Rebellion & Redemption: Lesson 5

The Controversy Continues

**Memory Text:** "And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' Then they set their hands to this good work." (Nehemiah 2:18)

**Setting The Stage:** It is said that there's a beautiful statue in Mexico that bears the unusual title: "In Spite Of." The name was given to honor the sculptor rather than the subject in stone. It happened this way: During the time he was creating the statue, the sculptor suffered a medical accident due to a poorly treated cancer and lost his right hand. He was determined to finish the statue, so much so that he learned how two chisel with his left hand. So the statue was named:... "In Spite Of" because in spite of his handicap, the sculptor completed his work. The sculpture's name is Jesus F. Contreras, born in 1866 and died in 1902.

Can God do great things through us in spite of ourselves? Do obstacles, difficulties, and challenges need to overcome us, or can we, by the grace of God, overcome them? Do you have to be gifted, talented, renown, wealthy, well positioned to do great things for God and His cause? This week we'll review the lives of seemingly insignificant people of the Bible to see how God used them, and how He can use us today.

**Sunday – David, Goliath & Bethsheba**
1 Samuel 17:43-51; 2 Samuel 11:1-17; Psalms 51:17

David was the youngest son of Jesse. He is described as a ruddy, handsome young boy with beautiful eyes. Like many other young Palestinian boys, he was early put in charge of the family's few sheep. As a shepherd boy he showed unusual bravery by killing a bear and lion singlehanded. After God's rejection of Saul, He directed Samuel the prophet to anoint David king in a secret ceremony. David was a skillful lyre player and was chosen to play for Saul to help with his fits of melancholy. Saul like David and eventually made him his armor-bearer, which kept him in the king's court most of the time providing the future king with an irreplaceable education.

In a war with the Philistines about this time, the eldest three sons of Jesse followed Saul's call to arms and left for the battlefield about 15 miles west of Bethlehem. It was here that a Philistine champion named goliath challenged the Hebrews to appoint an opponent, but the challenge remained unanswered and for about 6 weeks the two hostile armies faced each other without being involved in actual fighting.

At the end of this period David, who had been at home, was sent to take some provisions to his soldier brothers. Arriving at the Hebrew camp he heard Goliath
utter his challenging call. He surprised that none of Saul’s soldiers dared fight Goliath and offered to do so himself. Laying aside the heavy armor offered him by Saul, David went out to fight the giant with instruments of a shepherd – a sling and a stick.

1 Samuel 17:43-47. Skillful in handling the sling, from a distance David shot a stone that struck Goliath on his unprotected forehead. He fell, stunned, and David ran and struck off the giant's head with Goliath’s own sword. David won the battle in spite of his size and obvious disadvantage. Yet he won, not because he fought in his own strength, but in the strength of God. But how the mighty are fallen.

David eventually became king. He was at the height of his power. His enemies had been reduced to submission. Surrounded by the fruit of victory, receiving honor and acclaim from his own people and from the nations about him, his coffers overflowing from the tribute that was pouring in from his defeated foes, David lived a life of ease and contentment. The greatness of his success however, exposed him to the greatest danger.

2 Samuel 11:2-4. The same David who defeated the giant Goliath was defeated by his own lust and arrogance. How can such two extremes exist in one person? We are made in the image of God and yet through sin we have corrupted ourselves. No wonder our potential for good and evil can reach incredible levels. Thankfully God forgives, and He forgave David when he bitterly repented of his wrongdoing (Ps. 51). God also restores a person who has fallen insomuch that they won’t want to go back to that thing that brought so much heartache and grief to others.

Is there anything in the prayer of David’s repentance that can help us lest we fall prey to Satan and sin?

Psalms 51:17: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise.” The entire prayer of David is an acknowledgement that we are susceptible to falling at any given time if we are not careful, if we become self-confident.

