

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

“Listening for the Voice of God”

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” I Samuel 3: 9

TABLE of CONTENTS

Lesson 1 -	Noah	The Obedient Risk Taker	Genesis 6
Lesson 2 -	Abraham	The Adventurer Who lived By Faith	Genesis 12: 1- 9
Lesson 3 -	Moses	From Reluctant to Reliable	Exodus 3 - 4: 18
Lesson 4 -	Joshua	Strong and Capable	Joshua 5:13 - 6
Lesson 5 -	Gideon	From Uncertainty to Victory	Judges 6 - 7
Lesson 6 -	Ruth	A Willing and Submissive Heart	Ruth 1 - 2
Lesson 7 -	Jonah	He Learned the Hard Way	Jonah 1 - 3
Lesson 8 -	Jeremiah	Compassionate and Courageous	Jeremiah 1
Lesson 9 -	Nehemiah	A Man of Action	Nehemiah 1 - 2
Lesson 10 -	Mary	Humble and Devoted	Luke 1: 26 - 2:20

STUDY TIME SUGGESTIONS FOR THIS SERIES

These lessons are designed for you to use in the way that best fits your own schedule and preferences. Whether you schedule a regular and predictable hour each week as your study time or you prefer to have shorter and more spontaneous times to do the lesson is entirely up to you. The important goal is that week by week you find time to focus and concentrate on God's Word and your relationship with The One Who loves you and longs for you to spend time with Him through the study of the Bible. If at all possible, find a quiet, uninterrupted time and place to meet with JESUS.

ENTER INTO THE STORY

As you begin your study time, it is always wise to quiet your heart and mind - to be still. Put aside the details and distractions of your life, so that you can focus on the events that are described in God's Word. If possible, read the Scripture passage in two or three different translations so that you can begin to visualize the people, their situation and their choices. Imagining and writing out the suggested scenario will enrich your understanding of the story immensely.

IDEAS TO PONDER -

The questions in this section are designed to help you think about the passage of Scripture that you have just read. As you consider your answers, you will find yourself looking at God, at the people, and at the events from various angles. There are no “right and wrong” answers to these questions so that you can ponder them and come up with your own responses and thoughts. It's sometimes challenging to do this because we are all prone to depend on the insights of teachers and authors but studying for yourself is the very best way to integrate the lessons that God has for you into your own life and to remember what He said directly to you in His love letter to you.

THE REST OF THE STORY

There will be more to the biography than you have already read. If you can, go on and learn more about what happened as God continued to accomplish His purposes. Ask your own questions, pause, and consider the implications and applications of this story and these events. Take your time.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

What are the ideas and thoughts that the Holy Spirit has been putting into your mind? How will you respond? The discipline of writing down your heart's desires will clarify your thinking and deepen the impact of these truths.

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 1 - NOAH – The Obedient Risk Taker

"You're Asking Me To Do What?"

"So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark.'"

Genesis 6:13 - 14 and 18

PREVIEW – Generations had come and gone since the time of creation and the tragic event that happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose to disregard the voice of God and His very clear instructions. They were to enjoy and take care of everything in that amazing place. There was no shame, no fear, and God Himself was present with them. The one exception was that they were to refrain from eating the fruit of one tree – "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", but when the tempter came they couldn't resist and they paid the penalty immediately. Life for mankind would never again be the same. While we understand very little about the longevity of those people in the following centuries or what life was like for them, the Bible does tell us that although God had not forgotten them, He was increasingly grieved by their wickedness. Isn't it amazing that in the midst of this evil culture and time, there was one man in whom God found a responsive heart? One man who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord." One man who was willing to listen to God's voice and to do what God asked Him to do.

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Genesis 6

As you come to the Scripture reading, take some time to quiet your mind and your heart. Ask God to meet with you as you read His Word. Ask the Spirit of God to open your eyes and your understanding of the truths that He would like you to consider.

You might want to read this chapter in more than one translation and even in a children's Bible.

Think about writing a summary of these events for a news article, a Sunday School class, or a journal. What are the important facts or essential ideas that you will want to remember as you think about Noah and his God?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. What did you learn about the setting, the people, the place, the times?
3. What kind of a man was Noah? How did he fit in to the setting? What made him willing to hear God's voice?
4. What could have been Noah's response to God? His excuses for not listening and obeying?
5. What do you admire about Noah? Are there questions you would like to ask him?

