

Teacher Notecards Level 5, Quarter A— Old Testament Champions

Use these Teacher Notecards as a reference when teaching
Explore Scripture.*

Print on paper or cardstock. Fold in half, then fold again
along the gray line. This will create a two-sided, notecard-
sized piece for you to hold in your hand.

*The narrative form has been edited to fit on these cards. Please see the full
Explore Scripture sections of each lesson for more interactivity, application, and
content.

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Big Idea: **God rules over a universal Kingdom that extends throughout eternity.**

Hebrews 11

Era #1—God Reigns

Explain to the kids that during the next several months, you will explore a different Old Testament timeline era each week. This first era is about God's eternal reign. This era actually began way before the Old Testament (eternity past) and extends to the end of time (eternity future). During all this time, God has existed. His reign continues through all the other eras (picture 5A.1).

Champion—Almighty God

Invite kids to identify things they know about God. Make a list of His attributes, characteristics, and names (picture 5A.2). God is the ultimate Champion! *The Bible tells us that God is eternal, uncreated, and powerful. God has always existed and will always exist (Psalm 90:2). He fills heaven and earth with His presence. He is Spirit (John 4:24). He is timeless (2 Peter 3:8). He is unchanging (Psalm 102:27). He has no beginning and no end. He is over and above the universe. Yet,*

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He is always near.

Open your Bible to Hebrews 11. The famous “faith chapter”—Hebrews 11—showcases Old Testament champions of faith. These individuals were outstanding examples of men and women who honored God during their earthly lives. They lived by faith, not by sight. They earned earthly scorn and heavenly rewards.

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Give your kids a snapshot of each faithful champion listed in Hebrews 11:

- Abel—offered a righteous sacrifice (Genesis 4:4)
- Enoch—pleased God (Genesis 5:21-24)
- Noah—obeyed God and built the ark (Genesis 6:13-22)
- Abraham—followed God, traveling to an unknown destination (Genesis 12:1-4)
- Sarah—trusted God's promise for a son (Genesis 18:11-14)
- Joseph—believed God's plan of deliverance (Genesis 50:24-26)
- Moses' parents—hid Moses from Pharaoh (Exodus 2:2)
- Moses—disowned his Egyptian family, kept the Passover, crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 2:15; 12:21-28; 14:21-22)
- Joshua—circled Jericho seven days before battle (Joshua 6:20)
- Rahab—protected the Hebrew spies from Jericho's soldiers (Joshua 2:9-13)

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Big Idea: **God speaks the universe into being, giving people opportunities to honor Him.**

Genesis 1, 6-9

Era #2: God Creates (4000–2200 BC)

We are exploring an Old Testament timeline and champions who lived during each era. Today's era begins with God's creation—and a whole lot more. The events in this era took place on earth during a span of nearly 2,000 years (picture 5A.3)!

This era can be divided into four major sections:

- **Creation** (before 4000 BC) *God creates the earth and all life in six days (Genesis 1-2)*
Key People—Adam, Eve
Key Place—Garden of Eden
- **Fall** (4000 BC) *Adam and Eve disobey, breaking fellowship with God (Genesis 3-4)*
Key People—Cain, Abel
Key Place—Mesopotamia

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- **Flood** (2500 BC) *God rescues humans and animals on the ark (Genesis 6-9)*
Key People—Noah and family
Key Place—Mount Ararat
- **Tower** (2200 BC) *God confuses the language; people disperse (Genesis 10-11)*
Key People—Shem, Ham, Japheth
Key Place—Babel (in Mesopotamia)

Read or ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1 while kids follow along in their Bibles. After God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, most of their descendants forgot that God had lovingly created them in His own image. They ignored God or pretended that He didn't exist. Things went from bad to worse. Before long, God was sad that He had made people. Noah was the only exception.

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Champion: Noah

- Title—Walked with God
- Lived 950 years (about 3090—2140 BC)
- Took 120 years to build the ark
- Key verse—Genesis 6:8-9

Read or ask a volunteer to read Genesis 6-9. Noah trusted God and walked by faith. He lived a righteous life among the people of his day. What does it mean to be righteous? (living the right way, meeting God's standard) What made Noah righteous? Encourage responses. At first, it seems like God chose him because he was a good man, but Hebrews 11:7 explains that God considered Noah "righteous" because of his faith, not because of his deeds (picture 5A.4)!

