

# Story Time with Jesus



**Bible Stories**

*-As told by Jesus-*



**Book 7**

## Story Time with Jesus—Book 7

### Bible Stories

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(Jesus speaking: )

#### **Nahum and Habakkuk**

The prophet Nahum was shown something interesting and very futuristic for his time, when he stopped to receive a message from God. For thousands of years people only used simple and slower forms of

transportation. But in this modern day there are so many ways of travel, and people are inventing ways to go faster and faster. There are so many cars and traffic jams all over the world, and getting enough fuel for them, as well as car accidents, is quite a problem. It's a sign that this world as it is now, is coming to its end soon. And that's good news—because then I can start to make things right and nice.

Prophet Nahum saw a vision of what things are like now on the roads. It was a very different sight than what he saw around his town and country. God showed him a bit what things were going to be like. Prophet Nahum tried to describe it, but could only use the things he knew about and could relate to. He said the vehicles on the road in his vision from God looked like torches and lightning going very fast.

The “chariots” as he called them were jostling and raging in the streets and broadways. Doesn't that sound like a modern day highway, especially at evening traffic time—with zooming headlights and tons of cars, all rushing to go here and there?

One day things will be peaceful, as many prophets wrote down and foretold, from the words and visions that God gave to them. Not only did the messages given to the prophets back then talk about how the world was going to be nowadays, and all its troubles, but they told of the good and happy ending, and how wonderful things will be once again, when I, Jesus, come to rule and reign. And all you who have learned to live in My ways and to treat others with loving kindness, will be on My team, doing the important job of helping to change things for the better.

Many are doing all that they can now, and it's wonderful, but when the time is right, and God's love will be what rules in people's hearts and lives and homes and all over the world, it will be so much easier to bring lasting and marvellous change. Don't give up hope! That time is on its way.

The prophet Habakkuk wrote of it too. He said that the Earth would one day be filled with the knowledge of the Lord—everyone would come to know My ways and live in love. I can hardly wait until that time! I'm as eager and ready for peace and love to reign on Earth as you might be. Thank you for being patient and giving as many people a chance as possible, to chose to believe and to follow in My ways now, and to then be blessed with a wonderful rewarding future.

Things won't always go well, during this time of learning and waiting for that time of peace and love worldwide on Earth. But Prophet Habakkuk wrote of a wonderful attitude to have during times of troubles—which everyone will have while they are on Earth, at some time in their life.

He said that even if things were not going well, and his crops didn't grow, and he didn't have a nice farm and all that he needed, that he would still rejoice. He would praise God no matter what was happening.

You can be glad and have words of praise on your lips even if things aren't going well yet, as you have faith and know that one day things will be made right again, and you know that I will love and care for you through even the toughest situations. I'm always with you.

Many things were hard for Habakkuk in his time on Earth, and his book in the Bible only told of some of the things that were hard for him. But you can be sure that he's having a great time now. He's never hungry or tired or thirsty or in need of supplies now. He's having a heaven of a time, because he chose to keep believing in God's love and he was faithful to pass on the words God told him to.

You can be as happy as he is now too, when you get here, if you choose to do like he did and follow Me and listen to Me and do what I say in My Word to do. And when things don't work out right and you are having a hard time while still on Earth, if you keep in mind that it's just for a time, and then all will be wonderful one day, that will help you to have faith. As

you praise God no matter what hard times you are living through, you'll have an easier time, and you can be sure that He will bless and reward you for your faith and patience.—Just like He did those prophets who lived long ago.

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## **Ezekiel the Prophet**

Ezekiel was a man who was willing to do whatever was needed to get a message across. He did whatever God asked him to do, and some of the jobs were pretty unusual.

Sometimes he had to make model displays to show people what the future held for them, other times he had to sit or stand or lie down in a certain way as a type of skit to demonstrate a point to people. It helped to make the messages clearer and easier for people to remember than just hearing the words from him.

Sometimes I told him to eat certain foods and drink water in certain amounts and at certain times. Other times he was to make and show props as a way to show people what I wanted them to know. He had whatever type of hairstyle I told him to, and cut it when and however I instructed him. Ezekiel let every part of his life—his time, his actions, his words, his appearance, his diet and everything, be used by Me to help tell others the important messages that they needed to hear.

Because of his willingness to go and do and say whatever was needed, I also gave him the privilege of being shown some amazing things in the Spirit. He got to see powerful heavenly beings, talk with angels, travel into the future to see what things will be like.

It was no easy task to be a whole-hearted prophet. Sometimes the experiences and messages and trips I would take him on left him so

amazed it took him days to recover, as he sat in awe thinking about what he saw and heard and what was revealed to him.

There was a promise given in the 34<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Ezekiel that talked about God's people being like sheep, and in need of a shepherd, lost and needing to be gathered, fed and cared for. The promises in that chapter told of the day when I would send those who would lead and care for My people, and be as shepherds to them.

Ezekiel was shown visions and given messages that were similar to what was shown and told to the apostle John, My disciple on Earth, about heaven. The tree of life and the river of life were written about in the book of Ezekiel. It told of the wonderful tree of life that bore many types of fruits—every month a new type of fruit grew on it. It always had fruit on it. And the leaves of the tree were ever-green and had healing powers and when used would bring health to the sick or hurt.

I didn't promise to Ezekiel that when he warned people with the messages I gave him to pass on, that people would always listen and obey. I said that Ezekiel didn't need to worry about whether or not people would follow My instructions that he passed on to them. His job was to tell God's words, even if people didn't listen and change.

It would be better to give them all a chance to do things in My way and to let them know what I had to say, rather than not bothering to tell them at all. If he did his job and passed on My Words to the people then that was what he was meant to do. If it didn't result in a big and wonderful change in the hearts of people in the country, then at least he tried and God would be pleased that he did his best and gave the people a chance.

Ezekiel got to see amazing visions in the spirit that I showed him, but he didn't see these things all the time, and it was special when it did happen. Most of the time as a prophet and priest, living in a foreign country, things were rather difficult. But he was willing to obey, to listen and to follow.

He was able to write down all that I wanted him to, and the book of Ezekiel has many interesting and mysterious words, visions and messages. There is lots that his book talks about that is yet to come! It's not a history book of all that has happened many centuries ago. Isn't that neat? You can find prophecies in his book and in other books of the Bible that tell of things that haven't even happened yet!

Some prophecies from some of the books of the prophets have been fulfilled, and some things are yet to happen. See, things are all planned, and there is a right time for each thing to happen. This world won't go on endlessly as it is. There is a time for learning and choosing between right and wrong, and a time for people to be given the message of My love and salvation—and that time is now. When the way things are now comes to an end, ending first in a real tough time on Earth for everyone, then at last the best will be ushered in, and the loving Kingdom of God will be on Earth. The best is on its way!

The fact that so many events that the prophecies in the Bible say would happen, did happen, can give you faith that the rest of the messages and promises and predictions written of will also happen. Some things just take time—some events took thousands of years before they came to pass. But the fulfilment of the messages of My return to Earth is getting closer and closer each day.

Be a faithful witness, as Ezekiel was. Pass on the Words of Heaven and the truth of My love and care, and the message of salvation that is offered to all, and you will be greatly rewarded!

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## **Wings and Wheels**

One of the amazing visions that the prophet Ezekiel had, was hard for him to describe it using only the things he knew about and could relate it to while on Earth. God showed him a vision of a powerful and amazing

vehicle with angelic beings, unlike anything you have seen or heard about. This vehicle had special types of wheels, and looked like it was made of bright light and shiny jewels and fire, and all sorts of heavenly things.

The angelic beings with big wings looked like a combination of different types of creatures—a man, a cherub, an eagle and a lion, with wings and many eyes. They could look straight from all angles and so didn't need to turn to look this way and that way to see here and there but could always see straight ahead on all sides, and would walk or move straight in any direction they needed to go.

The wings of these heavenly beings made a special sound when they were used and when they were folded. The sound of their wings was like the voice of God. There was a type of wheel that each of these beings travelled with, that moved in whatever direction the angelic being needed to go, without the use of any machines or gears or things that Earthly vehicles have today.

There are so many far-out and unique creations of God in the world beyond your world there today. If you do like Ezekiel did, and take time to listen and to think about My Word, who knows what amazing things I will show to you? I can show you things that no one on Earth has even thought of before.

People on Earth try to think of amazing things, and many things people write about or create pictures of, aren't so great and most of all aren't true. Ezekiel got to take a trip to God's movies—real movies of things that are going on around you in the world of God's heavenly realm. If you love and believe in Me, Jesus, the true things going on in the land you will one day get to enter, are really going to surprise and astound you.