THE REST OF THE STORY - Read Genesis 7 – 9: 17 and Hebrews 11: 7

Why do you think this story is an important one? What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

Take some time to be still and to listen. What do you think God might want you to understand, to change, or to do? If there is a risk involved, what is it and are you willing to trust God for His provision and protection?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 2 - ABRAHAM – The Adventurer Who Lived by Faith

"Really? You Want Me to Move?"

"The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" Genesis 12:1

PREVIEW – Once again many generations had come and gone since God had covenanted with Noah that He would never totally destroy life on this earth. At one point in God's story some of the people decided that it would be a good idea to build a tower that would reach to the heavens! (Genesis 11) Their human efforts and dreams turned into an opportunity for God to demonstrate His sovereignty and His purposes. Some centuries after that event, we meet 1 of the 3 sons of Terah. His name was Abram. Travel was apparently not new to this family, but for some years they had been settled in a place called Haran. Then one day, God spoke to Abram and gave him some very specific instructions along with some incredible promises. He would be destined to be "the father of a great nation and through him all peoples on earth would be blessed."

ENTER INTO THE STORY – Read Genesis 12: 1 - 9

You might want to read this chapter in more than one translation and in a children's Bible, too.

Think about writing a "journal entry" that Abram might have written that day or a story describing his conversation with Sarai, his wife, as he told her about what the LORD had asked him to do. What was he thinking? How did he feel? What did he say?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

6. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
7. What did you learn about the setting, the people, the place, the times?
8. What kind of a man was Abram? Why do you think God chose him? Did the promises that God gave to Abram influence his decisions? How?
9. What could have been Abram's response to God? His excuses for not listening and obeying?
10. What do you admire about Abram? Are there questions you would like to ask him?

THE REST OF THE STORY -

1. Abram's ("exalted father") biography is a fascinating story of belief, adventure, struggle, and blessing – Genesis 11: 27 through 25:11. In chapter 17 his name was changed by God to Abraham ("Father of Many") and the covenant between them was established. Take some time to read it!
2. From the viewpoint of the New Testament – Read Romans 4 and Hebrews 11: 8 - 16

Why do you think this story is an important one? What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

In the quietness of these next moments, ask God to remind you of times when He has asked you to make a change, to leave something or someone behind, or to move on to a new experience, place, or position. How did you respond?

Abraham's faith deepened as he trusted the Lord in each new adventure and challenge. Are you willing to believe that God will keep His promises to you so that He can bless you and use you? Why or why not?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 3 - Moses – From Reluctant to Reliable

"You Can't Really Mean Me."

"God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses, Moses! I am the God of your fathers - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'" At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3: 4 and 6

PREVIEW – Remember the story of Moses' birth? The Israelites had been in bondage in Egypt since the time of Joseph. The new king of Egypt was fearful that these slaves were becoming too numerous and too strong so he ordered the midwives to kill all the baby boys. Two God-fearing ones, Shiphrah and Puah, chose not to follow those orders. At 3 months when Moses' mother could no longer hide him, she made a basket and put him in it in the Nile river. It was God's perfect timing because Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket and rescued the baby. In some very unique ways, God had been preparing Moses for the leadership roles that He was going to assign to him, but the twists and turns of his life made it seem very unlikely that Moses would ever be able to return to Egypt. Then, one day, as Moses cared for the flock of his father-in-law in Midian everything changed. Everything changed because he heard God's voice and met the "God of his fathers" in a very real encounter.

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Exodus 3 - 4: 18

As you come to the Scripture reading, take some time to quiet your mind and your heart. Ask God to meet with you and to open your eyes and your understanding of the truths that He would like you to consider.

It will be helpful to read this story in more than one translation and also in a children's Bible.

How do you think Moses described the burning bush and the interaction that he had that day with the Lord to his family?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

11. What did you learn about God through reading this story? How is He described? Who is He?
12. What were Moses' concerns about the job that God wanted him to do? Were they legitimate issues?
13. As God continued to convince Moses that he was the man to do this job, how did the things that the Lord told him help Moses? Why were these ideas not enough to convince Moses that he was capable? What was the result?
14. What do you admire about Moses? Are there questions you would like to ask him?