Noah showed his faith in God by obeying God's commands. As far as we know, in the pre-flood world rain had never before fallen from the sky. There had never been a thunderstorm or a rainbow. Based on the available evidence, did building an ark make sense? Why then did he do it? (FAITH!)

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Jesus said that social and cultural conditions on the earth will be the same when He returns as they were when the flood came. Read Matthew 24:37-39 to see how Jesus describes what things will be like. Talk about how Noah's culture may be similar to and different from today's culture.

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Big Idea: **God promises to bless all the people on earth through one family.**

Genesis 12

Era #3: Families Wander

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about God choosing one family to bless everyone on earth. God started it all when He called Abraham and Sarah to leave their home and to follow Him to an unknown destination (picture 5A.5)!

This era can be divided into four major sections:

- **Covenant** (2165–1990 BC) *God calls Abraham and promises to bless him (Genesis 12-20)*

Key People—Abraham and Sarah

Key Place—Ur (Fertile Crescent)

- **Son** (2065–1885 BC) *Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21-26).*

Key People—Isaac, Rebekah, Ishmael

Key Place—Canaan

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- **Land** (2005–1860 BC) *God gives the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 27-36)*

Key People—Jacob, Rachel, twelve sons

Key Place—Canaan

- **Nation** (1915–1800 BC) *Jacob's family grows in Egypt, forming the Hebrew nation (Genesis 37-50)*

Key People—Joseph

Key Place—Egypt

Read or ask a volunteer to read Genesis 12. God calls to Abraham and Sarah, who begin their journey of faith when they depart from Ur and follow God to an unknown location. It is hard to imagine what went through their minds along the way. Where would their journey lead? How would God's blessings come?

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Champions: Abraham / Sarah

- Title—Father of Many Nations / Mother of All Who Believe
- Lived 175 years (2165—1990 BC) / 127 years (2155—2018 BC)
- Was 100 years old when Isaac was born / was strikingly beautiful
- Key Verse—Genesis 18:18 / Genesis 21:6

Lead a discussion about some of Abraham and Sarah's exciting adventures: international travel and intrigue, organizing a guerrilla warfare campaign, meeting the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek, and begging God not to destroy righteous people who lived in wicked towns. **After becoming parents at the age of 100 (Sarah was 90), Abraham was even prepared to carry out God's bizarre command to sacrifice his promised son! Through it all, Abraham believed (picture 5A.6).**

Welcome students to OTTV & Radio. Explain that they have been chosen to do an exclusive interview with Abraham, the father of our faith, and his wife, Sarah. (Exclusive means that Abraham isn't talking to anyone else!) Tell them that the station managers want to screen the questions before the interview, though, so it's

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time for a news crew meeting.

Gather questions from students for the interview and help them find answers from Genesis 12-25.

Let one child pretend to be Abraham and another Sarah. Others can be reporters. Use creativity (costumes, etc.) in planning and performing the interview while still emphasizing Biblical accuracy. Record or pretend to record their interviews.

God gave Abraham and Sarah land, material possessions, descendants, and His presence. But the final blessing “for all nations” would come much later! Emphasize that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. All who trust Christ inherit all of Abraham's promises and are heirs to heaven, too!

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Big Idea: **God frees His people from slavery in Egypt so they can receive His Law and be holy.**

Exodus 7-12

Era #4: Slaves Escape

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about God delivering His people from slavery in Egypt and teaching them to succeed with their newfound freedom (picture 5A.7).

This era can be divided into four major sections:

- **Slavery** (1800–1446) *Pharaoh forces God's people to work as slaves (Exodus 1-4)*
Key People—Moses, Pharaoh
Key Place—Egypt
- **Exit** (1446 BC) *Moses performs miracles to free God's people from Pharaoh (Exodus 5-12)*
Key People—Moses, Aaron
Key Place—Mount Sinai

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- **Law** (1445 BC) *God gives His people rules to govern them (Exodus 13-40; Leviticus)*
Key People—Moses, Joshua, Caleb
Key Place—Kadesh Barnea
- **Wilderness** (1443–1405 BC) *God's people wander in the Sinai desert (Numbers 21—Deuteronomy)*
Key People—Moses
Key Places—Sinai Desert, Moab

