

**Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes**  
**Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah***  
**Lesson 1 “Making Sense of History: Zerubbabel and Ezra”**

**Read for this week’s study**

Jeremiah 25:11, 12; Daniel 9:1, 2; Ezra 4:1–7; Isaiah 55:8, 9; Ezra 7:1–28.

**Memory Text**

“ ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.’ ”  
(Ezra 1:2, NKJV).

**Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide**

- I. Introduction
- II. The First Return of Exiles
- III. Overview of Kings and Events
- IV. The Second Return of the Exiles
- V. Artaxerxes’ Decree
- VI. Importance of Education
- VII. Further Study

**Questions and Notes for Consideration**

**Facilitator: Jon Paulien**

1. Read Ezra 1:5. What lesson does this verse have for scientific minds? How does religion based on the heart differ from religion based primarily on truths and ideas? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10; and Daniel 9:1-2. When did the first return of Jews from the exile happen? What prophecy was that return fulfilling? Why was the exile specifically seventy years? What was the deeper historical significance behind that number? What significance do Leviticus 26:33-35 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 see in the exile? What do they mean by sabbatical years (Leviticus 25:1-4)? What does this concept have to do with the Israelite monarchy and its end at the Exile? What are the implications of the exile for the seventy-weeks prophecy of the Messiah (Daniel 9:24-27)? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read Ezra 4:1-7. Who were the different kings mentioned in this passage? (Monday’s lesson)

Persian kings of the Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah era:

Cyrus II “the Great”	(559 – 530 BC)
Cambyses II	(530 – 522 BC)
Darius I	(522 – 486 BC)
Xerxes I	(485 – 465 BC—husband of Esther)
Artaxerxes I	(465 – 424 BC)

4. What do we learn about Ezra from Ezra 7:1-10? Verse 10 tells us that he prepared his heart to seek “the law of the Lord.” How would we apply that to our lives today? (Tuesday’s lesson)
5. Read Ezra 7:11-28. What were the various components of the king’s decree? Why were these instructions so important for the people of Israel? Why was the king so willing to fund the temple and its sacrifices out of the royal and provincial treasuries? Why were all the temple workers given tax exemptions? What does all this tell us about the king’s view of God? What lesson is there in that for us? Why is the king so anxious that everyone in Judea be instructed in the law of Yahweh? (Wednesday’s lesson)
6. Read Ezra 7:6, 10. What do these texts teach us about the importance of proper religious education? In what ways might we need to unlearn a lot of what we have been taught in and by the world? (Thursday’s lesson)
7. Read Ezra 4:1-7 again. When local peoples offered to be helpful, why did Ezra respond so harshly? If he was speaking for God in this situation, what are the implications for our picture of God? (Friday’s lesson)

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Another remarkable thing about Ezra is that it’s in two languages. Part of it is in Hebrew, and part of it is in Aramaic. The book of Daniel is the same, and we’ll discuss that when we come to it. Not that most of you will have occasion to look this up, but Ezra 4:8 to 6:18, and Ezra 7:12-26 is not in Hebrew, but rather in Aramaic, the language they were speaking when they came back from Babylonian captivity. Most important is the setting for the events described in these two books, which to the Jews really were just one book; Ezra-Nehemiah. Wouldn’t you agree that much of what Ezra did is in Nehemiah?

So let me give you a chronology of dates. You remember when they went off into Babylonian captivity. Then 70 years later, as Jeremiah had prophesied, there was this decree by Cyrus that they could go home, about 537, and they went home in 536, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. How many, by the way, did you estimate came home? The whole group, thrilled that the 70 years were up? No, only a remnant went home. The book of Esther describes how God looked after those who didn’t have enough faith to go home. So in 536 this group of

maybe 40-50,000 came home and began to restore the temple; but in 522 the work ground to a halt. In 520, two years later, two prophets arrived, Haggai and Zechariah. This is where those two belong. These two men came and urged the Jews to get on with the building of the temple. If you recall, Haggai is that short book that has the opening paragraph that many pastors have used to initiate a building program for a church. You remember?

“Is this any time for you to be living in your well-paneled homes, while the temple lies desolate?”

The setting adds a lot of feeling to that paragraph. In 515, the temple was finished and dedicated. And as we read last time, the older people wept when they saw it, because they remembered the magnificent one that had been built under the reign of Solomon. In 483, Vashti refused to come in before the king. And in 479 and 478, somewhere in there, Esther became queen. So the king devoted some four years to intensive research in the selection of a new queen, which is hardly the way we would do it nowadays.

