

Worship: From Exile (Slavery in Babylon) to Restoration (the Rebuilding of Jerusalem)



SABBATH—AUGUST 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Nehemiah 1; Jeremiah 29:10–14; Ezekiel 8; Daniel 3; Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “You have planted many seeds. But the crops you have gathered are small. So you eat. But you never have enough. You drink. But you are never full. You put your clothes on. But you are not warm. You earn your pay. But it will not buy everything you need” (Haggai 1:6, NIV).

WE ARE MORE THAN ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED YEARS AWAY FROM THE TIME THAT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED FOR THE SECOND AND FINAL TIME. So, it is hard for us to understand just how important the temple was to the Jewish nation's national and religious life. The temple was the most important center of their culture and religion. The temple was where the Lord said He would live and rule in the midst of Israel. The temple was where the follower of YHWH (God) found cleansing, forgiveness, grace,¹ and peace with Him.

The prophets² warned the people that Babylon would destroy the temple. But many people did not believe them because the temple was the Lord's house. How could the Lord let His holy temple be destroyed? We only can guess the shock the Jews felt when the Babylonians did destroy it. It was just as the prophets warned it would be. But the Lord also promised that the nation and the temple would be rebuilt. He, too, promised that Israel would be given another chance to fulfill her prophetic³ destiny (future).

This week we will study some of the problems of worship during the time of the Exile (slavery in Babylon). And we will discuss the promised restoration.

1. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us in order to take away our sins.

2. prophets—men or women who are spokespeople for God. God gives prophets special messages to give to His people. Prophets also speak to God on behalf of His people. God may also give prophets warnings about what will happen in the future.

3. prophetic—foretelling future events.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 28**“SON OF MAN, HAVE YOU SEEN . . . ?” (Ezekiel 8:12, NKJV)**

Backsliding (falling back into sin) does not happen overnight. Whole groups of people do not fall away in a day, a week, or even in a year. The decline (downfall) is much slower: a little change here, a little compromise (giving in partway) there, disobeying rules in order to keep up with the times or to fit in better with the modern lifestyle. Bit by bit, step by step, and before long a whole nation is doing things that would have been thought of as terrible fifty years before. The same thing happened to the people of Israel and Judah in early Bible times. And the same thing happened to the believers in the early years of Christianity. The same thing can happen to any church, including ours. That is, if we do not carefully guard the holy truths and practices given to us by the Lord.

As you read Ezekiel 8, understand that all these practices were taking place in the holy temple that the Lord had started. It was the very place where the Lord had promised to place His name. How could the people and their spiritual leaders have fallen into such backsliding? What lessons can we learn from this terrible situation for ourselves?

The secret sins, held by priests and elders, disgusted God. Those who

should have been leading God’s people in true worship were conforming (fitting) that worship to the sinful customs of their time and environment. In this way they brought the sins of the world into God’s holy sanctuary.⁴ No wonder the coming of the army of Babylon would bring an end to the pollution of God’s temple by destroying it.

According to Ezekiel 8:12, what excuse were the elders using for their actions? What might have led them to such false conclusions?

These people must have turned so far away from the Lord that they believed He did not notice them or that He did not care about their practices. But over and over again, the Lord showed His care, His nearness, and His desire for their obedience. Yet, now He was blamed for having forgotten the land. How careful we should be, because sin will harden our hearts and poison our minds until we make excuses for the most terrible practices.

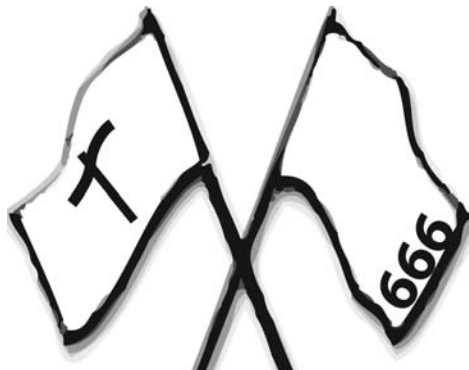


Sin will poison our minds until we excuse the most terrible practices.

⁴ sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

MONDAY—AUGUST 29**WORSHIPING THE IMAGE (IDOL)
(Daniel 3)**

All through this quarter we have learned that the final test in the last days deals with the question of worship (Revelation 14:1–12). All people will be divided into one of two groups: (1) those who worship the Creator, who made the heavens and the earth, and (2) those who worship the beast and his image (copy). This part of the prophecy⁵ has not been fulfilled yet. But one could argue that, even now, the world is divided into two groups: (1) those who are faithful to the Lord and (2) those who are not. There is no middle ground. We are on one side or the other.