Open your Bible to Exodus 7-12. People who win the lottery are often not ready to deal with their newfound wealth. As a result, their world unravels and they end up worse off than before their “lucky day.” It's the same way with some kids who can't wait to leave home so they don't have to listen to their parents. They think they can live completely without rules or without anyone to tell them what to do. As a result, they often run into trouble. It was the same with the Israelites when God freed them from slavery in Egypt. Moses took them to Mount Sinai, where God gave them rules that would help them live His way. But the people didn't want to follow Moses or the LORD. They quickly got into trouble.

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Champion: Moses

- Title—The Most Humble Man on Earth
- Lived 120 years (about 1525—1405 BC)
- Spent 40 years shepherding in the desert
- Key verse—Hebrews 11:24-25

In Exodus, we meet Moses, a banished prince of Egypt. God transformed him into the world's most noted lawgiver and His faithful servant. Moses gained forty years of training in Egypt, fleeing in terror when his attempts to deliver God's people branded him a murderer. Moses tended sheep in the desert for another forty years. Then God spoke to Moses and prepared him to lead Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land (picture 5A.8).

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God taught His people about holiness through His servant, Moses. Exodus and Leviticus were written to redirect the Israelites from their self-centered ways to God's holy ways. Talk about how Christians can be holy today through Jesus Christ's sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

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Big Idea: **God empowers His people to victory in the Promised Land.**

Joshua 1-6, 10

Era #5: Tribes Conquer

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about taking over the Promised Land. Joshua leads God's people in battle to defeat the Canaanites so that they finally occupy the land (picture 5A.9).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **Arrival** (1405 BC) *God's people cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Joshua 1-5)*

Key People—Joshua

Key Place—Canaan

- **Battle** (1405–1398 BC) *Joshua leads God's people to defeat the Canaanites (Joshua 6-12)*

Key People—Joshua

Key Place—Canaan

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- **Settle** (1398–1380 BC) *God divides the land among the twelve tribes (Joshua 13-24)*

Key People—Joshua, Caleb

Key Place—Canaan

Open your Bible to Joshua 1-6, 10. Discuss the battles that your students fight. What helps them obey God during these battles? Encourage kids to be open and honest in their comments. Talk about how developing a strategy will help them win their battles. Provide an example from your own life, or use the following example to stimulate thinking:

My Battle: Sometimes I say hurtful or mean things about others.

Winning Strategy Steps (ways to deal with this situation):

1. Before I open my mouth to say harmful things, I will try to picture Jesus and what He would say.
2. I will pray and ask the Lord to help me say kind things.
3. I will change my habit by saying one nice thing about people every day.

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Champion: Joshua

- Title—The Servant of the LORD
- Lived 110 years (1475—1365 BC)
- Joshua grew up as a slave in Egypt
- Key verse—Joshua 24:31

Joshua is best remembered for his role as a spy in the Promised Land and for his victory at Jericho. But for many years, Joshua was a slave in Egypt. For forty years in the desert, Joshua served as Moses' assistant, learning from Moses about God, His Law, and His ways (picture 5A.10).

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Big Idea: **God guides leaders who restore His people when they wander from Him.**

Judges 2-4

Era #6: Leaders Judge

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about the time known as the Judges. During this 400-year period, God's people establish a cycle of behavior that they repeat seven times throughout the book of Judges (picture 5A.11).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **Disobedience** (1380–1050 BC) *God's people fail to conquer Canaanite strongholds (Judges 1-2)*
Key People—Joshua, Caleb
Key Place—Canaan
- **Deliverance** (1380–1050 BC) *God sends judges who restore His wayward people (Judges 3-16)*

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Key People—Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Ruth

Key Place—Canaan

- **Anarchy** (1380–1050 BC) *God's people do what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17-21)*
Key People—Micah
Key Place—Canaan

Ask kids to open their Bibles to Judges 4:1-7 and find answers to these questions. Once again, God's people were in trouble.

What had they done? (Judges 4:1—they did evil before the LORD, presumably worshipping Canaanite idols.) Which Judges-Cycle stage does this describe? (Rebel.)