THE REST OF THE STORY - In Egypt & Crossing the Red Sea – Exodus 4: 18 – 15: 21

1. The first 5 books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, were authored by Moses. In the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, you can read about his life and the 40 years of his leadership in the wilderness - from birth to death. Leviticus was written to show the Israelites how to live lives of ritual and moral purity. The sacrificial system, their laws and the feasts are carefully explained. In the book of Numbers, Moses reported on 2 census that were taken as well as many of the events that took place during his lifetime.
2. From the viewpoint of the New Testament –
Acts 7: 17 – 47 – Stephen's summary of Moses' life
Hebrews 11: 23 – 28 – In the list of those who lived "by faith"

Why do you think this story of Moses' encounter with God is an important one for us to know?
What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

As you take time to ponder this story, you might be encouraged to consider what God has promised to do for you, too.
Philippians 1: 6, 2: 12 – 13 and 4: 13
Talk with the Lord Jesus about His desires to take your weaknesses and make you strong for His glory.

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 4 - Joshua – A Strong and Capable Leader

"Really? March around Jericho with the ark for 6 days?"

"See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days." Joshua 6: 3

PREVIEW – As Moses recounted the events that happened to the people of Israel as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, he regularly included the name of his young and trusted aide named Joshua, son of Nun. Joshua had been a confidant, a trusted spy, a military leader and an encourager to Moses throughout their years in the wilderness. These accounts can be found in both the book of Exodus and Numbers. Following the death of Moses, the LORD came to Joshua and told him that he should prepare to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. His instructions were very clear. Some months later, as the people came near to the fortified city of Jericho, once again the Lord laid out for Joshua a plan of action. First he had to circumcise all of the males so that the "reproach of Egypt was eliminated. Then, after they were healed and had celebrated the Passover, He explained how they were to "attack" the city. It was a strange way for an army to proceed. It was a real test of faith and obedience for not only Joshua but for all the people. Would they do as they were commanded or not?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Joshua 5: 13 through 6

You might want to read this story in more than one translation and also in a children's Bible. As you read it, try to put yourself in the place of the various people who marched around the city – a child, a parent, a soldier, one who carried the ark, and Joshua himself.

If you were going to re-tell this story, what would you emphasize? What would you want children or adults to remember?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

15. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
16. What did you learn about the setting, the people, the place? Why was the "ark of the Lord" so important?
17. There is a secondary, but very interesting story within this chapter about a Gentile woman who was very strategically used by God to spare the lives of the 2 spies and in the process saved her whole family – Joshua 2. What motivated her to do this and how do you think God blessed her because of her actions?
18. When "the commander of the Lord's army came to Joshua" and talked with him, why do you think Joshua so willingly and carefully listened and followed His directions? What were his options?
19. What do you admire about Joshua? Are there questions you would like to ask him?

THE REST OF THE STORY -

1. At the end of Joshua's courageous and faithful life, he had words of counsel for all Israel. Chapters 23 and 24 are well worth reading and considering.
2. From the viewpoint of the New Testament - Hebrews 11: 30

Why do you think this story is an important one? What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

Do you have any "enemies" that intimidate or cause you to tremble? They might be internal or invisible, but real. How does knowing that God has promised to "give you victory, to be with you wherever you go" make a difference?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 5 - Gideon – From Uncertainty to Victory

"How can I save Israel? I am the least in my family."

The LORD turned to Gideon and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand.

Am I not sending you?'"

Judges 6: 14

PREVIEW – While both the Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges open with an obituary, the remainder of the books are in strong contrast to one another. Moses had died and under Joshua's leadership the Israelites were victorious, strong, unified and obedient to the Lord. During the time of the judges (not legal experts, but men and women appointed by God to be "deliverers") the record of weakness, defeat, bondage and disobedience repeats itself over and over again. As Chuck Swindoll explains in his "Living Insights Study Bible", the cycle of compromise, rationalization, and disobedience always led to bondage and misery followed by a period of deliverance and rest. The Israelites did not seem to be able to break this pattern and learn from experience that God will not ignore sin, but that because of His love, patience and grace He will continue to offer redemption and forgiveness to those who will seek Him. Gideon was chosen by God to be one of those judges. Would God bless Him with victory for the Israelites in spite of his reluctance?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Judges 6 and 7

Take a few minutes to think about God's faithfulness to you. Enjoy His presence with you and ask Him to speak to you as you read these chapters in His love letter to you. What would you like Him to teach you about Himself and His desires today?

Take some time to imagine what it was like for Gideon when the angel of the LORD came and sat by him as he was simply doing his daily routines of work. From then on the story gets more exciting and surprising. Try writing about it under the title, "You'll Never Believe What Happened" or under any other title that might inspire you to describe how God chose to accomplish His will and demonstrate His power through an ordinary man named Gideon.