Even the wildest ideas on Earth are nothing compared to what is reality here with Me. Wait till you see what I can show you—even here and now!



If you feel you want to take a spirit trip, like Ezekiel did, and you want to get a glimpse of things that will really amaze you, stay close to Me. I can show you things in visions and in your dreams and when you are praying, that will thrill you and surprise you! Not even the best picture film on Earth will compare to what I have to show you.

The messages given to Isaiah have given hope and inspiration to many for thousands of years. When God first called him to be a prophet he didn't feel capable of doing the job well. He felt like he wasn't perfect and made mistakes and couldn't say the right things. He saw an awesome vision of Me, the King of kings on a Heavenly throne, and some angels, called seraphims, were flying above it. When the seraphims spoke words of praise the posts of the door of that Heavenly room shook and the room was filled with smoke.

Each one of the seraphims had six wings. Two to cover their feet, two wings to cover their faces, and two wings to fly with. When Isaiah was feeling so in awe and humbled to be in My presence and to get a glimpse into the world of the spirit, he thought that his weakness and his human nature made him too dirty to even speak God's Words.

He was the man I wanted to use to speak My Words to many others. He wasn't saying no to My call and job for him, he just felt so low and unclean compared to these glorious Heavenly beings, and when seeing the King of all.

The vision continued, and next Isaiah saw one of the seraphims take a spiritual coal of fire from the Heavenly altar with tongs and bring it near to Isaiah's lips. He heard the words said that now his lips and spirit were clean. I, the Lord, had cleansed him and made him ready to speak My Words to the people.

Then Isaiah heard Me saying, "Who can we send? Who will go for us?"

I needed someone to do what We here in the invisible spiritual realm couldn't do. We needed someone on Earth to be Our messenger and pass on the Words of Heaven to those on Earth. Isaiah volunteered right away and responded, "Here I am. Send me!"

Are you eager to help Me do what I need you to do while you are still there on Earth? You may not be as amazing and fast and strong as My mighty and bright angels are, but you can do something they can't—and that even I can't do yet. You can talk with others face-to-face on Earth, as a human, and pass on My words to them.

Can you imagine what kind of a reaction someone would have if they were just walking along and all of a sudden one of those six winged angels appeared to them? They would be so amazed and probably a bit too surprised to hear and understand much of what was being said.

Besides, if a strong angel appears and tells you something it's different than if you have to believe by faith, and choose to do things My way just because it's written in My Word. Believing by faith and obeying now without the strong beings of Heaven coming down to make sure you and everyone obeys, is the way it's meant to be for now. One day, everyone will get to see Me and get to see the angels too, when the time is right.

Does it make you feel special to know that you get to do a job that even the most powerful heavenly beings can't do all on their own? They are here to help you, to protect you, to help make it possible for you to do your job, but without those on Earth who are willing to pass on My Words and the truth of My love and salvation to others, nothing much will happen—at least not in the way I want it to. I need you! —Just like I needed Isaiah back then to be the one to speak the words to others that I needed to tell people.

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## Isaiah the Prophet

The Book of Isaiah contains many promises and faith-building words. Isaiah was a prophet who helped instruct some of the kings that ruled the Israelites who came to him for advice and My Words.

King Hezekiah spoke with him about the problems that came up in the land, as well as about his boil and sickness. Isaiah gave king Hezekiah the option from God asking what sign he wanted—the sun dial to go back 10 degrees or forward 10 degrees. And as I, the Lord, instructed him, a lump of figs were placed on King Hezekiah’s sore and he did recover, as I said he would. There were other times and with other kings that Isaiah was around to pass on messages from Me.

His Book is a collection of many of the messages that I gave to him. In it are prophecies about My coming to Earth and giving My life for the salvation of everyone who believes in Me, Jesus. There are wonderful messages written down of how wonderful the world of the future will be, when I make all things nice again on Earth. The animals will be calm and peaceful. Nothing will hurt or destroy. The world and all nature will be at peace and lovely.

One message written down in the Book of Isaiah spoke of how very different are your thoughts—you on Earth—from Mine. I see things very differently. I think very differently than people do. I know and see the whole picture. I am all wisdom and all knowledge. I know what will happen. I know what everyone thinks and feels and what will happen as a result of each choice and decision. When something seems wrong to you, but it’s My will for it to happen, it’s because there are things that I know that you don’t know or see, and one day you’ll find out that I did things in the best way.

Even the smartest person on Earth knows nothing compared to all that I know. How far is the starry sky from the ground? Space is quite wide and

goes for a long distance, right? As high as the starry sky is from the ground, that's how much higher and bigger and better My thoughts are. It pays to stop and listen and let Me tell you some amazing things! I have lots to say, and you'll enjoy getting to know all I have to speak to you about, just as Isaiah loved hearing My words too, and had them all written down carefully.

I don't ever just ramble on with nonsense and forget the next day what I said. I never make empty promises. I say what I mean and I mean what I say. I do what I promise. Everything I say is for a reason and brings good in the end. Isaiah wrote how just like rain that comes down and waters the ground and causes the plants to grow, so is My Word. My Words bring life and strength and refreshing. They accomplish something.

In another verse it talks about how wonderful and beautiful are the feet of those that spread the good news and Words of God—words of peace and salvation. I so appreciate everyone that passes on My loving words of truth to others.

Some people think that to please Me they have to go without certain things, or only eat certain foods, or none at all at times, or put themselves through hardship. They think that giving things up that they might even need is a way to make Me glad. But that's not what I'm interested in. I look at people's hearts, and I want to see My love given and shared with as many people as possible.

Isaiah wrote about what pleases Me—to give to and help others. To help feed the hungry, to comfort the sad, to clothe the poor, to give to those in need, to soothe those in pain or sick, and to make things easy for others who are having a hard time.

My Words written in that passage say that wonderful things will happen to those who give to others in these ways. Many of the rewards for living as I did and helping others in love will be rewards that aren't tangible—

that is things that you can't hold in your hands or buy in a shop. I will give you things that only I can give. Some of the blessings listed in the message given to Prophet Isaiah are:

--Speedy healing

--God's Spirit with you, surrounding you and protecting you

--Answers to prayer

--Guidance from Me

--Supply of all you need, physically and spiritually

--Your spirit will flourish and be refreshed

Prophet Isaiah was humble and did whatever I asked him to do. One passage reminds people that I listen to and am close to those who are meek and humble. I don't just hear those that are in a fancy building, but I look at people's hearts. I made all things on Earth, and even if people collected the best building materials to make a house for Me to live in, still it has been made with things that I created.

No one could ever make something on Earth for Me to live in that would really amaze me—as everything that it's made of I already created and made available for humans to use. But the place that I most like to be is near you—you who walk in humility, you who are poor, you who think you aren't fancy and famous, you who respect Me and want to do the things that I say. If you are that way, yet you open your life and heart to Me and invite Me to be near to you and to live in the spirit with you, then I am there, and love being very near to you. (Isaiah 66:1-2)

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## Jeremiah the Prophet

For many years prophets had delivered messages to the Israelites, telling them the importance of doing things God's way, and at times there were messages of warning and instruction given to other nations too. The book of Jeremiah talks about a time when some foretold troubles finally came.

When I called the prophet Jeremiah to give My Words to the people he was a young man, especially compared to some other older prophets, and he felt very incapable. "I am just a child," he said. But I knew he wasn't too young. He was a young man and could do the job well.

I told Jeremiah that before his mother even became pregnant with him, that I knew him! I had created and made Jeremiah for a purpose. Before he was even born he was destined and called to be a prophet of God.

When he was then old enough to be able to pass on God's Words and messages to others, then God told him about his reason for being born on Earth. When he said he felt inexperienced, young and not able to do a good job, God touched his mouth and said, "I've put My Words in your mouth."

With My help he could do whatever I asked him to. I would protect him and keep him safe. He didn't need to worry about people's negative reactions, and no matter what troubles came, I would be near to him and help him. Good for brave Jeremiah! He chose to do what I needed him to do, even if it wasn't easy and some people made things hard for him.

Jeremiah never stopped telling people what I told him to say. He just kept on persevering. The things he warned people would happen if they made the wrong choices ended up happening. If people had only listened to and obeyed God's instructions things would have been easier for everyone.