How did God respond to their disobedience? (Judges 4:2—He sold them into slavery to the Canaanites.) Which Judges-Cycle stage does this describe? (Rebuke.)

What did the Israelites do next? (Judges 4:3—they cried out to God for help.) Which Judges-Cycle stage does this describe? (Repent.)

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How did the LORD respond to their prayers? (Judges 4:4-7—He sent a message for Deborah, the prophetess, to deliver to Barak.) Which Judges-Cycle stage does this describe? (Rescue.)

Champion: Deborah

- Title—Mother of Israel
- Uncertain lifespan (about 1225—1155 BC)
- Served as prophetess, judge, and military leader
- Key verse—Judges 4:4-5

In addition to being a judge of God's people, Deborah also was a prophetess, wife, mother, and singer. As judge, Deborah held court at the "palm tree of Deborah," deciding cases brought to her. As prophetess, she summoned Barak and delivered the LORD's message for him to gather an army to fight the Canaanites. After the victory, she and Barak sang the song known as "Deborah's Song" (Judges 5) (picture 5A.12).

Have kids turn to Judges 4:8-22. Let's explore God's rescue operation in more detail: Why do you think Barak was unwilling to fight against the Canaanites

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without Deborah? (Judges 4:8-9—perhaps Barak needed her to promote unity among the tribes; perhaps Deborah's popularity would help Barak recruit an army; perhaps Barak hoped that the LORD would again speak to Deborah, giving him military advice.)

How many Israelite soldiers did Barak and Deborah assemble? (Judges 4:10—10,000 men responded to their appeal.)

How did the battle turn out? (Judges 4:14-16—Israel's forces decisively defeated the Canaanites.)

How did the LORD fight for His people? (Judges 5:4,21—though not readily apparent in the text, a torrential cloudburst fell on the battlefield, neutralizing the chariots of the Canaanites. The Israelites occupied the high ground (Mount Tabor) and were able to overwhelm the enemy forces mired in the mud and surging water.)

What happened to Sisera, the Canaanite commander? (Judges 4:17-22—A woman named Jael drove a tent peg into his temple while he slept.)

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Big Idea: **God anoints rulers who unify His people into one glorious nation, Israel.**

1 Kings 2, 10-11

Era #7: Kings Rule (1050–930 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's lesson is about the “golden age” of Israel's history. For almost a century, Kings who were consecrated to the LORD ruled wisely over God's people (picture 5A.13).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **Saul** (1050–1010 BC) *Saul disobeys the LORD after Samuel anoints him king (1 Samuel)*

Key People—Samuel, Saul, Jonathon

Key Place—Canaan

- **David** (1010–970 BC) *David unites all twelve tribes into one nation (2 Samuel)*

Key People—Samuel, David

Key Places—Canaan, Jerusalem

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- **Solomon** (970–930 BC) *Solomon builds the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 1-11)*

Key People—Solomon

Key Places—Canaan, Jerusalem

Give each child a piece of paper and pen or pencil. **Imagine** that during a time when you are alone, God comes to talk with you personally. He tells you that He will give you whatever you ask for. Think about it for a minute and write down your request.

Open your Bibles to 1 Kings 3. **When God asked King Solomon this same question, what did Solomon request?** (Wisdom to rule God's people well.) **Why did God give Solomon what he asked for?** (His request was not self-serving. His prayer request was for the sake of others, God's beloved people.) **How does Solomon's request compare with yours?** (Encourage students to share their requests, but don't force them.)

Talk about the difference between “being smart” (mental intelligence; the ability to score well on tests) and “being wise” (spiritual intelligence; living with supernatural skill—with insight, integrity, and intensity; the ability to discern between good and bad, right and wrong).

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Champion: Solomon

- Title—Wisest Person Who Ever Lived
- Uncertain lifespan (about 1000—931 BC)
- Reigned as king over Israel for 40 years
- Key verse—1 Kings 3:9

Solomon's kingdom was noted for its brilliance and glory—outstanding in size, wealth, and influence. Solomon built and dedicated the magnificent Jerusalem Temple. But Solomon's lavish personal lifestyle sowed seeds of mistrust. Solomon's spiritual life faltered and his kingdom did not remain strong (picture 5A.14).

