

# DEEPER

## Daily Bible Study

Podcast | Study Notes | Teacher Helps

Based on the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide

## Making Sense of History: Zerubbabel and Ezra

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 1

### Sabbath (September 28): God of History

The Bible is, among other things, a history book—it records God’s interaction with the human race from Creation. One of the most interesting and fulfilling aspects of Bible study is to learn sacred history. As Ellen White pointed out, remembering what God has done in the past gives us strength and hope for the future:

“We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for.”—The General Conference Bulletin, 1893, 24 (see *Life Sketches*, 196; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 31). {3SM 162.3}

#### Discussion Questions:

- Read 1 Corinthians 10:11. What is one reason that the Bible contains so much history? (The stories of God’s interaction with people in the past can teach us lessons for living our lives today.)
- Read Romans 15:4. Based on this verse, how would you explain God’s purpose in recording sacred history for us? (God desires that the record of His interaction with people in the past will give us patience and comfort today.) In what ways have you found this to be true in your life? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Isaiah 46:9,10. What additional lesson do these verses bring out regarding God’s intervention in human affairs? (Sacred history reveals God’s glory and power.)

### Sunday (September 29): The First Return of the Exiles

It is important to understand why God allowed the kingdom of Judah (and the ten northern tribes some time earlier) to be taken captive by their enemies. Although the bad things that happen in life are not always a direct punishment from God, the Bible makes it very clear that in this case, at least, Judah’s captivity resulted from their sins and departure from God. In today’s lesson we will look a little more closely at the Biblical explanation for Judah’s overthrow.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Read Jeremiah 25:11,12. For how long did God say the kingdom of Judah would be in captivity to Babylon, and what would happen at the end of this time period? (They would

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be captives for 70 years, and then God would punish the king of Babylon and his kingdom for their iniquity.) What lesson can we learn here from how God used and then punished Babylon? (Just because God has used a person, church, or nation in the past does not immunize them from future punishment if they neglect to serve God.)

- Read 2 Chronicles 36:20,21. For what reason(s) did God allow His people to be taken captive? (They had failed to follow God's Word and plan for their lives, especially in regard to the Sabbath rests.)
- Read Jeremiah 29:10. What did God promise to do for His people at the end of the 70 years? (Return them to their land.)
- Read Jeremiah 29:11-13. What was God's desire for His people, and how might these verses help us understand why God sometimes allows bad things to happen in our lives? (God desires our best good and sometimes allows hard experiences in our lives to teach us patience, faith, and hope.) Have you experienced this in your life? If so, how? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Daniel 9:1,2. What did Daniel do in response to the approaching end of the prophetic time period? (He prayed.) What is the lesson for us? (We should pray for the fulfillment of prophecy!)

### Monday (September 30): Overview of Kings and Events

Ezra 4:1-7 identifies five Persian kings—Cyrus II “the Great,” Cambyses II, Darius I, Xerxes or Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes—who reigned during the nearly 100 years spanned by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The first of these kings, Cyrus “the Great,” issued the initial decree around 538 BC that allowed the Jews to return home after 70 years in captivity.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Read Isaiah 44:24-27. How does God present Himself in these verses? (As the God of Creation who continues to interact with the lives of His creatures.) Is this a comforting view of God? If so, why and how? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Isaiah 44:28-25:3. What does this prophecy, given 150 years before Cyrus reigned, predict about him and his interaction with God's people? (These verses predict the very manner in which he would conquer Babylon, and also his decree to send the Jews home.) How do you think this made Cyrus feel when Daniel explained this prophecy to him? (Humbled and important at the same time, no doubt!) Why was it so important for Daniel to understand this prophecy? (He couldn't have explained it to Cyrus if he didn't know it himself!) What is the obvious lesson for us? (We must study and know Bible prophecy in order to share and explain it to others.)
- Read 2 Chronicles 36:22,23. What was the real reason that Cyrus issued his decree freeing the Jewish captives? (God placed this burden on his heart.) What lesson of hope should this teach us regarding the political and military leaders of our day? (God can work in similar ways and use them to accomplish His purposes.)

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## Tuesday (October 1): The Second Return of the Exiles

Isaac Newton, the famous physicist, wrote a great deal on Bible prophecy as well as on science. As he points out, there were two times when the Jews returned to Jerusalem en masse:

There were but two returns from captivity, Zerubbabel's and Ezra's; in Zerubbabel's they had only commission to build the Temple, in Ezra's they first became a polity or city by a government of their own (Newton, Isaac. "Chapter 10. Of the Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks." J. Darby and T. Browne. Blue Letter Bible. 01 Apr 2002. 2013. 12 Apr 2013).

The second return in 457 BC, while it fulfilled Bible prophecy and marked the beginning of the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9, was much smaller than the initial return of the Jews 80 years before, around 538 BC.

