all need someone to come and open God’s Word to us. *[Storyteller, insert your example of receiving the help of someone teaching you God’s Word and its meaning to you.]*

So, Ezra went to the king and appealed to him to grant his request (Ezra 7:6), to give many of the Jews in his empire the freedom to go back to the land of their fathers. And the king granted Ezra his request. Though the king did not worship God, he respected Ezra’s God and believed Ezra was going on behalf of God. The king granted him to go and gave him a letter, allowing him to go to teach the Israelites. He knew that Ezra was going with the wisdom of God. The king also offered silver and gold to Ezra so that the people in Jerusalem would have the money to buy everything needed in their worship to God. He weighed out into their hands all the silver and gold from the children of Israel and from the king. In today’s money, it would be worth over 200 million dollars! The king trusted Ezra to act according to God in His Word. So, Ezra left for

Jerusalem. We will later hear more of the things Ezra did in Jerusalem to teach the law to the children of Israel.

We, as God's people, need to know God's law like Ezra did. We need to know who God is, what He wants us to do, and how He wants us to behave. So, God will always give us someone who can come and teach us. I want to encourage you to be like Ezra this week. Maybe after you memorize your verse, you could teach it to someone else—a friend, a brother or sister, or your mom or dad.

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 6
Nehemiah the Cupbearer—His Unselfish Care for God’s People

Point to Emphasize: We can volunteer to help others instead of being selfish.

Reference Reading: Nehemiah 1—2

Memory Verse: What is desirable in a man is his kindness... (Proverbs 19:22a)

Story Sample

We have heard how many of the children of Israel returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the house of God. But not all returned to their homeland. Many like Ezra stayed in the Persian Empire for a time. Nehemiah was such a one. He knew many who had gone back to rebuild, and among them were even some of his close family. Through them, he received reports of how the rebuilding work was going. Even though he had not returned, he cared deeply for his God, his homeland, and the rebuilding work.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer of the king. As a trusted cupbearer, He served the king for many years and took drinks to him multiple times a day. So, even though he was not a counselor or an official to the king, he saw the king all the time. The king thought of Nehemiah as a pleasant person, because he was never sad in the king’s presence.

For a while, the rebuilding work went well, so Nehemiah received good reports from those he knew in Jerusalem. But one day, some from Jerusalem returned and told him horrible news. Things there were in a terrible state! The wall of Jerusalem had been broken down, and its gates burned with fire by people who opposed them. When Nehemiah heard this, he sat down and wept, and he prayed to God! Some grown men may cry now and then, but for a man to weep means that the most awful thing has happened! This horrible news made Nehemiah weep!

Nehemiah had to carry on his service to the king in this condition. He stopped weeping, but in his heart, there was such a sadness that his face and countenance showed the pain he felt. When he went to bring the drink to the king, the king asked him, “Why is your face sad, since you are not ill? This is nothing other than sadness of heart.” Then Nehemiah told the king the terrible report he had received. The king said, “What do you request?” Nehemiah took this opportunity to ask the king to send him back to Jerusalem and join the work of rebuilding the wall and its gates, and the king granted his requests.

Once, I was with a group of teenagers who volunteered for some hard work. There had been an earthquake and a lot of brick buildings had come down. The bricks were valuable for rebuilding but all the cement that held them into the wall of the building had to be chipped off. So, a group of us volunteered to sit in the sun all day and chip cement off bricks. Does that sound fun and exciting? NO! It was hard work and we had volunteered to do it all day when we were off from school. Can you believe that? Instead of being teenagers who slept in late and hung out or did fun things with friends on Saturday, we volunteered to chip cement off bricks. No one gave us an award or came from a TV station to show what great kids we were...No one even provided lunch for us. We brought our lunches from home. We did not even have the thought that we were super kids for doing this. We just wanted to help those whose homes were ruined by the earthquake, and this was the small thing we could do. *[Storyteller, tell your own story of volunteering.]*

Nehemiah took the opportunity to volunteer to help in the hard work of rebuilding! He was not a lazy or selfish person. He knew that going would include hard physical work. A selfish person would have remained in the comfortable life at the king's palace. But Nehemiah loved God, his country, and Jerusalem with its temple more than himself. Don't you want to be like him? I do! And even now we can be those who volunteer in the little things. Who volunteers to clean up the house when people are coming to dinner? Who volunteers to help set the table? Who volunteers to go to bed on time? See, there are so many ways that we can practice to be like Nehemiah today. And if we practice now, we will grow up to be teenagers who volunteer to help others. We won't have a habit of being selfish but instead, we will grow up to be Nehemiahs.