The Book of Proverbs is like a treasure map that leads us to wise living. Solomon wrote most of these short, meaningful sayings called “proverbs.”

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Big Idea: **God warns His wayward people to repent and obey His commands.**

1 Kings 16-18

Era #8: Prophets Preach (930–415 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about God's prophets. God communicates messages from the prophets to warn and woo His people back to Himself (picture 5A.15).

This era can be divided into five major sections:

- **to Israel** (930–722 BC) *Prophets warn Israel about idolatry (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2-8; Hosea; Amos)*
Key People—Elijah, Elisha
Key Place—Israel
- **to Judah** (930–586 BC) *Prophets scold Judah about sin (Habakkuk; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Joel; Micah; Zephaniah)*
Key People—Isaiah, Jeremiah

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Key Place—Judah

- **to Nations** (840–620 BC) *Prophets rebuke other nations about violence and cruelty (Jonah; Nahum; Obadiah)*
Key People—Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah
Key Places—Nineveh, Edom
- **to Exiles** (586–520 BC) *Prophets encourage the exiles to trust His promises of future blessings (Ezekiel; Daniel)*
Key People—Ezekiel, Daniel
Key Place—Babylon
- **to Returnees** (520–415 BC) *Prophets urge the returnees to remain faithful (Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi)*
Key People—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Key Place—Jerusalem

Open your Bible to 1 Kings 16-18. The kingdoms of David and Solomon did not survive. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, inherited the throne, but many people preferred Jeroboam, a popular leader. The ten northern tribes joined Jeroboam to form Israel. The two southern tribes sided with Rehoboam to form the kingdom of Judah. Israel had evil kings who rebelled against God's leadership. They led

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their people away from the LORD. So God sent prophets to proclaim His message and try to bring His people back.

Champion: Elijah

- Title—The Man of God
- Uncertain lifespan (about 880—850 BC)
- Appeared with Moses at Jesus' transfiguration
- Key verse—2 Chronicles 7:13-14

Elijah, "the man of God," is known as the greatest of all prophets. Elijah stopped rainfall in Israel for more than three years; he raised a boy back to life; he defeated 450 priests of Baal; and he left the earth in a blazing chariot of fire, whisked to heaven by a whirling tornado. And Elijah appears again in the New Testament, at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17) (picture 5A.16).

The rebellious heart says to God, "You are not the most important thing in my life. In fact, I am the most important thing in my life. And I am going to do what I want to do when I want to do it." Rebellion is a form of self-idolatry, when

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people worship themselves instead of God.

How is rebellion and false worship evident in today's culture? Allow kids to share how they have stumbled into rebellion or idolatry. Discuss solutions for returning to God and His ways. What is the result of rebellion in your own life? Share personal incidents.

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Big Idea: **God punishes His disobedient people when they ignore His urgent warnings.**

2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 32

Era #9: Kingdoms Collapse (930–586 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about the collapse of two nations, Israel and Judah. First, God sent Assyria to punish Israel. Later on, the Babylonians demolished God's people who lived in Judah (picture 5A.17).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **Divided** (930–750 BC) *God's people split into two nations—Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12-14)*
Key People—Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Jeremiah
Key Places—Israel, Judah
- **Scattered** (722 BC) *The mighty Assyrian army destroys Israel (1 Kings 15—2 Kings 17)*

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Key People—Hosea, Amos, 19 Kings of Israel

Key Places—Israel, Assyria

- **Exiled** (606–586 BC) *The Babylonian army defeats Judah, taking captives to Babylon (2 Kings 18—2 Kings 25)*
Key People—Nebuchadnezzar, 20 Kings of Judah
Key Places—Judah, Jerusalem, Babylon

Open your Bible to 2 Chronicles 36. Discuss how people of various ages can serve God. Why is being “too young” a poor excuse for not getting involved? Have kids read Jeremiah 1:4-10. God uses people who are available to Him, no matter their age. See also what Paul wrote to his young friend, Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12). When God calls someone to do something, He also gives that person the courage and the desire to do the job.

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Champion: Jeremiah

- Title—The Weeping Prophet
- Uncertain lifespan (about 650—580 BC)
- Watched Babylonians destroy Jerusalem
- Key verse—Lamentations 3:48

God gave Jeremiah a very difficult job. Throughout his life, Jeremiah was faithful to God, speaking to His people during Judah's darkest times. Jeremiah urged them to return to God, but they spurned his messages. The prophet was punished, imprisoned, and nearly put to death (picture 5A.18).