Jeremiah had a helper called Baruch. He was a scribe and knew how to read and write well. When Jeremiah needed to write down the messages

from God to be read to people, Baruch would write it down on a scroll, while Prophet Jeremiah would pray and listen to Me and tell Baruch just what to say. He was a good scribe and diligent to write everything correctly. Baruch helped read the scrolls so people could hear what the message said.

Once, when some people were upset about what Jeremiah was passing on to them from God, they tried to stop him. But there was a good man who respected My Words and My prophet, his name was Ebedmelech and he was a dark skinned man from Ethiopia. Together with a team of helpers they quickly went to rescue Prophet Jeremiah and brought him where he would be safe and have food to eat. Jeremiah had bread to eat each day even though there wasn't much food left in that area of the country. Food was getting scarce because of the troubles that were coming as a result of everyone's disobedience to My Words and instructions.

Because Ebedmelech helped My prophet and believed My Words, I told Jeremiah to tell Ebedmelech that when the troubles came, and others would be having a very sad and difficult time, that Ebedmelech would be kept safe because he trusted in Me. He would have God's extra blessing of protection and safe-keeping.

At first when the king heard the messages that Prophet Jeremiah was passing on to them from Me, he wasn't motivated to do much about it, and he didn't like what was being said. The King wasn't happy to hear the warning messages that were read to him from the first scroll that was written, and even though people begged him not to, he went ahead and burned it. However, I told Jeremiah to make a new one, and told him what to say, while Baruch the scribe wrote it down again—and this new scroll had even more messages and words added to it from Me than the first one.

However, later on when the hard times started to come, he knew that he needed God's help, and he went to meet with Jeremiah to hear what My

instructions were. Others also came to Jeremiah asking him what they were supposed to do. But sadly, even though they promised at first to do whatever I said to do, when Jeremiah received the message from God to pass on to them, they weren't eager to follow through and do it after all. As a result of their reluctance to obey, things only got worse.

Other countries were causing them all sorts of troubles, and the king of Babylon—King Nebuchadnezzar—ended up forcing most of the Israelites to leave their country. Instead of living happily and peacefully as they had been able to do during the times when everyone was honouring and obeying God's Word, now they had other kings in charge of them and making them move wherever they wanted the people to go.

It was very sad and difficult for everyone. God had warned the people for many years about this happening, and through the prophet Jeremiah told the people what to do to make things easier and to make King Nebuchadnezzar treat them better. But no one wanted to listen, so things were very difficult, confusing and tough.

When the people were travelling and being taken to Babylon, the man in charge, amazingly enough, told Jeremiah that he didn't have to go to Babylon after all but could go wherever he wanted to go. If he wanted to go there he could, or if he wanted to stay in his country and be with the person that was made in charge of the small amount of people that were left, he could. Prophet Jeremiah chose to live in his country and help the people there.

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## **Tough Times**

Jeremiah is called by some people "the weeping prophet" as he was around to speak God's Words to the people at a very sad time. It hurt his heart so much to see the waywardness of everyone, and to see the very sad results of their continued disobedience. Most everyone in the country



he was in had to leave and move far away, and do as kings of other lands ordered them. It was not an easy time at all. There was so much sorrow and disruption to their lives. Nothing was the same. It was a time of much change and many difficult lessons. People wished then that they had listened to the many prophets and countless messages that God passed on to them, so this sad turn of events could have been avoided.

Jeremiah wrote another book for Me called, “Lamentations.” One verse says, “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water.” (Lamentations 1:16) The country was so empty and sad, compared to what it used to be like before everyone was forced to leave and to serve other kings.

Jeremiah thought about the situation, and prayed and wrote down the words that came to him, he wrote: “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” (Lamentations 3:26) They would need hope and faith in that very difficult time, and they would need patience until it was time for things be made right again and they could return to their land.

Jeremiah knew what it was like to lose everything, and to see all his loved ones and relatives going through hard times. He knew what it was like to cry and cry. He knew what it was like to feel that aching feeling in his heart where he felt it was breaking and hurting. He knew what it was like to suffer and go without help for long periods of time. He knew what hunger felt like. He knew what it was like to experience hard times as a result of other’s poor decisions. He knew what it was like to not have a family with children and a loving wife.

He knew what it was like to feel so very lonely. He knew what it was like to be hurting all over and to be in need of healing. He knew what it was like to pray and pray and to wait for a long time for prayers to be answered, and to be left wondering when or if the answer would come. But no matter what he was going through in his heart and mind, deep

inside his heart he still had faith and trust that I loved and cared and would eventually bring relief.

Here's a passage that expresses it: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. (Lamentations 3:22-25)

In the Book of Isaiah where there is the prophecy about My time on Earth, it says I was "Despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) So I know what Jeremiah felt like, and I know what you or your loved ones feel when things are real difficult or seem to be going all wrong. If your heart is aching, come to Me. I can bring the comfort and soothing that you need, until the time is right to bring full healing and relief and joy and restoration.

There's a memorable passage in the Book of Jeremiah. God told him to go to where the potter was making clay pots. The wet clay was formed into jars and pots of all sizes and shapes and used for so many things. Pots of clay were used by everyone in everyday life. Clay was probably about as common to use as plastic is today in this modern world.

As Jeremiah watched the potter at his work using a potter's wheel he saw that something wasn't right with the pot he was trying to make, so the potter started again and made it better the second time. I spoke to Jeremiah and said that I am like a potter, and My people are in My hands. He will care for them, hold them, and make things better for them—if they will be like clay, and easily yield to My hands that want to form their lives into something beautiful and good.

I, Jesus am like the potter of your life. I move you this way and that way, and I know what the future holds for you and what kind of a person you need to be, and what experiences will help to prepare you for the future

and what you will be needed to do. If things aren't right in your life, like the clay that wasn't being formed right, and you let Me change you and teach you new things, and you say "yes" to My will and ways, then in the end you will see I have made something wonderful out of your life.

However, if you insist on doing things just the way you think you should and you are stubborn and disobedient when I show you a better way, then it's as non-helpful for the success of your own life as it would be for the clay to refuse to be moulded. What would it be then? Nothing but a dry clump of clay that is unusable.

Sometimes the things that happen in people's lives are difficult and they really don't understand them at the time. But if they choose to use the situation or experience to change them for the better, and they pray for Me to make them a better person because of it, a "better vessel," then they will be happier for it in the end.

You are in My hands and I have wonderful plans for your future—and even for you today. What will you choose to do? Will you listen to Me and do what I know is best for you to do? If you do, good things will come your way. Even if not everything goes well for you all the time—just like the prophet Jeremiah had many difficulties—you will eventually be very glad that you did things My way. Those people who didn't follow the advice given in prophecy through Jeremiah didn't let themselves be moulded and changed for the better, and things were much tougher for them.

The Prophet Jeremiah trusted that what God said, would indeed happen. Then when those hard times came he trusted that it was all for a good reason and I, the Lord, would make things better in the end, as people turned their hearts back to Me again. When Jeremiah told people I words and they didn't like it and treated him unkindly, he trusted that I would take care of him, and he didn't give up doing whatever I asked him to do.

The prophet Jeremiah had difficulties, but it didn't feel as hard for him as it was for many others, because He was staying close Me. He was cared for by Me, and he had peace in his heart knowing that he was faithful to do what I said to do. As one of the promises in his book say, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." (Jeremiah 17:7)

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### **Wise Young Men**

When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon took control of Jerusalem, he wanted many of the gold and silver vessels and items that were in the temple to be brought back to his country. There was something else that he thought would be a help to him. –He wanted some wise young men to be his counsellors.

"Bring me some of the young Israelite men, sons of kings and princes and those who could be a help to me as I rule."

King Nebuchadnezzar listed the qualities that he wanted those young men to have. Ashpenaz was the man who the king chose to do the job of finding the right people. He was to look for young men who were wise, smart; those who could study well and learn new things—like learn to speak the new language they would need to know in order to talk with the king. They would need to know things about science and clever things. They would need be skilled, and have the good character traits to act well in a king's palace. They would need to be in good health and look nice, have taken good care of themselves, as well as be likeable and pleasant to be around.

Ashpenaz looked around the country and gathered those he thought would be just whom the king needed. They came to live near the king and would have three years to be specially cared for, to study, to learn the

language and to prepare before going before the king for him to see if they would make good helpers and counsellors.

King Nebuchadnezzar said that the team of young men being trained could have a portion of what was cooked and prepared each day for him and all those in his palace. They could drink his wine and eat some of his meat and all that was served. The king wanted these men to have the best, so they could be wise and strong. He thought what he ate was the best type of food, and would be just great. However, he didn't believe in and pray to God, and what was usually served wasn't blessed by God, nor was it the type of food that some of the Israelites had learned was the most nourishing.

