

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

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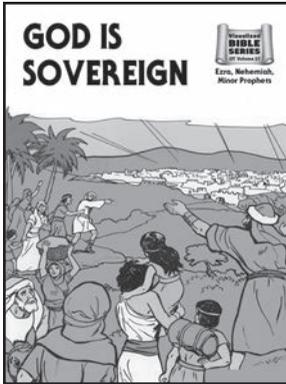
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NOTE TO THE TEACHER

Display each illustration where indicated in text, laying volume aside when the story line continues beyond the picture.

Lesson 1

GOD ACCOMPLISHES HIS PLAN FOR ISRAEL

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

The captivity of Israel is related in the final lesson of Kings and Chronicles. (See Old Testament Volume 26.) If you have not taught that material recently, give your students the following brief background.

Israel was God's special nation. (See Deuteronomy 7:6.) In His sovereignty, God had three purposes for the Israelite people. They were to be (1) His witnesses to heathen nations; (2) The channels through whom He would give His written Word and (3) The nation through which He would send His Son, the Lord Christ Jesus. Christ would be the Saviour of the world.

God promised (through Moses) to bless the Israelites if they obeyed Him. (See Deuteronomy 6:24-25.) He also warned of punishment if they disobeyed (Deuteronomy 28:36-37). Years later, King Solomon built a beautiful temple in Jerusalem. And the Lord God repeated His promise and warning (1 Kings 9:3-9).

Israel ignored God's commandments. The Israelite kings sinned greatly against the Lord. The people followed the sinful ways of their kings. God sent prophets to warn the Israelites. But

they despised God's words and laughed at His messengers. The Lord was true to what He had said. His people, the Israelites, were punished. They were taken as captives to Assyria (2 Kings 17:4-6) and to Babylon (2 Kings 24:12-14; 25:7-12). Their Babylonian captors were later conquered and ruled by Persia.

God's people were in captivity 70 years. But the Lord did not forget them. The sovereign Lord had a plan for them. Through His prophets, God reminded Israel of the reasons for their captivity. (See Jeremiah 25:1-11.) He also promised they would return to Palestine after 70 years. (See Jeremiah 29:10-14.)

The book of Ezra opens after the 70 years of captivity. God sovereignly used heathen kings to fulfill His plan for Israel.

Teacher: Print boldly on a large poster:

GOD IS SOVEREIGN
God rules His entire creation

Display poster during each lesson. Repeatedly emphasize that God is sovereign—the *only* Sovereign.

Scripture to be studied: Ezra 1:1-6:22; Haggai 1:1-2:23; Zechariah 1:3-4; 16-17

The aim of the lesson: To show that God controlled the affairs of the Israelite nation.

What your students should know: That God fulfills His warnings as well as His promises.

What your students should feel: Confidence in God as they obey Him.

What your students should do: Trust God to work out His plan in their lives.

Lesson outline (for the teacher's and students' notebooks):

1. God remembers His promise (Ezra 1:1-11).
2. God strengthens the leaders (Ezra 3:1-13).
3. God knows the opposition (Ezra 4:1-5:17).
4. God intervenes for His people (Ezra 6:1-22; Haggai 1:1-2:23; Zechariah 1:3-4; 16-17).

The verse to be memorized:

The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. (Ezra 8:22b)

THE LESSON

Sovereign is a word some may not hear often. Perhaps you never have heard it. It tells us something special about God. Sovereign means that God is in absolute control of everything everywhere. He rules the entire universe. (Show poster.)

Today we begin studying the Bible books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets, **HAGGAI**, **ZECHARIAH** and **MALACHI**. Was God sovereign over the heathen kings of long ago? Could He accomplish His purpose for the people of Israel whom He chose for Himself? Listen carefully!