Look at Jeremiah 8:18—9:2. How did Jeremiah like his job? (See Jeremiah 12:1-4!) In the end, Jeremiah, too, was exiled in Egypt. Jeremiah had followed God faithfully, but he ended up being taken away from his homeland. When we choose our own way, we hurt ourselves and we offend God. God has a better plan for us! But even in the midst of judgment and suffering, God continued to extend hope to the people of Judah.

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Ask kids to turn to Ecclesiastes 12:14. “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” Discuss this verse. What do you think the evil kings of Israel and Judah would change about their lives if they could? What things would you change in your own life? Share with students something you would change. Choose one change in your life that will help you follow God's ways more closely.

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Big Idea: **God sends His rebellious people into exile so they will learn to trust Him.**

Esther 7-9

Era #10: Captives Endure (722–415 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about the time when God's people lived in exile (picture 5A.19).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **in Assyria** (722–415 BC) *Israelites adopt Assyrian ways; some remain in Samaria (2 Kings 17)*
Key People—Shalmaneser, Hoshea
Key Places—Assyria, Samaria
- **in Babylon** (606–539 BC) *God preserves a remnant who remain faithful to Him (Ezekiel, Daniel)*
Key People—Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel
Key Place—Babylon

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- **in Persia** (539–415 BC) *God delivers His people from an evil plot to destroy them (Esther)*
Key People—Esther, Mordecai, Haman
Key Place—Persia

Open your Bible to Esther 7-9. Set the stage for kids to study and dramatize portions of Esther. Divide the class into five groups, assigning a chapter of Esther for each group to act out (Esther 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

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Champion: Esther

- Title—Queen of Persia
- Uncertain lifespan (about 500—440 BC)
- Saved God's people from disaster
- Key verse—Esther 4:14

Queen Esther was a remarkable woman. After both of her parents died, Esther became an orphan in the city of Susa, capital of the Persian Empire. Mordecai, probably an older cousin, took Esther into his home and raised her. Mordecai was a devout Jew who instilled in Esther strong convictions of their Jewish heritage. Esther's beauty turned the heads of the king's servants. King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) eventually selected her as queen (picture 5A.20).

Now give each group about ten minutes to read its chapter and to prepare one-minute skits. After each group of kids presents its drama, be sure to praise their work and to summarize the plot as it has progressed.

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Use these questions to discuss the story further:

- **Why did it take courage for Esther to approach the king?**
- **What steps did Esther take to persuade the king?**
- **How are Mordecai and Haman alike? Different?**
- **Why did Haman's annihilation plot backfire?**
- **How do you see God's hand at work in the Book of Esther? Be specific.**

If you have time, discuss similarities and differences between Persia in Esther's time and Germany during World War II.

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Big Idea: **God restores His people to their homeland and rebuilds Jerusalem.**

Explore Scripture

Era #11: Jews Return (539–415 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about the faithful Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon to face many difficulties in Jerusalem. They rebuilt the Temple and raised Jerusalem's city walls (picture 5A.21).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **Babylon Defeated** (539 BC) *King Cyrus of Persia destroys the mighty Babylonian Empire (Ezra 1)*
- Key People—Cyrus
- Key Places—Babylon, Persia

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- **Temple Rebuilt** (538–516 BC) *Faithful Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1–6)*
Key People—Zerubbabel
Key Place—Jerusalem
- **Walls Rebuilt** (458–415 BC) *God's people raise the city walls in Jerusalem (Ezra 7–10, Nehemiah)*
Key People—Ezra, Nehemiah
Key Place—Jerusalem

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Champion: Ezra

- Title—Teacher of God's Law
- Uncertain lifespan (about 490—430 BC)
- Trained as a priest and scribe
- Key verse—Ezra 7:10

Ezra was a descendant of Aaron, trained as a priest and a scribe. In Persia, Ezra enjoyed the favor of King Artaxerxes who gave him permission to lead about 1,500 Jewish families back to Jerusalem. Ezra was zealous to carry out the Law of Moses. When he learned that many men in Jerusalem had married foreign wives, Ezra was gravely concerned. Ezra insisted that the people follow God's Law. As a result, spiritual revival broke out among God's people (picture 5A.22).