Here was a situation where young people were suddenly not with their parents or family, and they had to make their own decisions and make wise choices without those nearby who had patiently taught them what was right and wrong. They had to stand on their own faith and choose to do what pleased Me without anyone making them do it.

Some of the ones who were chosen to be helpers to the king of Babylon, that were from the land of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four friends were strong in faith and conviction. They were willing to learn and did the best they could in their new situation. They didn't sit around crying and whining that they didn't have all the things they used to. They were brave and wanted to make the best of their situation and try to make things better and more Godly.

Ashpenaz gave each of these young men a new name—a name in the language of Babylon. Daniel was named Belteshazzar, Hananiah was named Shadrach, Mishael was given the name Meshach, and Azariah was called Abednego.

So on top of everything else that was new for them, they weren't even called the same name they had been called all their life up until then. It

was all a very big change and took lots of prayer and faith to make the best of their situation.

These young men loved God and had been taught to follow and obey Him. They had to choose what things they should obey when those who were now in charge gave them instructions, and what things they needed to not do.

One of the first choices they found themselves having to make was about the food they were served. Food is an important thing—what you eat can affect a lot of things about you. It affects your health and your appearance, your ability to think clearly and learn new things. It affects your moods and energy level. The food they were offered wasn't going to help them have clear minds to think and study, nor strong and healthy bodies, and it was against what they had been taught was right and healthy to eat.

Asking Me, Jesus, what to eat and what is best for you in your situation is very important if you want to be in tip-top shape. Sometimes you don't have much of a choice, because there are only certain things available, or it is all that can be afforded or what is in season. But when there is a choice, choosing to pray and ask Me about your food, and having self-control to stick to the good choices I present to you, can have a great effect on you.

In the situation the young men found themselves in there was a lot of pressure put on them to learn new things, to do well in their studies, to be physically fit, and to be the kind of men that could help and be wise counsellors to the king. It was a big responsibility. Daniel and his friends took it seriously, and knew that it was important that they learn whatever they needed to learn, and become what was needed.

Have you ever felt real tired after eating a big meal, or felt very lazy after eating certain foods, or felt buzzed after eating something, feeling that

you couldn't sit or remain calm and learn things well, and just needed to wiggle all over the place? Daniel had been taught the importance of a good and wholesome diet, and he knew that it would be the key to good health, a clear thinking mind and robust body.

So when the king's food and wine was served to them, these Godly wise young men knew it was something of great importance to speak up about. They couldn't eat it with a clear conscience. It wasn't right for them, and it wouldn't help them achieve the goals that they needed to. So they asked Ashpenaz's permission to not have to eat it. They explained the type of food they would like to have served instead.

Ashpenaz was supposed to do as the king asked, and he was a bit worried that they wouldn't have good health and strength if they didn't eat the king's type of food. He wanted to make things as nice for Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as he could, but he was worried what the king would think, and he didn't know what to do.

Ashpenaz had put a man called Melzar in charge of these four young men, and Daniel presented an idea to him. Daniel asked Melzar if for ten days they could be given only water to drink instead of wine, and only pulse to eat—just vegetables and beans, and foods that grow in the ground. It was to be a test and Melzar agreed to try it. These four young men would be served their special healthful diet, and the other young men would continue being served the king's food.

Daniel told Melzar that after the ten days of food try-out, that he could look at all the young men and see which diet was best by how healthy the different teams looked, and then he could choose to feed them whatever he thought was best—the king's food or their requested healthful diet. At the end of the ten days they all were looked over to see what team was the healthiest and best looking. Daniel and his friends looked noticeably the best! They appeared strong and handsome, more so than all the

others who had been served the king's meat. Melzar continued then to serve them the good food that they requested.

Daniel had reacted in a wise and respectful way, and yet didn't just do what was the easiest thing, or just what everyone else was doing. He knew that he and his friends were placed there for a reason—that God had put them there, in the very palace of the king, and he wanted to make wise and good decisions.

Because they chose to do things God's way and keep praying and staying close to God, He blessed them with special talents and skills. They were able to learn all kinds of things, they were wise, smart, skilled and they excelled in their studies. Besides this, Daniel was given the gift of understanding visions and dreams, and giving counsel to people about what their dreams meant.

After the three years of training and preparation it was time for all the young men to stand before the king, to talk with him, and to see if they would make good and wise counsellors.

The king knew that to make good decisions he would need to talk with others, get new ideas, find out information, and have solutions thought of. If he talked with people that weren't wise, then it would result in poor decisions that could negatively affect the whole country.

So the day of their big test came when they were to go before the king. They prayed a whole lot! Ashpenaz who was in charge of this project brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.

The king talked with them and asked questions. He realised that there were four special young men that seemed far wiser than everyone else in the answers they gave, and the way they came across. They were good looking, answered him well, were humble yet bold and had conviction. They said things that were helpful and wise. The king chose these men—



Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—to be some of his special counsellors.

There were others that helped talk with the king—older wise men, astrologers, and magicians, but the king found these four Godly and wise young men 10 times better than any of the other wise men and counsellors. What made the difference? Was it just the food? Or was it the fact that they were connected to the God of all wisdom and were able to hear My and My angelic counselors speaking to them, telling them what to say and do?

They didn't try to just impress the king with their own witty or clever words, nor were they trying to use it as an opportunity to hold an important position in the palace, and be well-thought of in the country. They prayed with all their hearts and spoke as I, their Lord, led them to. They loved and worshiped Me and were My faithful servants, even in this new and challenging situation.

Daniel and his friends knew God's Word and were eager to hear any new things I had to tell them. They weren't afraid of people—even kings—if I wanted them to do something differently. They served Me and did what I wanted them to do. This is what made the difference.

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### **Job's Lessons**

There was a man called Job, and he was a good man who always tried to do what he thought was the right thing to do. He determined to always have faith and trust in God's wisdom no matter what happened.

One fine day, as he was praying for his family and enjoying having all their needs met, there was quite a different scene going on in the court of Heaven. God was talking with the angels and in walks the Enemy to ask God's permission to cause Job a lot of trouble.

God had put many angels all around Job and his property to protect him. All was going well for him, and he was very wealthy. Job liked to please God and to make sure that the words he said were good and true and right, and not proud or careless. It was important to him that he make the right choices and behave himself well, showing kindness and self-control.

The Enemy challenged God to test Job. He said that the only reason why Job was always praying, and was praiseful was because things were going so well for him, and God's angels guarded him well. If things were to suddenly go bad, and sad and difficult things were to happen to him, perhaps he wouldn't be so full of faith, and be trusting God through it. The Enemy thought that Job wouldn't be able to handle troubles, and would just collapse and throw away his faith. But he was wrong.

God then allowed Job to have everything that he had taken away in a single day. Now how hard do you think that would be for you if that happened to you? Houses fell down, animals were taken by others, fire and storms came and ruined things, and your dearest loved ones perished, suddenly?

How do you think Job reacted? He passed the test. He said, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." He remembered that he was born having nothing—not even clothes to start out with, and when he would leave this life he wouldn't be able to take anything that he owned on Earth anyway.

It was a big test, but he kept on loving and trusting God no matter what happened.

However, the Enemy wanted to give him more trouble. He is always looking for ways to get you to be discouraged and to lose your faith in God's wise care. God only allows what will in the end help you. Things could be going wrong for you all the time, every minute of the day, but because you pray and because of God's protection, safe keeping through

the angels sent to protect and provide for you, and because God has a plan for your life, most of the time things go well.

When things then do go wrong, sometimes people act all surprised and shocked and upset, thinking how bad things are. They don't remember then all the good that has been given to them day after day, year after year.

Job was able to handle losing everything he had, and kept his faith through it. It was very commendable. However, the next test seemed much harder. He got a very painful affliction. He had boils and sores all over his body. And oh how much it hurt. That was where he felt he couldn't handle it any more. It was very hard to endure.

Some of his friends came and talked with him. They were puzzled by this sudden change in his life. First he was a good man that was blessed in every way, and suddenly he was a poor sick man. They talked and discussed and argued, and some unpleasant, untrue and unwise words were said.

"You must have done something wrong, and this is your punishment," some were saying.

"No, I didn't! I have been good all along. I think it's wrong for God to have given me this hard time, when I've done so much good!" Job was saying.