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. What did you learn about the setting, the people, the place, the times?
3. What kind of a man was Gideon? What were his different responses to the various episodes?
4. After Gideon finally decided to gather the men and go to Midian to fight the enemies, what do you notice about his willingness to do things the way that God asked him to do?
5. What do you admire about Gideon? Are there questions you would like to ask him?

THE REST OF THE STORY - Judges 8: 22 – 35 and Hebrews 11: 32

Why do you think this story is an important one? Why do you think it has such a sad ending?

What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

Have you ever felt incapable, inexperienced, or reluctant to accept a challenge or to do something that seemed to be what God was asking you to do? How could this story encourage or help you to respond and to trust in the Lord?

In the future, how will Gideon's story make an impact on your response to the Lord when He prompts you to action?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 6 – RUTH – A Willing and Submissive Heart

"But Orpha, my dear sister, I want to follow the God of Naomi."

"So Ruth replied to Naomi, 'Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.

Your people will be my people and your God my God.'"

Ruth 1: 16

PREVIEW – During the time of the judges, life was often very difficult for the Israelites and sometimes God allowed famine to increase their suffering as a judgment for their idolatrous choices. It was during one of those periods that a man named Elimelech, along with his wife, Naomi, and their 2 sons, Mahlon and Kilion left Bethlehem in Judah to move to Moab, a rival territory. During the 10 years that Naomi lived there, she experienced the death of her husband and then her 2 sons. When she got news that the famine had ended, she decided to go back to her home town to live out her life as a grieving widow. To her great surprise one of her two daughter-in-laws, who had apparently come to trust in her God, wanted to return with her and to live out her days caring for Naomi, living with her people and her God. We do not know the details of how God spoke to Ruth or moved in her heart to make this decision, but we do know that this story of redemption and love points us to an even greater story. What would God do for Ruth and for Naomi in the days ahead as they listened to His voice?

ENTER INTO THE STORY – Ruth 1 and 2

As you prepare to read one of the greatest love stories ever written, take time to give thanks to God for His unending love for you. You will want to read these chapters in more than one translation or paraphrase if possible.

If you were to write a letter for Ruth to her sister, Orpah, describing what it was like to be in a foreign country and what her life was like as she adjusted to being with Naomi and finding a job in the grain fields, what would you say?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. What did you learn about the setting, the people, the place, the times?
3. Why do you think Ruth decided to go with Naomi to Bethlehem? Why did her sister make a different decision? What influence did Naomi have in helping these widows make their choices?
4. Naomi came back to her homeland a discouraged widow. How did God continue to keep His promises to her in spite of her circumstances? In what ways does she continue to believe that God will meet their needs?
5. How would you describe Boaz? What motivated him to act so kindly to Ruth?

THE REST OF THE STORY - Ruth 3 and 4 and Matthew 1: 5

In some translations Boaz is called "kinsman-redeemer", meaning a close relative who was willing to buy the property of his deceased relative and also marry the widow herself so that the family name would continue to exist. Do you believe that everything we do in obedience to God, no matter how small, has significance in His eyes and is ultimately a part of His great plan? Why or why not?

What would you say are some of the lessons that we can learn from these people and their choices?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

How does this story illustrate the idea that God will bless those who choose to listen to His voice and to follow His ways? Take some time to quietly listen for the voice of God's Spirit as He opens up your mind and heart to His love and to His will for you. Would you describe yourself as "willing and submissive" when you hear God's voice?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 7 - Jonah – He Learned the Hard Way

"Really, God? Why in the world should I go to Nineveh?"

"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD." Jonah 2: 8 - 9

PREVIEW – The writers of the Old Testament books of II Kings and II Chronicles recorded the history of both Israel and Judah as they experienced the leadership of many kings and were eventually taken captive by foreign nations. During these centuries God used various prophets to continue to warn the people of the consequences of their idolatry and evil practices. It was during the reign of King Jeroboam II, a time in Israel of political calm, that Jonah is first introduced (II Kings 14: 25). Assyria, the country that would soon come and conquer them, was preoccupied with other campaigns at his time. While Jonah was primarily a prophet in Israel, he was also asked by God to go to Nineveh so that these foreigners could hear about the consequences of their evil ways and about a merciful and forgiving God. Jonah, however, was not just reluctant to listen to God's voice, he actually turned and went the opposite direction. Is it possible to run away from God?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Jonah 1 - 3

When you come to a very familiar story in the Bible, it is easy to skim through the details and miss out on the impact. Take your time when you are reading these chapters. Try reading a modern paraphrase as well a translation. Look for what might be new to you or read it out loud with expression?