All the world will be divided into one of two groups: (1) those who worship God and (2) those who worship the beast.

With this in mind, the story of the three Hebrew boys in the book of Daniel becomes very important for us today. It is not just a dramatic story describing God's rescue of those

faithful followers of YHWH (God). It becomes a symbol of the test of worship that will come upon the world just before the second coming of Christ.

Compare⁶ the worship of the image in Daniel 3 with the worship of the image in Revelation 14. What can we learn from this story that can help us to understand the danger of receiving the mark of the beast?

The second commandment (law; rule) does not permit idol worship (Exodus 20:4–6). Idol worship was the issue in Daniel 3. The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8–11), the Sabbath commandment, will be the issue in the last days. How interesting that both of these commandments were changed by the beast power itself. (Read Daniel 7:25.) Both commandments are tied to worship. The second commandment does not permit the worship of idols. Meanwhile the fourth commandment shows why we should not worship idols. This is because the Lord is the One who created and saved people. (Read also Deuteronomy 5:12–15.)

In both cases, too, there is an earthly political/religious power that wants to take worship away from the Lord. In both cases this power is willing to fight and kill in order to get that “worship.”

Think through what it means to “worship” something. Is it always

5. prophecy—a message from God, often explaining what will happen in the future.

6. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

wrong to worship anything other than the Lord? If not, why not? Might there be some things that we can worship without sinning, without breaking God’s law? If so, what? If not, how can we make sure we are worshiping the Lord and not anyone or anything else?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 30

“CONSIDER [THINK ABOUT] YOUR WAYS” (Jeremiah 29:10–14)

What does Jeremiah 29:10–14 tell us about the character⁷ of God? What hope can we learn from these verses?

After seventy years, as foretold, the Lord began to bring the Jews back to the Promised Land. Israel was to be given another chance to fulfill her prophetic destiny (future).

An important part of the rebuilding program was the temple, also called the sanctuary. It was the place where the entire plan of salvation was taught through the symbols of the sanctuary service.⁸ Here the work and mission of the Messiah were pictured as symbols of salvation for all people who believed. (Read John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19; and Hebrews 8:1, 2.)

Yet, the work of rebuilding the temple did not go as smoothly or as quickly as it should have. Evil forces got in the way. And the work

was delayed. This was not what the Lord wanted. And He spoke through Haggai to let the people know that He was not pleased.

What happened in Haggai 1? What changed the attention of the people? Why is that so easy to do?

How easy it is to let worldly things get in the way of our spiritual responsibilities. The Lord let the people know that they would never be truly satisfied if they did not do His work faithfully. All too often we can make the same mistake. We can get so caught up in the ways of the world that we fail to do what should be first and foremost in our lives. Our relationship with God should be first and foremost in our lives. Maybe the Lord is saying to us, “Consider [think about] your ways.”

Consider your ways, your actions, and the things you do and do not do. What do they say about your relationship to the Lord? In what ways might you be guilty of the same things as the people in Haggai’s warning?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 31

“YOUR FATHERS, WHERE ARE THEY?” (Zechariah 1:1–6)

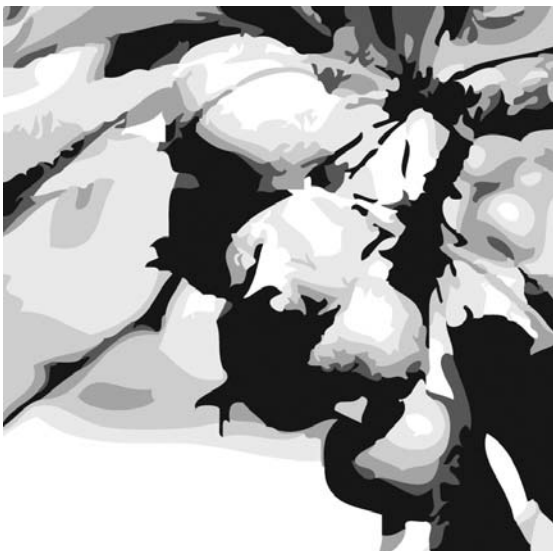
The rebuilding of the temple took about twelve years. Ezra 5:1, 2 speaks of Zechariah as one of the “prophets

7. character (of God)—who God is; God’s Ten Commandments show us who God is.

8. sanctuary service—the offering of blood as a payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner’s blood. This service represented Jesus’ dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died this service was not needed.

of God [who was] helping them.” Ezra’s message, like Haggai’s, is about the glory⁹ that would one day fill the temple. But as often is with prophecy, the promises depend on whether or not people obey. Humans, given free will, must choose to obey the Lord and to do what He commands. Obedience is not something we do to be saved. Obedience is something we do to show the fruit of salvation.