To defend himself he started saying things that showed he thought he knew better than God what was right and good. If God always gives bad times to badly behaving people, then Job felt something was wrong, because as far as he knew, he hadn't done anything that would displease God. But bad things do happen to all, no matter what they do, as a lesson, as a test, and as a way to train people while on Earth. It's just the way things are, and none can escape being taught tough things at times.

"If I was God I wouldn't have let this happen to me!" Job was feeling.

Some things can be so very difficult, and most people on Earth have something happen in their life that seems harder than they can manage. But those who love God can trust that everything will eventually work out for the best in the end—as dear Job found out.

At first it was hard for him to see what his lesson was—that he thought of himself too proudly, and thought he was so good on his own, and nothing sad or bad or hard should ever happen to him. But even the best of people can be bettered by hard times, if it teaches them humility, compassion and strong faith that all things will work out for good, one day.

I loved Job a lot, and wanted to teach him that to walk in humility, and to depend on Me to help him do the right thing was the best way to be.

The Bible says that I am “meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29), and that “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

Things were all going to work out for Job again, but it just was a special time of lesson learning—not just for him, but for his friends and relatives too. He was well known by many people around, so what he learned he could teach and tell many others. They would be benefited by what he could tell them, as he was respected and listened to.

Before his time of trouble he was often counselling people and giving them hope and courage in their hard times. Now, with his new experience of knowing what it felt like, he could be an even greater and wiser counsellor.

After much discussing with his friends about what the problem was, finally one of them felt something in his heart, and he knew he was meant to tell Job. He told him with conviction that he believed the problem wasn't that he did something wrong, but that God wasn't pleased that he thought he knew better than God what was right.

Then I, the Lord, joined in on the conversation and made things clear. That really got everyone listening and learning the lesson in a hurry!

I asked him some questions like, “Where were you when the world was first made? Can you control the stars? Can you make lightning or control the clouds and rain? Can you make sure all the animals have food to eat? Do you teach them what to do to care for their young?”

Well, it was obvious to Job that God knew a whole lot more than he did, and had everything in control. Job apologized for his proud way of thinking and talking, and told Me that he now knew that I was the wisest and knew every thought and word of each person on Earth.

I told them all—Job and his friends—to be sorry for their wrong ways of looking at things and all the wrong things they had been saying while trying in their own minds to figure out why Job was having troubles. When Job prayed for his friends, as I, the Lord, asked him to do, then he began to receive healing.

His friends and relatives then came to see Job and give him gifts and encourage him after that difficult time. And I gave Job some very big gifts to encourage him too. I gave him back double the amount of everything that he had before. He was even wealthier than before—and much wiser too, after having learned all that he did.

Everyone has troubles and hard times, and it doesn’t mean that they are behaving worse than you and are needing to be corrected. Everyone gets turns to learn lessons while on Earth. So if you or others are having a time of difficulty and having a chance to learn new lessons, trust that it can all work out for the best in the end. Try not to get too discouraged, but keep your faith strong, knowing that all things will work together for good, for those that trust and love Me. And try not to think negatively or critically of others when it’s their turn to experience difficulties. Just pray for each

other, and keep reminding one another that I am in control and will bring good out of even the most difficult times.

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## Queen Esther

King Ahasuerus ruled over a large area—27 provinces in the land that was between India and Ethiopia, which included parts of what is now known as Asia, the Middle East and part of Africa. The countries and lands were divided differently back then.

There were many Israelites or Jews as they were called, living in the area he ruled over, and many other nationalities and many languages were spoken throughout the land. Many people were scattered around in various places because of King Nebuchadnezzar making many of them move out of their home countries.

King Ahasuerus had just spent six months showing off his great city and palace and his wealth to many important men and princes and those in charge of the various provinces of this kingdom. Afterwards he made a feast and celebration for those who lived in Shushan, the place he lived. Everyone there was invited to attend the final feast, from princes to peasants, old and young.

Everything was decorated fancy for this feast that was to last for seven days and was held the court of the king's palace. There were white, green, and blue decorations hanging that were fastened on to silver rings, and pillars of marble with cords of fine linen and purple.

The places to sit, recline and relax on were made of gold and silver, and the ground was covered in all types of marble—red, blue, white and black. The glasses used were cups made of gold, each cup being a unique shape and style. Royal wine in great abundance was served, and people could

freely drink all that they wanted to; or not drink if they so desired. It was to be the fanciest week-long celebration they'd ever had.

Queen Vashti also made a fancy celebration in one of the king's houses, for women to attend. So everyone was partying and relaxing, and getting drunk as well.

When people drink too much wine it makes them unable to think clearly and react wisely or the way they normally would. So when it seemed things were going real well and people were laughing and trying to have a good time, then things started to go sour.

In the middle of the party one day the king got the thought that he all of a sudden want to show off one more thing that he was proud of. He'd just spent half a year showing and telling everyone who visited how great he was and how rich he was. But there was one more thing. He had a very pretty wife—the queen.

If he hadn't been so drunk and in the mood to boast he might not have done what he did next. He would have remembered that the queen was in the middle of hosting a huge party herself. And if she hadn't been in party mode, she might have remembered her manners and behaved more politely.

The king in a silly moment made a hasty decision and asked his most trusted helpers to go and get the queen, right then, and have her stop all that she was doing and come to be looked at and admired and stared at by many others. He wanted to continue to show things off, and this time his wife.

Now, it's nice that he liked how pretty she was, but it wasn't the best timing, and he might have planned it better if he hadn't had too much to drink.

Queen Vashti told the men who came to bring her to the king that she wouldn't come. That was a big mistake. No matter what was going on or what she was in the middle of, she should have dropped all that she was doing and obeyed, even if she wasn't in the mood for it. The rules of the land then were very strict and whatever the king said, had to be obeyed.

So the king was stuck with a very difficult problem. If he let it pass and just didn't say anything about it, and said, "That's okay, she can obey whenever she wants to, and when she doesn't want to she doesn't have to," then that would have caused problems in the country.

When you are a king or a queen or a leader or ruler, everything you do is watched and copied by others. The king could see that this refusal to obey could cause a whole lot of trouble all throughout the land. If the queen didn't do what the king asked, then many others would think they could also just do as they pleased when asked to do things. He could see that it would also cause husbands and wives to not get along well and each one trying to do their own thing also, and not listening to each other.

King Ahasuerus talked with his counsellors about what to do. They knew that word would get out and spread all over the land, from person to person, telling the story about how the queen didn't do what the king asked her to do. It was decided that Vashi could no longer be queen, and the king wouldn't ever call for her again.

Just that moment of one person acting on a sudden impulse, and the wilfulness and disobedience of another meant it was the last time they met. It was a tough time, and the king regretted what happened, and the queen was sorry. But for the good of the others in the country, and for the purpose of keeping peace and good relations in families all over, that's what they chose to be the consequence. Letters were published and sent all over the place, so people would know that it wasn't a good example of the way to behave, and that there was a consequence.



The king missed his wife, queen Vashti, and his counsellors tried to encourage him and came up with an idea. They would look all over the country for ladies, one of these who could possibly be a new queen. These women would be brought before the king, one by one for him to choose one to be the new queen.

There was a man called Mordecai, and he had a cousin named Esther, and they lived in Shushan, where the palace of the king was. Mordecai had raised Esther and was much older than her. She was an orphan and so he had been like a father to her, and had taught her well. They both loved Me, the Lord, and respected Me. Mordecai was one of the people who had to leave their former land, when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had made many of the Israelites move out. He and his cousin Esther, who was a grown young lady by then, were now living near to King Ahasuerus

When the king's men searched the land for fine young ladies she was also chosen and brought to the palace. The women wouldn't be shown to the king right away, but would have about a year of preparation first, to get all prettied up, eat good food, have nice baths, put on perfumed oil, get strengthened and healthy, and learn how to act and how to be around the king. They needed to learn the ways of a queen.

Mordecai came each day to talk with Esther and see how she was doing. She respected him and followed his wise advice even though she was a grown woman and no longer living with him.

When the year was finished it was the time for the king to choose one of the ladies to be the new queen. Esther was very pretty, but she also was kind, and godly, as well as humble. People noticed that she was a special woman. She had God's Spirit in her and this made her stand out from others, and she was liked by many.

When it was her turn to be presented before the king, she was wise and humble and asked for advice from the one who was in charge of her

preparation. He knew what the king would like and he suggested to her what to wear and how to behave. She listened and followed his advice.

When King Ahasuerus saw her he was delighted with her, and loved her a lot. He chose her right away to be the new queen. The crown was placed on her head, and she had a new and big responsibility. A great feast was held to celebrate that Esther was the new queen.

