

God's Call



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezra 7:10; Neh. 1:1–11; Dan. 9:24–27; Daniel 8; Rom. 8:28, 29; Romans 9; Exodus 3; Exodus 4.*

Memory Text: “Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem” (*Ezra 7:27, NKJV*).

Does God call each person to a specific task? Are there criteria that make someone more qualified than others for a certain task? Are those criteria different in human eyes than in God’s? Most of us would probably say yes, especially to the last two questions. There are times when God prepares us, through education or experiences, for a specific task; at other times, He chooses us to serve simply because we are willing and humble. It’s not always easy to know, though, what God’s call is in our lives, is it? Nevertheless, the Bible is full of stories of people whom God chose for a particular assignment.

Interestingly, Ezra and Nehemiah were called for a specific task by God: to rebuild what lay in ruins. However, rebuilding in this case involved various tasks. They were to lead the people of Israel back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple and the city. At the same time, they were to teach the people about God and above all guide them back to a committed relationship with Him. Talk about a calling from God, and an important one, too.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 19.

The Calling of Ezra and Nehemiah

We could say that Ezra was chosen for various reasons: (1) he was willing to go; (2) he was a leader; and (3) he was a skilled scribe and teacher. There are additional reasons that we could find, as well. But there is one verse that perhaps best demonstrates why Ezra was given this task.

What does Ezra 7:10 say about Ezra? How might Ezra have “prepared” or “set” his heart to seek “the law of the LORD” and to do it?

The word for “prepared,” or “set,” is *kun* in Hebrew. The word can be translated as “prepared, set, be firm, to firmly establish, be stable, or secure.” Therefore, the true meaning of this statement seems to mean that Ezra firmly set his heart or established in his heart to seek God.

After arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra modeled what it means to be dedicated to God, and he taught God’s Word in Jerusalem for 13 years. It may have seemed to him that he wasn’t making any difference during those 13 years, but then, after the walls were completed, the people called an assembly—not because anyone forced them, but because they wanted to do it. The Word of God that they had been hearing from Ezra had taken root.

Why was Nehemiah chosen? Read Nehemiah 1:1–11.

Nehemiah had a heart for God and the people. He was troubled when he found out that the work in Jerusalem had stopped. Nehemiah had a passion for the cause, and just like Ezra, he volunteered for the job. God answered their prayers and desires. Sometimes we get the idea that if we love something it must not be from God, because God will give us only difficult tasks that we might not want to do. But if we are walking with God, the desire to do something we love are often God-given. God wants us to have a passion for what we do for Him.

In what ways have you experienced the reality that God calls you to do for Him things that you love?

Prophetic Timing

In the first lesson of this quarter, we studied how God called Zerubbabel (c. 538 B.C.) and Ezra (457 B.C.) to special ministries. In the second lesson, we considered God's call for Nehemiah (444 B.C.). We need to realize that these callings were performed in harmony with God's foreknowledge. For example, Zerubbabel was moved by God to do a specific task in response to the end of the 70 years of captivity that Jeremiah had prophesied.

In what year was Ezra called to ministry? It was the same year in which King Artaxerxes issued a decree. How is that year significant in prophecy? Look up Daniel 9:24–27.

Daniel 9:25 states that “from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” (*NKJV*). The last week of this prophecy is mentioned in verse 27. Since one week contains seven days, a prophetic week equals seven years (*Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:5, 6*). Therefore, this prophecy talks about 70 weeks, which equal 490 years. The question that must be answered is: What is the starting date of the 70-week prophecy? The text states that it will be from the time that the decree is given to restore and build Jerusalem.

There were a total of three decrees given regarding the restoration of the Jewish people. Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes all gave commands for restorations. However, only the one from Artaxerxes includes concern for the city of Jerusalem itself, and only this decree is associated with praising God for His intervention (*Ezra 7:27, 28*).

We count the beginning of the 70-week prophecy from the year 457 B.C., the seventh year of King Artaxerxes I as mentioned in *Ezra 7:7–26*. Additionally, because the year 457 B.C. also is the start of the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 (see tomorrow's lesson study), this decree serves as the starting point for these two prophecies. The 70 weeks end with year A.D. 34, which is when the preaching of the gospel was enlarged and also went to the Gentiles (marked by the persecution of the early church and the martyrdom of Stephen). The middle of the last week would be the year A.D. 31, which is when Jesus died on the cross.

Review the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. How does it reveal, with amazing accuracy, the ministry of Jesus? How should a prophecy like this help firmly establish our faith?