The Bible teaches that human freedom is open to all people. People are free to choose whom they will serve and worship. And the fulfillment of the promises depends upon the choices that people make. The Bible is filled with wonderful promises to any and all who faithfully choose and serve God.



Obedience does not save us, but it is something we can do to show the fruit of our salvation—that Jesus has saved us.

What theme is found in Zechariah

1:1–6 that appears often in the Bible? How is human free will and free choice shown in these verses?

Some of the sharpest words in Zechariah 1 are found in verse 5: “Your fathers, where are they?” In other words, learn from the mistakes of those who come before you. Do not do what they did. Learn from the past. Learn from what happened before you.

Here is where the ministry (work) of the pastor can come in. Like the prophets, the pastor can point the people to the Lord’s leading, to His promises, and to the conditions of those promises. The preaching of the Word should not cause confusion in religious matters. Preaching should be Christ-centered, pointing to what the Lord has done for us now, what He offers to do for us, and what He will do for us. His promises depend on the condition that we come to Him in faith and repentance.¹⁰ That is what Zechariah is saying to the people here: (1) repent, (2) turn from your evil ways, (3) learn from the past, and (4) put your hope in the Lord and the promises of the Lord for the future. In the same way, today, we should come to the Lord and worship Him in faith, repentance, and obedience. We should come with the better understanding of what the sanctuary service was all about (the life and death and work of Christ as High Priest in heaven). Again, obedience cannot

9. glory—great power, beauty, and royal perfection.

10. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

save us (it is way too late for that). But there is no such thing as salvation without obedience. It does not matter how weak our obedience is.



The pastor can point people to Jesus and His promises.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 1

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (Daniel 9:5, 6)

There were many promises of restoration.¹¹ But things were not going well in Jerusalem. The people faced problem after problem. Many of the problems were the results of their own disobedience. The prophet Nehemiah was serving the Persian king. He received word about the situation in Jerusalem. And he fasted, mourned, and prayed about it. His desire and concern for the situation clearly is shown in the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah.

Read Nehemiah 1. This is Nehemiah's prayer about what he

heard. Now answer the following questions:

1. Why would Nehemiah, who was faithful, include himself among those who had sinned against the Lord? Read Daniel 9:5, 6.

2. What kind of prayer is this? Why is this kind of prayer so important? Read Exodus 32:31–34 and James 5:16.

3. What needed to happen in order for this prophecy to come true?

4. On what basis does Nehemiah ask the Lord for help? In other words, why should the Lord listen to this prayer? Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Exodus 6:4, 5.

Write a prayer for the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Bring it to class on Sabbath and compare with others what you wrote. What do our answers tell us about how we think about the different spiritual needs of the church? More important, how can we help to bring forth necessary changes for the church's good?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "The Return of the Exiles," pages 551–566; "The Prophets of God Helping Them," pages 567–581;

11. restoration—things returned or rebuilt to their original condition.

“Ezra, the Priest and Scribe [Author],” pages 607–617; “A Spiritual Revival,”¹² pages 618–627; “Instructed in the Law of God,” pages 661–668; “Reformation,”¹³ pages 669–678, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The time of trouble for God’s people will call for a faith that will not become weak. His children must make it clear that *God is the only goal of their worship*.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 512; emphasis (special attention) added.

“There is danger for Christians who think that they must follow the world in order to have influence on its people. *This method may seem to offer great advantages [things that help]. But really, it always ends in spiritual loss*.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 570; emphasis added.

“In the work of bringing about positive changes to the church today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not excuse sin. . . . They also will not cover evil with a cloak of false charity [love and goodness]. . . . They will remember also that the spirit of Christ should ever be shown in the one who attacks evil.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White,

Prophets and Kings, page 675.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read the prayers for the Seventh-day Adventist Church that were written for Thursday’s study. What can we learn from these prayers? What do people believe are the greatest needs of the church at the present time?
- ② What lessons can we learn from our own church fathers and mothers? What important spiritual lessons can our own Seventh-day Adventist history teach us?
- ③ As a church, we may work hard in reaching out to the culture around us. But in what ways are we in danger of compromising (giving up) important truths? Why is it so hard to be aware of compromising when it happens?
- ④ There is always the danger of compromising ourselves when trying to fit ourselves with the world. But there is also the danger of locking ourselves in church beliefs or practices that perhaps need to be changed. How can we know the difference between what should not be changed and what can and should be changed with the times?

12. revival—to bring something back to its original condition and to breathe new life into it.

13. reformation—change for the better.