God had made her be queen for a special reason. Why? Well, later on someone who often helped the king, tried to trick him into agreeing to allow a lot of harm to come the Israelites—or Jews as they were called then—that were still living in the land that King Ahasuerus ruled over.

This man, called Haman, was very proud and wanted everyone to bow down to him as he walked past them. Those who didn't serve and worship the true God didn't seem to mind bowing down, as they would rather do that than to make Haman angry at them. They feared him and what he might do. However, Mordecai loved and respected Me, the Lord, more than anyone else. He knew he wasn't to bow down to this man, who he knew had his heart filled with all the wrong kinds of things.

This showed up soon enough, as Haman's pride-fuelled anger thought that all the Jews should not be allowed to continue living in their kingdom, simply because Mordecai was one of them. He plotted an evil plan and tricked the King into promising that any of the Jews that still were in the land should be caused trouble, and put to death if they stayed around. Without knowing the full story, the king who trusted Haman thought what Haman slyly said was good. This evil plan would cause harm and trouble to so many people. I wanted this plan stopped.

Esther had heard about the plans against the Jews, started by Haman, since her cousin Mordecai had informed her. She prayed desperately for the Lord to help her and her people. It was urgent that she talk with the

king, but the rules of the land were that one had to wait to be called on by the king.

For three day she and her maids, and Mordecai as well, fasted all food and water. They spent the time in prayer for the king to receive her into the court room, unrequested, and for a solution to be found. At the end of three days, Esther put on her most beautiful, royal queen’s clothing and went to speak with the king. During her days of prayer, I had showed her the best way to get the king to listen and to want to change his mind and help her people.

When the king saw her standing there in the court, he loved the sight of her and held out his gold sceptre, giving her permission to approach him. Did she start weeping and crying and begging him to help, right then and there? No, she had faith. Instead she invited the king to do one of his favourite things—to attend a banquet of wine that evening, and served delicious food. It would just be with her and Haman. The king agreed and showed up that night for a nice time with his lovely queen and most trusted counselor.

King Ahasuerus however knew that there was more that she wanted to ask him, and that she was probably planning to say it at the banquet. But when the time of drinking and dinner was over and she didn’t ask him anything special, he wondered about it. “What do you want to request from me?” the king ask Esther. “I’ll say yes to whatever you want.”

Continuing with the plan that I had showed her, Esther said, “I would like for you to come again tomorrow night to have another banquet. Then I’ll do as you have asked, and will tell you what my request is.”

Intrigued, the king agreed. He was wondering what was going on, and just what Esther was going to tell him. That night he just couldn’t get to sleep. I was at work. I wanted to humble proud Haman and bless honest and faithful Mordecai.

Some time back some men had tried to take over the king's place as ruler and bring him harm, but God had helped Mordecai to find out their bad plans and to report them to the king. Things were safe in the palace again because of it. Mordecai had saved the king's life.

During the night after the first banquet with queen Esther, while Haman was fuming and planning what to do to bring harm to Mordecai, the king meanwhile just can't seem to go to sleep.

King Ahasuerus gets the idea to have the chronicles or records read to him of things that have happened in the kingdom and while he was the ruler. He heard the story read to him about about Mordecai and the good that he did for him, the king.

"What did I do to reward Mordecai for helping me?" the king asks.

"Nothing was done yet," came the response.

Just then, Haman, the king's trusted helper who was also having a rough night, comes to talk to the king about how he feels about Mordecai not giving him better respect. Not being allowed to come right into the king's court without permission, Haman stands in the outer court, hoping to be let in.

"Who's standing in the court?" King Ahasuerus asks that sleepless night.

When he is told that it is his trusted counsellor, Haman, the king lets him come in at once—not to talk to the king about his own problems, but to listen and help the king.

King Ahasuerus asks him, "What should I do for a man that the king wants to honour?"

Filled with pride and nearly only always thinking about himself Haman wrongly assumes that the king must be talking about him. So he lists all

the best things that he, Haman, would love to have given to him—all the ways he could be given great respect and honour.

“A man’s pride shall bring him low” a proverb says, and so it happened.

Haman’s chest fills with pride while visions dance in his mind. He speaks to the king.

“To the man that the king wants to honour, let him ride on the king’s own horse, wearing the king’s royal apparel and the king’s crown placed on his head. Let one of the king’s most noble princes lead the horse through the city, calling out, ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.’ ”

As he is saying this, his mental image shows him, Haman, on the horse, smiling, while everyone is bowing in respect. His thoughts are jolted suddenly when the king says,

“Quickly now, go and do this, just what you said. Don’t miss doing any of this. Do this for Mordecai the Jew.”

A worse instruction couldn’t have been given. Haman turns pale. He can’t imagine being asked to do this, to honour in such a respected way, his most bitter enemy. His pride brought him so low.

The next day, when morning came, Haman had to be that ‘most noble prince’ that led Mordecai around, giving him great honour. Being so near to a king, means you have to do whatever you are asked to do. So, of course Haman had to obey and do it, but when it was over he just about collapsed. He’d never felt so humiliated in all his life. He didn’t have long to think about how he felt, for the second banquet that he was invited to with the queen and king was happening that night. Just as he felt like he wanted to crawl into a cave from embarrassment, the king’s servants were there to summon him to the king and queen’s banquet.

The wine food was just as delicious as the night before, and Esther looked just as beautiful. When the king could not stand the suspense any longer, at last Esther revealed her request. She is in danger. She tells the king the trouble and dangerous predicament that she and her people are in—and says that it is Haman who is causing the problems. The king was shocked and outraged! From that moment on, Haman was no longer the king’s counsellor. He was taken away to receive the same awful destruction that he was planning to have happen to Mordecai. Haman’s job and the special ring from the king that he had, was given to Mordecai, someone the king knew he could trust.

There was more that needed to be done to fix the troubles that had been started by Haman, so once again Esther came before the king, this time weeping and begging for his help. Just having the proud man out of the way didn’t stop the terrible decree that had been issued; what Haman had tricked the king into deciding and declaring. King Ahasuerus told Esther that she and Mordecai could write a letter, of whatever they wanted to say, to all people in the land. It could be sealed with the king’s seal and approval.

So Mordecai and Esther did this, and wrote and sent letters all over the country, in all the different languages that were spoken. They had many translations done and copies made. It was a major publishing project as it was to go to so many places with people speaking all kinds of languages. The letters were sent out by the postmen of their time, riding mules and camels, going all around as fast as they could travel.

The king wanted the Jews all to be allowed to live safely in his land, and no harm to come to them. Esther was a good and brave queen that her people loved, because she loved and obeyed Me, her Lord and God. Her older cousin Mordecai was giving the place as the next most important man in the country besides the king. He started out as a man that loved, obeyed and respected God, and took care of an orphan girl. It was a humble beginning, but “he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”. He

didn't know that the little girl he cared for would be a queen one day, and be the one God used, along with him, to help all their people.

Maybe I, Jesus, have asked your family to just care for one orphan, or perhaps several. Who knows where your faithfulness in training them right will lead to. Every bit of love and kindness that you give to them, and all the good skills you help to teach them, will pay off one day. Most of all, the way you lead them to know Me, Jesus, their loving Heavenly Father, and how you help to instruct them in My Word, is the best thing you can do. Perhaps one day you'll see the huge and big effect this good training will eventually have on yours and other's lives, just like with Mordecai and Queen Esther.

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### **King Cyrus and King Darius**

I, the Lord, promised to the people of Israel, through the prophet Jeremiah, that they would be allowed to return to their home land again. So when King Cyrus ruled over many of the lands where they were now living in, I moved his heart to want to allow them all to return to their home country. He wanted them to go back to Jerusalem and build up the temple again.

King Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the gold and silver vessels—the bowls and cups and all that was stored in the temple and put it in his own place. But when King Cyrus was the new king he decided to let the people return and fix things up again. He ruled over that land and had charge of all those treasures that had been taken away. King Cyrus said they could all be returned to Jerusalem. A man called Sheshbazzar, who was the prince of the land of Judah, took it all back—over 5,000 gold and silver vessels—with them that were travelling from Babylon back to Jerusalem.

Besides these treasures being returned, King Cyrus said that those living around the Israelities should give them supplies and help them in any way

they could—with gold and silver, with animals, with goods and so forth, so they could have all they needed as they started to build up their cities and temple again. Everyone that was travelling back, along with their animals was listed and counted, and they all could return to the cities that they had come from.