Monday – To Turn Their Hearts
1 Kings 18:21-39

Elijah was God’s special messenger to the northern kingdom of Israel during the great apostasy under Ahab and Jezebel, when Baal worship practically supplanted the worship of the true God. He is identified as the “Tishbite.” Elijah easily qualifies as one of the greatest of the prophets. So far as is known, Elijah was the only person, except Enoch, ever honored by translation to heaven without seeing death. He was also chosen to accompany Moses at the transfiguration of Christ.

When Ahab began his reign, a little more than a half century had passed since the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom, since which time, the northern
kingdom, had rapidly lapsed into apostasy. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord than any kings before him. Such were the conditions when the Lord commissioned Elijah to visit Ahab at court and announce a severe drought of unspecified duration as remedial punishment.

Elijah was instructed to flee to the brook Cherith, a seasonal tributary of the Jordan River, where he was sustained for a time by food miraculously provided. When the brook dried up, Elijah was instructed to leave Israel and find refuge in Zarephath. There again, God made miraculous provisions to sustain him.

After 3 ½ years, during which Ahab had spared no effort to find the prophet, Elijah presented himself and met the king. He ordered Ahab, along with the prophets of Baal and Asherah, to meet him on Mt. Carmel. It was here that the issue of Baal versus the Lord as the true God was put to a dramatic test designed to bring king and people to a decision in the matter.

1 Kings 18:36-39. The Lord responded to Elijah’s prayer by sending a bolt of fire that consumed the sacrifice, the altar, and the water. The people acknowledged the Lord as the true God.

How can we exhibit the same type of bravery for the Lord during a time of national crisis? What are the key ingredients to a life of faithfulness to God in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition?

“Such men make their wills and plans subordinate to the law of God. For love of Him they count not their lives dear unto themselves. Their work is to catch the light from the Word and let it shine forth to the world in clear, steady rays. Fidelity to God is their motto.” (Prophets & Kings, p. 148)

Tuesday – Words Of Defiance
2 Kings 19:21-34

Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz and the 13th king of Judah. He reigned for 29 years, 10 of which were likely shared with his son Manasseh. Hezekiah was a good ruler and broke with his father’s evil practices as soon as he was free to do so. He repaired and cleansed the temple, reorganized the religious services, and celebrated a great Passover to which he invited the ten tribes of the north. He removed the high places, destroyed the idols, and even the bronze serpent dating back to the time of Moses, since it was being used for idolatrous purposes. He also had unpublished proverbs of Solomon collected and recorded.

His reign was marked by incredible prosperity. He gained control over the Philistine Plain, built store cities and sheepfolds, and fortified the wall of Jerusalem. His greatest technical accomplishment was bringing water inside Jerusalem.
Hezekiah is best known for his brave fight against the powerful Assyrian Empire, and for his faith in God during one of Sennacherib’s invasions, a faith that was rewarded by a miraculous destruction of the large Assyrian army.

2 Kings 18:19-36. Rabshakeh taunted and mocked Judah prior to endeavoring to enter the city. He appealed to the people to not put their trust in Hezekiah. Yet the people bravely obeyed his command not to respond to the taunts.

2 Kings19:1, 14, 15. The king’s only recourse was prayer, yet how powerful is prayer. It moves the arm of omnipotence!

2 Kings 19:22. Who had the Assyrian king actually mocked and ridiculed? It was God Himself. God doesn’t take well to any disparaging words made against His people, even if they aren’t all they should be at the time. In spite of the incredible odds stacked against Jerusalem, God delivers His people in the hopes they will yet fulfill His plan.

Wednesday – Death Decree
Esther 4:5-17

Esther’s original name was Hadassah. She probably adopted the Persian name, Esther, upon entering the Persian court. Esther was the daughter of Abihail, and the adopted daughter of her cousin Mordecai, a courtier of Xerxes. Both Esther and Mordecai were descendants of the Hebrew exiles who had been transported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar more than 100 years earlier, but were among those who had chosen to remain when Cyrus granted permission for the return to Judah. Both were residents of Shushan, formerly capital of Elam, but in their time one of the Persian capitals, situated about 200 miles east of Babylon.