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 7

The Rebuilding of the Wall

Point to Emphasize: We can be those who finish our work.

Reference Reading: Nehemiah 3—4, 6; 12:27-43

Memory Verse: ...This work was done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:16b)

Story Sample

Last week, we heard that the king granted Nehemiah's request to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, right? So Nehemiah got permission, and the Israelites rose up and were strengthened to rebuild the wall. But it didn't take long for some problems to start. Two men named Sanballat and Tobiah did not like that the wall was being rebuilt. They wanted to make the Israelites stop their work, so they began mocking the builders. They said all kinds of mean things to try and keep the builders from working.

But do you know what? These two men were not successful. The Israelites persisted in their building work. Who knows what it means to be persistent? [*Let the children answer.*] To be persistent is to refuse to give up. Nehemiah and the Israelites were persistent, even when their enemies came to mock them and tease them. It might be easy to be persistent when everybody is encouraging you, but do you think it's easy to be persistent when people are mocking you?

Who here has tried to play a musical instrument? I tried when I was young. I would get so discouraged, because I was not very good at first. Then, to make things worse, people would tell me things like, "You're no good at it!" But I decided not to give up. I really, really wanted to learn to play. So, instead of listening to the discouraging words, I listened to a friend of mine play his instrument. That friend had been playing the piano for years, and he played so well. I told myself that if I stuck with it, I would get better. One day I would play as well as my friend! But if I quit, I would never be able to play. [*Storyteller, insert your own story about being persistent in the face of discouragement.*]

The Israelites were persistent, even though they were being mocked. They were not going to stop rebuilding the wall! Well, that made the enemies even angrier, and so they decided to go fight the Israelites.

Nehemiah cared for God's people and the rebuilding work very much, so he came up with a plan to keep everyone safe and be able to continue work on the wall. He instructed half of his servants to work on the wall and told the other half to guard the builders with spears, swords, shields, and bows. Those who were building would work with one hand and keep a weapon in their other hand. Even the builders were armed—each had a sword strapped to his side. They were ready if they needed to fight, but they were also not going to stop building!

Their persistence paid off! In fifty-two days, the wall was finished! Can you believe they built such a huge city wall in such a short amount of time? Only with God's help could they have done such a thing! After the wall was completed, they had a special ceremony called a dedication to mark its completion. They called all the Levites to come to Jerusalem, and the city was filled with rejoicing and thanksgiving. There was singing with cymbals, harps, and lyres, and a procession along the wall to give thanks. There was so much rejoicing and thanking that day. Do you think that they were rejoicing just because they had done a good job? No, it was because they knew God had helped them, and that made them full of joy and thanks.

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 8

Coming Back to God by Coming Back to His Word

Point to Emphasize: We can learn about God by reading His Word and by listening to the ones who can explain it to us.

Reference Reading: Nehemiah 8

Memory Verse: ...Give me understanding according to Your word. (Psalm 119:169b)

Story Sample

When the children of Israel returned to their land (Jerusalem), many of them did not know God's Word, so they lived their lives and worshipped God according to what they thought was proper. They had built the house of God and the wall around Jerusalem, but they did not know what God said concerning how they should live! And they did not know how God wanted them to worship Him! They did not know a lot of things, because they did not know God's Word.

Many people today are like this. They may know that God exists, but they do not know His Word. So they never check God's Word to see if God likes the way they are living or how He wants to be worshipped. God says a lot in His Word. You can find out all about God and what He likes and dislikes by reading His Word.