It took a couple years from the time they arrived back in Jerusalem until they began the construction work on the temple. When they were ready to start, the priests Zerubbabel and Jeshua and others began organizing and appointing those who would start the work. It would be a big project to complete, so they didn't wait until it was all done to have their first celebration. After the foundation was laid for the new temple, the people got together for a big time of praise.

There were musicians playing and singers singing praise to God, doing it in the way King David had instructed and taught the people to do many years before. He had told those around, when he was king how to praise God in song, and now many years later they wanted to do it in that way again—as they wanted to follow King David's example of loving and pleasing Me.

People were shouting for joy! Their first focus after returning and settling back in their home land was to make the place of prayer, and to make times of worshiping and praising Me their priority. They had learned after all those years away and the troubles they'd been through, that loving and staying close to Me was what would make things go well in their lives.

Well, they were off to a good start, but everything didn't go smoothly. There were others that were living around in the area who weren't happy about the Israelites building up the temple again. They thought that those now in Jerusalem would then just be doing their own thing and not obeying and giving money to the King of Persia any longer, who ruled over all that area.



When Cyrus was no longer the king, a letter was written to the next king telling him to make them stop building the temple, and saying why they thought it shouldn't be built. The King of Persia at that time then agreed and told the Israelites that the work of building the temple needed to stop.

Haggai and Zechariah were prophets then, and passed on My Words and messages to the people. Everyone needed the encouragement during that time especially, as they were being forced to stop building the temple that at that time I wanted them to build, as a sign of turning again to Me, and making their nation a God-respecting place.

While the new king reigned they weren't permitted to work on the building project. However, when Darius became the next king, Zerubbabel and Jeshua decided to get building again. No one could legally stop them, as the king that made the rule that they should stop building it was no longer in power. Zerubbabel and Jeshua knew it was what I wanted them to do, so the work began again, in spite of those who were still grumbling about it. But with the encouragement of God's prophets they found the strength to make good progress day-by-day.

The people who were trying to stop their project came snooping around to see what was going on and found the temple was being built quickly. They asked questions and tried to get the names of the leaders of the project written down so they could have, in writing, the ones in charge of the construction work to report them to the king, and make them stop.

However, rather than listing their names and trying to argue and answer each little question, those working on the building project decided to use it as an opportunity to tell the King the story of their lesson and the history behind it all. This would help the King come to know Me, the Lord, better, and realise that obeying and respecting Me is a wise thing to do.

So when the grumblers wrote to the king about it, informing him about the project, they also included the letter from the people working on the temple and what they had to say.

The letter told of how because of their disobedience to Me that I had allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to disrupt things, make them leave their land, and ruin the old temple and take all the special things out of it. The letter continued to explain how when King Cyrus was ruling he said everyone could return to their land. He gave back all the gold and silver vessels that had been in Babylon, that belonged to the temple, and he gave the order that the temple be rebuilt.

They explained that they were trying to rebuild it, since King Cyrus said they should. The letter suggested that King Darius see if that written decree could be found, the one given by King Cyrus telling the Israelites to start the temple rebuilding project. Then King Darius would know that it was true, and that they were actually doing what they were meant to do.

When King Darius read the letter and read where it suggested that he find King Cyrus' degree, then he made a decree for that scroll to be looked for. The search was made, and at last it was found in the "house of scrolls" in a palace!

After reading it, King Darius gave his full support to the building project. He said that no one should give them any trouble from then on, and the work should continue to progress. In fact, he said that the tax money from those living nearby should be given to help support the project.

King Darius ordered that all kinds of food be given to them daily, so they would all have what they needed to make fast progress. King Darius was glad that prayers would be offered, and asked that the priests pray for him and his sons too.

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## Ezra

At last, after several years and lots of hard work and perseverance, to the great joy of all, the new temple was finished being built! Everyone had a great celebration and rejoiced that they were at last together again, and able to pray and worship and sing and do what was written down in the Books of Moses and what I had told them through My prophets. They read and followed My instructions to them.

There was a man called Ezra and he was a scribe of the words of the God of Heaven. He would read and write and make copies of the books of Moses and other documents. He knew My Word very well, and the King liked that. So the King sent Ezra out of Babylon to Jerusalem with a mission—to go and teach the people God’s Words and instructions and to find others who could help do that job.

The King was very interested in having the people follow My instructions and he promised to Ezra that he could have whatever riches, food, gold, silver and supplies that were needed to do the job of helping people learn to do things My way.

He had permission to use and ask for all that was needed from the King’s treasures and from the land. If people didn’t follow and obey and do what My Word said, the king told Ezra to correct them and give whatever punishment as seemed best, in order to keep people going the right way.

The King wrote this in a decree that whatever Ezra needed from that part of the country to help the people follow in My ways and have all the things that were needed for the temple, that Ezra could have in unlimited amounts. He also said that the priests and Levites and singers and those who served Me would not need to pay any tribute or taxes. He made it a rule that they didn’t need to!

The King respected God and believed that good things happened to those that loved Me and prayed and worshiped Me. He wanted it to go well in

his own life and in the lives of his sons and that's why he was supportive and was encouraging people to follow in My way and gave all that he could to help them.

Ezra was fervent in prayer and dedicated to his mission of helping the people obey My Words to them. When there were problems that came up, or situations and things that needed My help right away, he would pray with all his heart, and I would hear and answer and bring victory.

Ezra knew it was by God's grace and mercy that they were kept safe and things were going well. He didn't take it for granted, but knew they needed to follow Me all the way, faithfully if they wanted My blessing.

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## **Nehemiah**

Different people feel My call to do something for Me in different ways. Some of the prophets saw visions of angels, other people were commissioned by Kings to do things that I led them to do. Some people had dreams from God and acted on them.

There was a man called Nehemiah, and his job was to serve wine to the King. He was just a humble servant, although he was a trusted and important one, who would often come into the presence of King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's call came in the form of a deep feeling in his heart, after he heard some sad and disturbing news from his brother who was visiting. Nehemiah wondered how things were going in Jerusalem and was greatly saddened to hear that it was pretty rough. One of the main problems was that there was no wall and gates around the city, so the people who lived in the area that didn't like them could cause them distress and troubles.

The city didn't look all nice and fancy as it had many years before, when other good kings had ruled and they had all prospered. What could he do

about it? Nehemiah was a servant and wasn't even free to go and travel and do this and that. Besides, he was just one person. What could he do?

However, he was overwhelmed with the feeling in his heart that something needed to be done in the situation and was deeply grieved about it all. The first step he took was to start with prayer—lots of prayer and getting things right in his heart with God. He asked for forgiveness for himself and others and reminded Me of My promises that if anyone turned again and was sorry and decided to do things God's way that they would be forgiven and brought again to the place they were meant to be.

Sometimes when people see the need for a job to get done and are praying for something to happen, sometimes the answer to the need is you! Instead of looking around for someone else to fix the problems, maybe you are who God wants to use to bring the solution. And so it was with Nehemiah.

One day as he was serving the wine to the King and Queen he couldn't hide his sorrow—it was shown on his face. Nehemiah had always tried to act pleasant around the King, but this time he just couldn't come across joyful. He felt the call in his heart, the great burden, that he was the one that needed to go and do something about the broken wall in Jerusalem.

Now, a wall around a city isn't a little thing to build, especially not with the tools and equipment that was available back then. It would be a huge undertaking, but in his heart Nehemiah was willing to go and tackle this enormous task, if God called him to—and if the king allowed it and gave him the help he needed.

When the king noticed that Nehemiah seemed very sad about something he asked Nehemiah what was troubling him. At first Nehemiah felt afraid, like maybe the king was unhappy about his servant coming into his presence all sad. But it was something that Nehemiah just couldn't hide. Nehemiah explained the reason for his sorrow—that the walls of

Jerusalem were broken down, and things weren't going so well for those there. It was a place he had grown up in. It was his home country and city. It mattered personally to him.

The king surprised him and asked him what he would like. Nehemiah didn't dare just answer off the top of his head. He had prayed before that the king would help him in some way and here was the answer to his prayer. Whatever he asked for, the king would grant. He wanted to choose his words carefully and wisely. What would make the mission successful? What would he really need? Before talking he prayed with all his heart and then spoke.

Nehemiah asked for permission to be sent to build the wall.

"How long will you be gone for? When will you return?" the king asked, and then granted him permission to go. Nehemiah answered with a time he would come back by.