Esther was a remarkably beautiful woman whose tact and winsomeness brought her into royal favor and earned for her the title of queen after the former queen, Vashti, fell into disfavor. Xerxes gave her this rank in his 7th year sometime soon after his disastrous war in Greece. Four years later the royal favorite, Haman, cast lots and then secured a royal decree authorizing the slaying of all the Jews within the borders of the Persian Empire and the confiscation of their property. By this decree he sought revenge upon Mordecai, who, as he came and went at the palace gate, had consistently refused to bow before Haman.

The decree naturally threw the Jews into a great panic, and Mordecai reported the matter to Esther with the admonition that God had providentially overruled that she should be queen at this hour of crisis.

Esther 4:13-17. Esther clearly saw her responsibility to save her people even if it meant her own life coming to an end. In spite of the incredible difficulty of the hour and the apparent impossibility to reverse the decree, Esther, in the strength of God’s
grace, preserved God’s people so that they would continue to preserve a knowledge of God in the earth.

Esther appealed to the king on behalf of her people, apparently for the first time revealing that she herself was Jewish. Haman was executed, the king elevated Mordecai to Haman’s former position, and signed a decree prepared by Mordecai that, in effect, reversed Haman’s decree. In joyful celebration of their miraculous deliverance the Jews declared a festal period known as Purim, “Lots,” in commemoration of Haman’s casting lots in connection with the decree for slaying the Jews. Ever since the Jews have celebrated this festival in honor of Esther and in commemoration of her spirit of bravery and devotion. And we can rejoice today because God can take a humble vessel and in spite of that make a big difference for God in the world today.

**Thursday – Nehemiah**
Nehemiah 2:16-18

Nehemiah was a Jew of the postexilic period. He was appointed governor of Judah by Artaxerxes I, king of Persia, and distinguished himself as the rebuilderr of the city wall of Jerusalem. When first mentioned he was serving as a trust officer at the court of Artaxerxes I. A serious rebellion in Egypt, and more recently, a rebellion in the satrapy Beyond the River, to which Judea belonged, had interrupted communication between Shushan, the Persian capital, and Palestine.

Finally a report reached Nehemiah that his countrymen in Jerusalem suffered “great affliction and reproach” and that the city walls had been broken down and the gates burned. Mourning and fasting for a period of time, Nehemiah was questioned by the king as to the reason for his sad countenance. Nehemiah took this opportunity to appeal to the king on behalf of his people, and, at his request, received a commission to return to Jerusalem for a specific period of time in order to bring his people whatever help they should require.

Supplied with a royal letter of introduction to the necessary officials authorizing his mission journeyed Beyond the River, delivered his royal credentials to the proper authorities, and then went to Jerusalem. Keeping his plans to himself for the time being, he inspected the walls by night and then laid a plan before the leaders at Jerusalem for restoring the wall.

The work immediately began, and despite repeated attempts to halt it, it was completed in a comparatively short time.

**Nehemiah 2:16-18.** Nehemiah convinced the leaders to start working on something they thought was impossible, and he did this by explaining to them how God had laid the burden on his heart and how He had directed him. Nehemiah also had a viable plan. Because the leaders agreed the people rallied and the work was done.
“This example of wise forethought and resolute action should be a lesson to all Christians. God's children are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligent and provident care. They encounter many difficulties and often hinder the working of Providence in their behalf, because they regard prudence and painstaking effort as having little to do with religion.

Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts for the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the carrying forward of sacred enterprises today as in the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.” (Prophets & Kings, p. 633)

**Appeal:** There's no question we'll meet opposition in God's service, but we can take courage, because in spite of the situation or our apparent weakness, we can claim God's strength to overcome.