And all the queens who were not acceptable were simply used to stock his harem; but Esther became the number one queen. I wouldn't want my daughter to end up where Esther did, but it's a wonderful story anyway. It's just the culture was very different. In 457, note the passage of the years, there came the third decree of Artaxerxes, and the return under Ezra. And that's a famous date for us, isn't it? 457 BC.

In 444 BC Nehemiah came, sometime after Ezra, as the governor. And when you have a minister and an administrator together, things begin to move, you notice. Nehemiah, I am sure you would agree, was a very forceful person. Whereas Ezra would pull out his own hair, you remember, Nehemiah would pull out other people's hair to get them to move, and get on with the work. And the walls were now completed. For twelve years, Nehemiah was their leader. Then in 425 Malachi came with the last of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and we have the four centuries without any direct communication that we know of. The next one to come would be John the Baptist, and then the Son of God himself.

Were you able to catch most of the dates? If not, if you look in the *SDA Bible Commentary* the chronology is laid out very well there; and I think it adds a lot of meaning to fit these books and these events into that chronology. Our question, of course, is: What is there to be learned about God from the experiences recorded in these two books? Is it apparent that the exiles had learned their lesson? You know, “whom the Lord loves, he disciplines”, and he really had disciplined the two remaining tribes. The ten tribes to the north were scattered; they remain scattered to this day. The two southern tribes, God waited another century, and then finally gave them up, as it said in 2 Chronicles 36:15:

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers [and many of those were the writers of the books yet to come], because he had compassion

on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God [even the words of Hosea, which were so moving], despising God's words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the LORD rose against his people [and Hosea explains that God's wrath is His sadly giving people up, but crying as He does so, till God had to give His people up], till there was no remedy.

Is that what you have in your version? Something like that? "There was no remedy." There was nothing more he could do. You cannot heal a patient who doesn't trust you, doesn't care, doesn't want your help; so he sadly let them go. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Ezra and Nehemiah*, recorded December, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

\*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/23MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/24MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

How you define faith and trust enters into this. And we need to read other places. **To me, faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a person well known; and we get to know him through the gospel. The good news is about God, that he is infinitely worthy of our trust. It implies an attitude toward God of love, and trust, and deepest admiration.** It means having enough confidence in God, based upon the more than adequate evidence, all summed up in the good news, to be willing to believe what God says—as soon as we're sure *he* said it! And to accept what God offers, as soon as we're sure *he's* offering it, and to do whatever God wishes, without reservation, as soon as we're sure *he's* asking us, and not somebody else. Anybody who has such a trusting relationship with God, of love, trust, and admiration, willing to listen, is perfectly safe to save.

He could die just beginning that relationship, like the thief on the cross. He would arise loving, trusting, and admiring that kind one in the middle. He will be willing to listen, and accept all kinds of instruction and correction. He is therefore safe to save. But you can't regard God in that attitude without a new heart and a right spirit. So you are a new creature, which he's going to mention in a moment.

And that's what David eventually wanted—truth and honesty in the inner man. Mention honesty, and you remember Micah, Amos, Hosea, they all talked about this. All God asks of us is that we stand humbly in his presence with an honest willingness to listen, and let him do for us whatever needs to be done.

I would add that even though with the passing of time I'm finding more and more that everything God has asked us to do makes such good sense and I agree with him; I would have

to say that being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I'm willing to obey this trustworthy God when he instructs me to do something beyond my present understanding.

Wouldn't that be safe, because he's proved always to make such good sense in every other respect? And I think that's what Abraham said to him. "God, you've always made such good sense. But your command to sacrifice the son of the promise makes no sense to me. But I know it will. So God, I'm on my way." I believe faith says to God, "God, I hear you, and I've checked that carefully. It is you. And I am on my way. But as I go, in all reverence, may I ask why?"

And that's how we come to know God. For three days and three nights Abraham thought that through; and in the end he said, "God, I'm even beginning to think of ways in which you could work this out. I'm not telling you how, but I know you will; because you'll not contradict yourself in the promise you gave me about my son. Maybe you'll resurrect my son. Just as you gave him miraculously, you could easily resurrect him. Or maybe you'll provide a substitute."