### Discussion Questions

- Read Ezra 8:1-14. The lesson points out that only about five to six thousand people probably returned with Ezra to Jerusalem, compared with the 50,000 that had returned 80 years before with Zerubbabel. Why do you think so few returned with Ezra? (Apparently they had become comfortable living in Babylon.)
- Read Esther 3:12-14. What approaching calamity was God trying to prevent the Jews from facing by allowing them to return to Jerusalem? (While Haman's death plot reached to all of the Persian empire, including far-flung provinces like Judah, the brunt of the persecution connected with his decree would certainly have been most severe near the capital city of Persia.) What warning should we learn from this failure of many of God's people to return home when they had a chance? (Immediate and complete obedience to God is the only safe course. Delayed obedience is dangerous.)
- Have you been convicted or impressed of any changes that God wants to work in your life? If so, what has your response been? For what reasons might God be leading you in this way? (Answers will vary.)

## Wednesday (October 2): Artaxerxes's Decree

Artaxerxes's decree in 457 BC to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem was, of course, important for the Jews at that time. It is also highly significant for us today, for this decree forms the beginning of one of the Bible's most important time prophecies—the 70 weeks of Daniel 9.

### Discussion Questions:

- Read Ezra 7:11-13. What did Artaxerxes's decree make possible? (Artaxerxes permitted Ezra and any other Jews who so desired to go to Jerusalem.)
- Read Ezra 7:20. What generous offer did Artaxerxes include in this decree? (He offered to provide funding for the rebuilding of the temple.)
- Read Ezra 7:24-26. What other aspects of the rebuilding of Jerusalem were included in this decree? (Economic, judicial, and executive autonomy for the Jewish nation.)
- Read Ezra 7:27. Why did Artaxerxes make such a generous decree in favor of the Jews? (God put it in his heart.)

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- Read Daniel 9:24,25. How does Artaxerxes's decree fulfill this prophecy? (His decree "to restore and to build Jerusalem" marks the beginning of the 70-week prophecy that culminated in the appearance of the Messiah.)

### Thursday (October 3): Importance of Education

Ezra's character and experience contains important lessons for us today. As Ellen White remarks in the book *Prophets and Kings*:

...Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it." Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God's people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land. {PK 608.1}

#### Discussion Questions:

- Read Ezra 7:6,10. What characteristics of Ezra are revealed in these verses? (He valued and studied God's law, and lived out what he read in it. He also wanted to teach others to do the same.) In verse 7, what did this attitude lead Ezra to do when the opportunity arose? (To leave Babylon.) In a spiritual sense, how should Ezra's experience be repeated today? (A true love for and dedication to God and His law will lead us to leave spiritual Babylon.)
- Read Acts 17:10-12. What made the people of Berea commendable? (They studied the Bible carefully.) What effect did this Bible study have on their characters? (They were "more noble" than the Christians in Thessalonica.) What does it mean to "receive the word with all readiness of mind"? (Answers will vary. They studied with an attitude of wanting to follow what they learned, rather than look for excuses to avoid God's instruction and calling in their life.)
- Read Psalm 19:7-13. What positive results does God promise will come from studying and receiving God's Word in our lives? (It will be a powerful tool for our conversion, make us wise, bring us joy, provide wisdom and discernment, and keep us from sin.)

The Bible is our rule of faith and doctrine. There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts or give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose that are rarely seen in these times. {*Steps to Christ* 90}

### Friday (October 4): The Work for Today

The work of reform carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah so many centuries ago stands as a witness and example for God's people today. Their job was not easy, and neither is the task entrusted by God to His servants at the end of time. However, we have the same promise they did—that God will be with all those who firmly take their stand on His side and dedicate their lives to be used by Him. As Ellen White says in the book *Prophets and Kings*:

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In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, nor shrink from vindicating the honor of God. Those upon whom rests the burden of this work will not hold their peace when wrong is done, neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. They will remember that God is no respecter of persons, and that severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed. {PK 675.1}

## Discussion Questions:

- Read the following passages and discuss what each one reveals about the attitude and commitment that God's people should have today:
  - Daniel 9:5. (Confession of sin and of failure to follow God's law.)
  - Daniel 9:6. (Sorrow for refusal to listen to God's prophets.)
  - Daniel 9:8. (Acknowledgment that confusion and disorder among God's people have resulted from our sins.)
  - Daniel 9:13. (Desire to turn from evil and understand God's truth.)
  - Daniel 9:17. (Recognition that God's sanctuary and the truths connected with it must be restored.)
  - Daniel 9:18. (A desire for God's glory and righteousness to be revealed, not our own.)
  - Daniel 9:19. (Request for forgiveness and restoration.)