Nehemiah asked for letters to be written to the governors where he would be travelling, to give him permission to enter, and to be given safe travel. He asked for a letter of request from the king to ask the keeper of the king's forest to cut down trees for the timber he would need to use for the big gates of the city.

All these things were granted to Nehemiah by the king. Nehemiah had faith to ask for big things, and had great faith that he, just him, could go and start getting this huge project going.

I, Jesus, the King of the universe, enjoy hearing your prayers of faith when you ask Me to grant you big requests. It shows you believe that I am as powerful and wonderful as I am, and I like to answer you. And when I ask you to do a challenging job, and it seems too hard for you alone to do it and you ask for My help and begin obey in faith, this too makes Me very happy!

So the king was glad to not just see that Nehemiah was downhearted and in despair but that he was willing to be part of the solution and was filled with faith that things could be solved. The king was glad to give support to someone that had faith that it could be done.

Nehemiah and some others who went with him began their journey and their new challenge. When they arrived in Jerusalem some troublemakers were upset to see that someone had come to take care of things and check out the situation. It meant good news for the Israelites and something that would begin to put an end to the problem-makers' shenanigans.

The first part of the mission was done in secret. Nehemiah needed to see for himself the condition of his new construction site and building project. He and just a few others snuck around at night walking here and there getting a good idea of the state things were in. If he did this during the day no doubt there would be questions raised and people would wonder what he was up to. He needed to get the plans in progress before those trying to stop progress would hinder him.

Nehemiah then went during the day to talk with the rulers and noble men about his mission—to repair the wall; and he told them what the King had granted him. The men he talked with supported his plan and gave him their approval to begin work. Gates and walls began to get fixed as people worked hard together to make progress as quickly as possible. Not only was the work tiring, but it wasn't without its troublemakers.

There were those who seemed to have nothing better to do than to speak words of despair and discouragement, and they tried to weaken the teams working, through their words. Words can be a powerful thing and can make people feel strong and motivated, or feel weakened and like quitting.

These guys tried all that they could to stop the progress, but Nehemiah wouldn't be distracted or discouraged. Nehemiah and his team just kept the vision in their mind of the wall being finished. They focused on the end goal and just wouldn't stop no matter who was making it hard for them. It took a great deal of perseverance and helping each other.

When the job was half way done, those who thought they could discourage the workers and make them quit, got upset. Those troublemakers were quite proud and thought they could make happen whatever they wanted to. But this project was beyond any of their tactics. Those trying to hinder the work tried to get others in the area involved in causing the wall builders trouble. It didn't work however, because Nehemiah had something much stronger than they did—he had prayer and a God who listened to his wholehearted fervent prayers. This project was completed as a result of many prayers and by not giving up.

At last the wall was built, and there were gates and doors and locks all in good working order! Everyone around knew that it was a miracle for it to be completed, knowing the struggle that they had endured from all those trying to hinder it being built. People knew just by looking at it that God was the one behind it all and was making it happen.

Nehemiah was the governor for sometime during the building of the wall, and helped to instruct people to make the right decisions and do things according to the way My written Word to them had said to things. When the wall was complete he made his brother Hanani, as well as and Hananiah who was the ruler of the palace, to be in charge of Jerusalem.

Ezra the priest and scribe taught the people what was written down in the scrolls of God's Words. He read as well as explained to everyone what things meant. Everyone understood the instructions and knew what God wanted them to do.



On a day of celebration when they were reading the Words of God everyone was sad when they heard how much they had all been disobeying My instructions. They wept and prayed and were sorry. However, Nehemiah and Ezra told them to cheer up, that it was a day of celebration. They didn't need to get all down about past mistakes, just to try to please Me, the Lord, from then on. He said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Instead of thinking only about their mistakes, they could instead praise God and sing and declare how wonderful He is. The joy I would give them as they praised and rejoiced in all that I had done for them would give them the strength to follow Me.

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### **Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**

Before all that disruption happened, and when the Israelites were still in their country, and king Nebuchadnezzar hadn't made them leave yet, the prophet Zephaniah spoke God's Word to the people. The messages spoke of warning and coming difficulties to those who didn't listen and follow in My ways.

In one of the messages in the Book of Zephaniah it says how I, the Lord, love it when people meekly and humbly come before Me and pray. It also says how good it is to "receive correction" and to change when I am trying to get you doing things the right way, and not just continue on the opposite wrong pathway of life.

It takes humility to receive correction. It's the proud that have the worst time. If you are humble and admit your mistakes and ask Me, Jesus, for forgiveness, then I can help you to change and I willingly forgive you. I love you and want to be near to you and want you to be near to Me. Being humble and listening to the ways My Word tells you to change in, is the way to a strong life. If instead of choosing the less self-glorifying things I

might lovingly ask you to do, you are proud, obstinate and wilfully disobey, and choose your own self-image, this will bring worse things your way.

I am gentle with those who want to change, and who know they need Me and who aren't trying to prove that they are strong and wonderful all on their own. I love those who love Me and who have realised that I made them and I am the one that gives them life and the strength to do anything at all. Those that have a humble spirit and know they need My forgiveness and lovingkindness are the ones I will give special care to.

Though the prophecies in the Book of Zephaniah tell of the coming troubles, the things that ended up happening, the end of his Book tells a promise. It tells that the people would be allowed to return again one day. This also happened, after they were compelled to leave for 70 years. When they returned and began to set up Jerusalem again, and build the temple and walls of the city, they were much more eager and ready to listen to the prophets that I, the Lord, sent them at that time.

Things were off to a rather rough start and those in Jerusalem and in the area nearby weren't so welcoming and helpful to those working to build things up again. They were worried about what would happen if these Israelites were strengthened again, and what it would mean to the country. But I had a job for them to do, and they needed to stick with it and work hard to build things up again and start to have their special times for prayer and praise once again.

Two prophets that were sent to encourage the Israelites at that time were Haggai and Zechariah. These men received the messages from Me and were faithful to speak My Words. Through prophet Haggai, I spoke to Zerubbabel and Jeshua instructing them and encouraging them in their work of rebuilding the temple and setting things up again. Some people were very old and had seen the temple before it was broken down, and remembered how fancy it was, made with so much silver and gold and

precious stones. They missed having it the way it used to be and it made them sad that the first temple was gone and the new one was much simpler.

Through Haggai, I was able to encourage them and said that I didn't need people to give Me silver and gold—like a fancy place of worship, with all those precious metals and jewels adorning it. I told them that I was there with them and that was the most important thing. I said in the end, this more simply-built temple would be better than the fancier one that was built before. What would make their lives great wasn't merely the materials that a temple was made out of, but rather by how fervently and wholeheartedly they loved Me and how much they'd let Me be in their lives and thoughts and actions. What I most of all wanted was their hearts to follow Me and love Me.

Prophet Zechariah gives promises and instructions from Me. I promised that My spirit would be what helped them to accomplish what I wanted them to do. They didn't need to be the strongest and most powerful nation around. All they needed to do was obey Me and listen to My Word, and I would help them do what they were meant to do.

Other tips for a happy life, given to them through the Prophet Zechariah included:

- Show mercy and compassion
- Help those in need
- Think good and positive thoughts about your brothers and sisters
- Speak the truth and be honest
- Live in peace
- Do what you promise to do
- Be kind to neighbours and foreigners

The Prophet Malachi passed on God’s wonderful promise of tremendous supply and God’s care to those who gave to God—those who brought their “tithes.” Those working in the temple were to receive the provision of their food and needs through others giving a small percent of their goods and wealth, as a gift to Me. Still today people can give to Me, Jesus, in this way. I don’t need money in Heaven, but there’s lots of people that do need help and mostly My Words to be passed on to them. If everyone who loves Me chooses to give a portion of all their earnings and let Me tell them how to use it and who to share it with, and most of all how to use it to reach people with My love and Words, so many more people can come to know about Me and will lead much happier lives.

Even if someone only has a small amount of funds or goods, and it’s not even enough for them, if they will take the step of obedience and share whatever they can with others, in whatever way I lead them to, they too will find that I bless it and give back to them more than they gave up. There are so many ways that I give back to you when you share what little you have with others, out of love and obedience to Me. I don’t always give back just what you give away, or pour down heaps of money, but I might protect you from a debilitating accident for example, and you walk away from it unharmed. Or perhaps there’s something that you’ve always been wanting to do, and out of My love for you I work it out for you to enjoy yourself extra with that special treat.

Those that go all the way for Me, I will do marvellous things for them. I love you and I love treating you to the best things for your faithfulness to love Me and follow in My ways.