If you wrote a play about Jonah's life, how would you introduce his story and what would be the various scenes in your production? Make a list of them. What would you want the audience to know about Jonah's life?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. Why do you think God wanted to send His prophet to a foreign country?
3. What kind of a man was Jonah? Why was he resistant to go to Nineveh?
What did he learn in the belly of the fish?
4. Two groups of Gentiles, the sailors and the Ninevites, are brought to faith through Jonah's life and words.
What are the implications of this?
5. What are the questions you would like to ask Jonah?

THE REST OF THE STORY - Read Jonah 4

What do you think happened to Jonah after he recovered from his anger and depression? Or did He recover?

Why do you think this story is included in the Old Testament?

What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

Have you ever tried to run away from God? To rationalize what you know He wants for you? To think your plan is best? Take some quiet moments to confess your resistance and reluctance to trust Him fully and to be obedient to His desires. Let Him reassure you of His goodness, His mercy and compassion, and His faithfulness – for today and all your tomorrows.

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 8 – Jeremiah – Compassionate and Courageous

"I do not know how to speak. I am only a child."

"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 1: 8

PREVIEW – The nation of Israel had been conquered by Assyria. The nation of Judah was in great turmoil living under the threat of captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. There were insurrections and rebellions, idolatry and unfaithfulness in the land. It was during the reign of Josiah and the following 4 kings of Judah that God came to a young man named Jeremiah and appointed him to be one of His prophets. For the next 40 years Jeremiah, often known as "the weeping prophet", spoke courageously and boldly in spite of persecution and opposition. Throughout his life time, Jeremiah never forgot the covenant between God and His chosen people, so he urged the people and kings to remember that faithfulness to the Lord and His covenant would bring blessing, but that disobedience would always result in punishment, destruction, and exile. Mixed in to his message of coming judgment, he also would remind the people of God's promises to restore and to revive those who were loyal to Him. Is Jeremiah's message still relevant to us today?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Jeremiah 1

As you come to this Scripture reading today, take some time to read Psalm 139 and to think about your creator, the God who created you and has known you always and who loves you unconditionally. Let these truths be absorbed into your soul.

What would Jeremiah have written in his journal the night after this encounter with the LORD? Take some time to write down what Jeremiah might have been thinking and feeling as he processed this conversation and information.

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. What do you know about the setting, the people, the place, the times?
Read II Kings 23: 29 – 25: 21 and II Chronicles 35: 20 – 36: 20
3. What kind of a man was Jeremiah when the "word of the Lord" came to him?
4. How did God confirm his desires for Jeremiah so that he was willing to listen to "the word of the LORD"?
5. What are the questions you would like to ask Jeremiah?

THE REST OF THE STORY –

The rest of the book of Jeremiah records the way that God continued to guide and use him as one of His spokesman for the next 40 years. Jeremiah was faithful and determined even though he watched the disintegration of his beloved people and their identity. In the book of Lamentations he emotionally expressed his pain, grief and suffering as he watched Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquer Judah and destroy Jerusalem and the temple (586 B.C.). Yet, Jeremiah has hope in the Lord and his great love.

Read Jeremiah 32: 16 – 44

Jeremiah 33: 1 – 18

Lamentations 3: 19 – 27,

Why do you think this story is an important one? What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

What is the word that God would like you to hear from Him at this time? Does he want you to bow before Him in humility? Would He be honored through your honesty or repentance? Can you give Him your sorrows and grief? Why not bow in silence until He speaks to you?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 9 - Nehemiah – A Man of Action

"So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. If possible, could you use me to help?"

"O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name and grant him mercy." Nehemiah 1: 11

PREVIEW – When the Israelites came to Samuel to tell him that they no longer wanted to live under the direction of judges but wanted to have a king, he was very disappointed, but the Lord gently told him that their request should be granted because they had not simply rejected him, but that they had rejected their God. So it was that a succession of 3 kings came to power – Saul, David and finally Solomon. During Solomon's reign, the nation was divided into the 10 northern tribes, called Israel and the 2 southern tribes, called Judah. About 100 years after Israel's captivity by the Assyrians, Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians. Life began to improve for the Israelites after Persia defeated Babylon. Zerubbabel was allowed to bring some of the people back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. Ezra brought more captives back and was used by God to rebuild the people's spiritual awareness and worship. Finally, it was Nehemiah who after hearing about the troubles of his people in Jerusalem, came to the Lord with a broken heart and a willing spirit, asking God to enable him to go and rebuild the gates and the walls so that the Israelites could live in safety once again. How would God choose to use and bless these requests?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Nehemiah 1 and 2 –

Before you begin reading this miraculous story about a man with a heart for God and a willingness to solve a big problem, take some time to quiet your mind and your emotions. Can you let go of your list of things to do and focus on what the Lord would like to teach you through the life of this man, named Nehemiah? Ask God to help you and to meet with you. Invite Him.