And that's what God chose to do. And Abraham is cited in Hebrews 11 as one who trusted God, but thought it through. **Faith is not blind. You can jump off a cliff if you take leaps in the dark, and call that faith. It is not safe. History is strewn with the wreckage of people who leap in the dark and call it faith.** Light makes faith possible, and without it we ought to wait. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>*

Now, they were known as the experts in the scriptures, were they not? These were the theologians—the Pharisees—which gave them great influence. In fact, they derived their authority from the general recognition that if you want to know what the Bible teaches, you go to the Pharisees. And Jesus came along and said, "You have misread the Bible." And that's extremely offensive. You tell a theologian, "You know, you're really wrong." That surely was involved, and their pride. Supposing the Lord were to come into a group of Adventists and say, "By the way, I know you've been using such and such a verse all along. You know, it's really wrong." Could we accept that with grace? Of course, we don't expect him to correct us on anything, do we? We know we're right on everything, don't we? So what could I pick that would do?

Well, supposing Jesus came to a group of Seventh-day Adventists, and said, "By the way, you have not been keeping the Sabbath correctly. You have been too strict." How would we react? You know, we'd say, "Well, we've been warned that false prophets would come. 'To the Law and to the Testimony' and you're not speaking in harmony." I think we shouldn't

underestimate the devotion, the dedication of these Pharisees. And they were highly respected by the people.

And he said, "I read the Old Testament differently." You remember, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor," and they said, "That's ridiculous! The poor aren't blessed. They're poor because they're **not** blessed. If they were blessed they would be rich." And then he says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." If you're rich, you're blessed. Otherwise you wouldn't be rich. And you wouldn't be blessed if you weren't good, so if you were rich, you were good. So Jesus was saying to those Bible students, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a good person to be saved." That's ridiculous! It's just their basic understanding was wrong.

And Jesus said, "I say, blessed are you poor, because you're more willing to accept what I have to offer than these rich people. Because the rich people know they're okay." You see, they had key texts for this. They'd go back to Deuteronomy. "If you obey me, I'll bless you and prosper you. If you disobey me, I'll curse you and there'll be punishments, and plague, and all the rest. And your crops will not flourish." The three friends of Job argued with him over that very point. And they were wrong. So Jesus was taking the same point of view against the Pharisees as Job was taking against the three theologians who came to him. Don't oversimplify on this. Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Mark*, recorded March, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/53MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/54MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

### **Further Study with Ellen White**

In the great closing work we shall meet with perplexities that we know not how to deal with; but let us not forget that the three great powers of heaven are working, that a divine hand is on the wheel, and that God will bring His promises to pass. He will gather from the world a people who will serve Him in righteousness. {8T 254.1}

The enemy can never take out of the hand of Christ the one who is simply trusting in His promises. If the soul is trusting and working obediently, the mind is susceptible to divine impressions, and the light of God shines in, enlightening the understanding. What privileges we have in Christ Jesus! {SD 351.4}

Promises are estimated by the truth of the one who makes them. Many men make promises only to break them, to mock the heart that trusted in them. Those who lean upon such men

lean upon broken reeds. But God is behind the promises He makes. He is ever mindful of His covenant, and His truth endureth to all generations (MS 23, 1899). {7BC 942.12}

There is by our side a witness, a heavenly messenger, who will lift up for us a standard against the enemy. He will shut us in with the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Beyond this Satan cannot penetrate. He cannot pass this shield of holy light. {COL 171.3}

In the whole Satanic force there is not power to overcome one soul who in simple trust casts himself on Christ. {COL 157.3}

God does not ask us to do in our own strength the work before us. He has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. . . . {8T 19.1}

In a knowledge of God all true knowledge and real development have their source. Wherever we turn, in the physical, the mental, or the spiritual realm; in whatever we behold, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed. Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate. {Ed 14.2}

Love, the basis of creation and of redemption, is the basis of true education. This is made plain in the law that God has given as the guide of life. The first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.” Luke 10:27. To love Him, the infinite, the omniscient One, with the whole strength, and mind, and heart, means the highest development of every power. It means that in the whole being—the body, the mind, as well as the soul—the image of God is to be restored. {Ed 16.1}

Like the first is the second commandment—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Matthew 22:39. The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. More and more fully do we become partakers of the divine nature. We are fitted for heaven, for we receive heaven into our hearts. {Ed 16.2}

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men’s thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have

said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation. Let them contemplate the great facts of duty and destiny, and the mind will expand and strengthen. Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. {Ed 17.2}

The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life—the object that underlies every other. {PP 595.2}

To gain the higher education means to become a partaker of the divine nature. It means to copy the life and character of Christ so that we shall stand on vantage ground as we fight the battles of life. It means to gain daily victories over sin. As we seek for this education, angels of God are our companions; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard for us against him. {CT 388.4}