Focus on the character of Ezra and his heart for obeying the LORD. Discuss the qualities of great people of God and note how Ezra possessed these qualities: godly humility, sacrificial heart, zeal for righteousness, boldness to confront sin, vision for God's purposes, etc.

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Why is prayer a good response to the obstacles you face? (Praising, thanking, confessing, repenting, requesting, and rejoicing help us stay connected with God and His will.) Discuss ways that they can improve their prayer lives.

Ezra describes how the people rebuilt the Temple and dedicated it to the LORD. Read Ezra 6:13–22. Discuss why the Temple is so special. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. What does it mean to be a temple of the Holy Spirit? How does thinking of yourselves as God's holy Temple make a difference in how you act and how you treat your bodies? Brainstorm ways to show that God's Spirit lives in us:

- dress to show God's beautiful and holy character
- eat food that will cleanse and energize God's Temple
- exercise to make the body stronger and healthier, etc.

Ask students to choose one way they can honor God by treating their bodies as His holy Temple. Encourage them to practice this activity during the days and weeks ahead. Emphasize the wonderful reality of God's continual presence in their lives!

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Big Idea: **God prepares the world for the arrival of His Son, the promised Messiah.**

Isaiah 53

Era #12: Jews Wait (415–004 BC)

We are building an Old Testament timeline and learning about champions who lived during each era. Today's era is about waiting for the Messiah. During this 400-year era, God's people in Palestine lived under the rule of other nations. The time between the Old and New Testaments is known as the "400 Years of Silence" or the "Inter-testamental Period." Even though God didn't speak directly to His people during those years, He was busy preparing the world for Jesus (picture 5A.23).

This era can be divided into three major sections:

- **under Persia** (415–333 BC) *God's people enjoy 100 years of relative peace*

Key People—Darius II, Artaxerxes

Key Place—Palestine

After the Jews who returned to Jerusalem completed the Temple and rebuilt the walls, they lived under the authority of governors appointed by the Persian king.

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The Judean Jews fought hard to separate and purify their own culture, language, and religion from foreign influence.

- **under Greece and Syria** (333–063 BC) *God's people endure 250 years of turmoil*

Key People: Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV, Maccabee family

Key Place: Palestine

Greek Period: The Greeks brought unity of language and culture to the Mediterranean world. They encouraged the "Diaspora" or the Jewish dispersion throughout Egypt, Asia Minor, and Europe. The dispersed Jews accepted the Gospel message much more readily than did the Jews in Judea.

Syrian Period: Antiochus IV desecrated the Temple by sacrificing pigs on the altar. Mattathias and his descendants (known as the Maccabees) purified the Temple and offered proper sacrifices. This led to religious freedom for the Jews and a great celebration, Hanukkah. Seeking independence from Syria, the Maccabees enlisted support from Rome.

- **under Rome** (63–04 BC) *God's people experience 50 years of authoritative rule*

Key People: Caesar, Herod

Key Place: Palestine

The relative peace in Judea at the time of Jesus' birth was due largely to Rome's

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strict enforcement of law and order. The Romans built many roads that aided the spread of the Gospel. By this time, many Jews anticipated the Messiah's appearance.

Read Isaiah 53. After years of captivity in Babylon, God restored His people and brought them back to the land of Israel. During this period of time, the Jewish people who lived in Judea were governed by other nations. Through 400 years of ups and downs, the Jewish people held on to one hope: the Messiah would come and lead His people to greatness once again! God's prophet, Isaiah, wrote about the coming One who would lead God's people back to Him and would rule His people justly.

Champion: Isaiah

- Title—Prophet of Salvation
- Uncertain lifespan (about 760—680 BC)
- Sawn in two inside a hollow log
- Key verse—Isaiah 12:2

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Isaiah's name means "the LORD is salvation." For 40 years, he steadfastly preached of God's righteousness, warned people of their sins, and comforted them with words of God's love and forgiveness. When an evil priest tried to force Isaiah to retract his messages of judgment, the prophet refused. He was placed inside a hollow log and sawn in two (Hebrews 11:37) (picture 5A.24).

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