What would the children of Israel do? A couple of weeks ago we were talking about a man who was a scribe named Ezra. Ezra requested the king to let him go to Jerusalem. What did he want to do? He wanted to read God's Word to all the children of Israel. So, for seven days (during the Feast of Tabernacles), Ezra stood before the people and read God's Word to them, helping them to understand it. All the people gathered together into an open area. Ezra read the Word of God to them, and the ears of the people were attentive to the book of the law. The people paid attention and listened to him. Isn't that amazing! The people were in a huge crowd, yet still, they listened. That means that they gave their FULL attention. It would be wonderful if we all were that attentive. Probably many who were there that day had never heard God's Word. And of those who had heard or read God's Word, not many understood it. So as Ezra read, he and others would help the people understand God's Word. By hearing God's Word, they realized that God was not happy about some things they did. They became very sad and were sorry. Then they made some changes. They were God's people, and they wanted to please God according to His Word. They changed some things in their living to please Him, and they began to worship God according to His Word.

As I was growing up as a child, I had many questions. I did not understand everything about God, and I had questions about growing up as a child of God. So, I would go quickly to my dad or my mom and simply ask them. One day I asked my mom why I needed to obey her. I knew I needed to, but I wanted to know why. She responded to me with a verse from the Bible. She said, "In Exodus 20:12, God said that when you honor your parents your days will be extended. In other words, when you don't honor your parents your days will be shortened." After that, honoring my parents became very meaningful to me. *[Storyteller, share your story about listening to a grownup and listening to something about God's Word.]*

As you grow older, you will have many questions. I want to encourage you to look around and find some older ones or "grownups," who care about you and God's Word. They can discuss your questions along with God's Word. You don't need to get all of your answers from a computer! Most real answers cannot be found from a screen. If you want to know God Himself, you need to

learn about Him in His Word. Now, you might read the Bible and say, "I don't understand!" That's when you go to the dear ones among you who know the Bible! They can explain it to you! God's Words has the best answers! You just need to have someone to help you understand it!

This week I want to encourage you to be like the children of Israel. Seek God's Word, not only by reading it but also by listening to the ones who can explain it. The Bible shows us how God wants us to live and to please Him!

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 9 Esther—Standing Up for Her People

Point to Emphasize: We can stand up for God’s people.

Reading Reference: Esther 2—5; 7—8

Memory Verse: ...Do not lose heart in doing good. (2 Thessalonians 3:13b)

Story Sample

Who remembers a woman in the Bible named Esther? That’s right! She was an Israelite who became a queen. As an orphan she was raised by her uncle, but in the end, the king chose her as his queen. How did this happen? It was by obedience to her uncle Mordecai’s instructions. Esther’s obedience to Mordecai didn’t just help her become the queen—it also helped her save God’s people! This is the story we are going to tell today.

King Ahasuerus was not an Israelite king. He was a Gentile king, and the Israelites were in captivity in his land. As Esther was accepted into the king’s court, Mordecai instructed her to keep her identity a secret. She was not to tell the king or anyone that she was one of the children of Israel. Esther obeyed Mordecai, and said nothing about who she was. But there was something evil going on in the kingdom. The king’s highest official, Haman, had made a plan to destroy all the Jewish people on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Mordecai heard about this plan, and became fully distressed. He asked Esther to go to the king and plead for her people.

To try and speak to the king without being invited was a crime. Anyone who did that would be punished, unless the king held out his scepter to pardon them. Esther knew this, and she told Mordecai how dangerous it would be for her. But Mordecai said, “Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Mordecai was saying that Esther might have become the queen so that she could save her people when they were in need.

When Esther heard these words, she told Mordecai to get all the nearby Israelites together and fast and pray for her for three days. And at the end of the three days, she approached the king. She knew that it was a risky thing to do, but she also realized she needed to stand up for God’s people, no matter what it cost.

Have you ever had to stand up for someone else? It can be a little scary, right? When I was younger, someone told me a story about a friend of mine—let’s call him John. A bunch of friends were making fun of someone, but John interrupted them. John stood up for the person everyone was teasing, and he asked everyone to stop. This story impressed me when I was young, and one day I found myself in a similar situation. Some friends were making fun of someone, and I felt very uncomfortable. I didn’t know if I should say anything—I didn’t want everyone to suddenly start making fun of ME—but then I remembered the story about John. I remembered that John had stood up for what was right. I was inspired and encouraged by that. If John could speak up in that way, I wanted to, too! And so I did. I was not rude or mean, but I gently asked everyone to stop making fun of that person. And they did! *[Storyteller, insert your own story about standing up for God’s people.]*

When the king saw Esther approaching, he was not angry. He held out his scepter. Esther would not be punished! Then the king asked Esther what was troubling her, and what she wanted to request from him. Esther didn’t tell him right away; instead, she invited him to a banquet. At the banquet, Esther made her request. Her request was for her life and the life of her people. She

revealed to the king that she was one of God's people who was in captivity in this land, and she told him about Haman's plot to destroy her people.