How do you think Nehemiah would describe to his family what happened to him as he prayed and as he went to the king before he left on his trip? What would he have said to his wife on his "cell phone" after his first 3 days and nights there?

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. Nehemiah had never known anything but life in captivity, yet he had a heart for the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem. How did this happen? How do you think he viewed his place of prominence as cupbearer for the king?
3. As you think about Nehemiah's prayer, what do you notice? How does he approach God?
4. Nehemiah doesn't seem to be discouraged by the opposition. How does he continue to handle it? What were the results of his faith and confidence in God?
4: 1 – 6
4: 7 – 15
6: 1 – 9
6: 10 - 16

THE REST OF THE STORY - Read on in the Book of Nehemiah, especially chapters 8 – 10.

Why do you think this story is an important one? What would you say are some of the lessons that it teaches us?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

As you quietly sit before the Lord, what do you think you might be hearing Him say to you? To you - alone?
To you - as His dear child? To you - as one whom He might want to use to accomplish a specific task?

Who, ME? . . . Yes, YOU!

"Listening for the Voice of God"

Lesson 10 – Mary – A Humble and Devoted Young Woman

"How can this be since I do not know a man?"

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS."

Luke 1:30 - 31

PREVIEW – The Bible is entirely silent on the events, the rulers, and the life of the Israelites during the 400 years between the last prophet, Malachi and the Gospels. Secular history provides us with very basic and interesting information on what happened to Assyria, Babylon and Persia, the ruling countries as we leave the Old Testament. First the Greeks, under Alexander, invaded Palestine and their influence was tremendous. Eventually Rome conquered much of the known world and the Israelites were living under their rule at the time of Jesus' birth. Under Caesar Augustus there was a time of peace and economic stability. The Romans allowed native peoples to rule the lands they conquered. In Palestine, they allowed Herod to rule and Matthew records some of his decisions, as well as the fulfillment of some Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah that are not found in the other Gospels. Throughout these centuries it is clear that there were always Israelites who held on to the promise that a Messiah would come and He would be an heir to the throne of David, bringing with Him both redemption and salvation. Could it be that Mary would really be the one chosen to be the mother of this Promised One?

ENTER INTO THE STORY - Read Luke 1: 26 – 56

As you come to the Scripture reading, take some time to quiet your mind and your heart. As you read and ponder this very familiar story, ask the Spirit of God to give you a sense of wonder and amazement and an awareness of what this all means.

You might want to read this chapter in more than one translation and in a children's story Bible.

Two women with amazing stories. Both unexpectedly pregnant. How would the joy of sharing those 3 months together helped each of them to be encouraged and strengthened? (Read Elizabeth's story in Luke 1: 5 – 25)

IDEAS TO PONDER -

1. What did you learn about God through reading this story?
2. What do you think Mary knew about the coming of a Messiah? Old Testament Prophecies include:

Genesis 3: 15	Psalm 45: 6, 7	Isaiah 7: 14
12: 3	Psalm 102: 25 – 27	Isaiah 9: 7
17: 19	Micah 5: 2	Jeremiah 31: 15
49: 10		Hosea 11: 1
3. What does the angel tell Mary about the son that she would conceive? Who was this baby going to be?
4. What evidence did Elizabeth have so that she understood Mary's condition and could rejoice with her?
5. As Mary expresses her emotions and thoughts in song, what do you notice about her focus and her ideas?

THE REST OF THE STORY - Read Luke 2: 1 – 20

In what ways is the story of the angels and the shepherds a great example of worship? Of devotion? Of witnessing?
What lessons are there to learn from Mary?

MAKING IT PERSONAL –

"For God so loved the world (For God so loved even me) that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3: 16) Who do you believe that Jesus really is? What does He mean to you? Write your own words or song of praise and thanksgiving and then share it with someone!