Oh, the king was so angry at Haman! Haman was punished immediately. But because of the law, the decree could not be changed. Even the king himself could not change it. However, he **COULD** make a new decree! And that's what King Ahasuerus did. He decreed that the Jewish people were allowed to fight back against those who came to destroy them. God's people were so glad about this new decree. When the day came to fight, the Israelites assembled and fought, and they were victorious! Esther stood up for God's people, and God used that to save them.

The time may come when you find yourself in a situation where someone needs to stand up for God's people. I hope you will remember this story. And remember we should always be willing to help any of God's people.

Intermediate Level, Block 8, Week 10
Mordecai—Being a Noble and Honorable Man

Point to Emphasize: We can be those who are noble and honorable.

Reading Reference: Esther 2—5; 7—8

Memory Verse: For we exercise foresight for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men. (2 Corinthians 8:21)

Story Sample

Last week we talked about Esther and how she stood up for her people. How do you think she became such a person who would do such a thing? Well, I think it was because of who raised her. Do you remember that she was an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai? So today I would like to tell you something about Mordecai and what a noble and honorable person he was. The dictionary says that a noble person is one who shows fine personal qualities or high moral principles.

First, Mordecai raised Esther as if she were his child. Mordecai was willing to do all the things parents do, yet Esther was not even his real daughter. Was there a law saying that since he was a relative he must take care of her? NO! He could have let her as an orphan and have someone else take care of her, BUT he decided that he would become like a father to her. He raised her to be obedient, someone who would one day be worthy of being queen. This was a very honorable thing to do.

Second, he was noble in reporting the truth. After Esther became queen, Mordecai remained in the king's gate so that he could continue to watch out for her. Each day as he was sitting in the king's gate, there were two guards at the gate. These two were responsible for the gate of the king's palace. But they were not happy with the king. They were so angry that they began to plot how they might lay their hands on the king and do him harm. Mordecai heard them plotting and reported it to Esther, who then reported it to the king. When the king found out, he punished the two men for what they were planning to do.

When I was in the third grade, one day my teacher left the room. While she was gone, a boy went up to the blackboard and wrote something disrespectful about the teacher on the board. When the teacher came back, she was upset when she saw it and asked who had done it. The boy raised his hand and told her that the girl sitting next to him had done it. No one in the classroom said anything. It was bothering me so much that I finally raised my hand. I told her that she had not done it but the boy had done it. This wasn't easy to do. It would have been easier to have stayed quiet like everyone else in the class, but that would have been very wrong. The only right thing to do was to tell the truth.

Third, Mordecai refused to bow down to anyone but God, because he would not agree to worship a man. A man named Haman had been placed above all the princes in the kingdom and he wanted all the people to bow down to him. Haman was only a man. He was not God. Since Mordecai was a Jew he would only honor and worship God by bowing. We need to learn from Mordecai. No person should ever be lifted way above others. No person should be idolized. A person may be very good at this or that, maybe even the best, but they are still only people. We should only worship our God.

The book of Esther ends with Mordecai being well-regarded. The last verse of the book of Esther ends with a verse that speaks of him being well-regarded by his fellow Jews, not because of the high position he attained, but because he sought the good of his people. The last verse also says that he spoke for the people's welfare. By caring for Esther as an orphan and guiding her to have a proper heart toward God and His people, Mordecai, through Esther, saved all the Jews from being destroyed. What a wonderful way to end the story of Esther!

We can all be noble and honorable like Mordecai. We may be too young to raise a child, but we are old enough to care for others. And we can all learn to tell the truth even when it is hard to do. It is so good that we are in families that love God and worship only Him. As we grow, we can also be those honorable and noble people who choose to love and worship God.