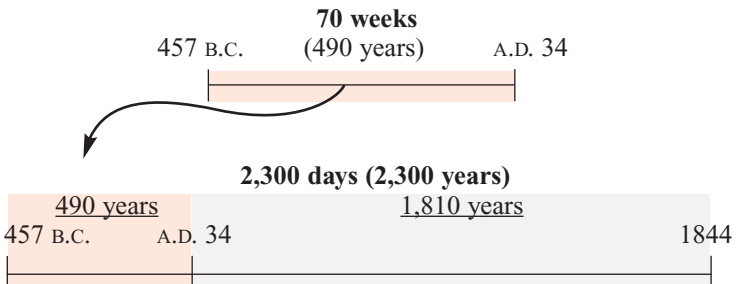
The 70 Weeks and the 2,300 Days

The word “determined” found in Daniel 9:24, “Seventy weeks are determined,” literally means “Seventy weeks are *cut off*.” Although the word translated as “determined” is not used anywhere else in the Bible, it is found in Jewish literature, and it means “cutting off” from something longer. Since Daniel 8 presents the 2,300-year prophecy, whose starting point is not given in Daniel 8, it logically follows that when the next chapter (*Daniel 9*) talks about 490 years as “determined,” or “cut off,” they can be “cut off” only from the 2,300 prophetic years mentioned in the previous chapter. After all, what else could this period be “cut off” from but another, and longer, time prophecy?

Read Daniel 8. What was the one part of the vision given that was not explained (*see especially Dan. 8:14, 26, 27*)?

There are many reasons the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27 and the 2,300 evenings and mornings prophecy of Daniel 8:14 belong together: (1) both are time prophecies; (2) the specific terminology of “vision” and “understanding” links them (*see Dan. 8:26, 27 and 9:23*); (3) both interpretations of the prophecies were given by Gabriel (*see Dan. 8:16 and 9:21*); (4) the only part of the vision not explained in Daniel 8 was the vision about the 2,300 evenings and mornings (sometimes translated as “days”) in Daniel 8:14; (5) Daniel 8 contains the vision and then a partial interpretation of it, while Daniel 9 has an interpretation only, in this case the interpretation of the only part of Daniel 8 not interpreted—which was the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, the one part of the vision that Daniel had not understood (*see Dan. 8:27*).

The information given to us in Ezra fills in the missing pieces of the prophecy’s predictions in the book of Daniel; namely, when to begin historically to count the prophetic time regarding crucial aspects of Christ’s ministry and work on our behalf.



God's Election

There is a lot of talk about God's electing us or choosing us to do something. Many have different ideas on what that election means. What does the Bible say about our election?

Read Romans 8:28, 29. What does God call us to? What does He choose us for?

This passage specifically states that God predestined humans to be conformed to the image of His Son. It is not saying that God predestines us either to be saved or to be condemned, and that we have no choice in the matter. In other words, the election is for the purpose of our transformation. We are to be changed to reflect the Son of God. This transformation is then promised in the following verse (*Rom. 8:30*), in which Paul, the author, states that those whom God calls He also justifies (makes us righteous) and glorifies (sanctifies). Thus, we are not left to transform ourselves; but rather, God promises to accomplish this transformation by His power.

Read Romans 9. What kind of election or call of God is described in this chapter?

In Romans 9, Paul discusses God's election to a specific task. The Israelites were chosen to bring the good news about God to the world. The phrase "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (*Rom. 9:13, NKJV*) is commonly misunderstood to mean that God loved only one of the brothers. However, in the context of this passage, Paul is saying that Jacob was chosen but Esau was not. What was Jacob chosen for? To be the father of the Israelite nation. Thus, there are two types of election/choosing that God does. First, God chooses every single one of us for salvation and wants us to be transformed into the image of Jesus. Second, God chooses different people for specific tasks.

Why should it be encouraging to know that you were predestined for salvation? Why does that not, however, mean that your choices cannot cause you to lose the salvation that God offers?

Our Responsibility

If we are called by God, we still have free choice in accepting or rejecting that call, just as we have free choice in accepting or rejecting the salvation that He offers us all. He may place us in a particular position, but we can choose not to follow His biddings. Yes, He wants us to do specific things for Him, just as much as He calls us to become like Him. God's election to a specific task is part of His plan for our salvation. By doing what He calls us to do, we reveal in our lives the reality of the salvation He has given us.

King Saul was given the position of king. Unfortunately, Saul never fully gave his heart to God, despite the task he was given. Just because someone is called by God to do something special for Him doesn't mean that this person will embrace God. Our free will remains the determining factor, and if we don't follow God's leading, we can lose everything.

Read Exodus 3 and 4. What does this teach us about what happens when the Lord calls someone for a task?

Our response can be like that of Ezra's and Nehemiah's, who went without questioning, or we can be like Moses, who had objections and excuses. Moses went in the end, but not without trying to get out of it. He objected, claiming that he was not good enough, a nobody, and didn't have an important position. So, how could Pharaoh possibly listen to him? He also was worried that the Jewish people would not believe him or listen to him, and the work would be for naught. Additionally, he complained that he was not qualified—"I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (*Exod. 4:10, NKJV*)—and didn't have the needed skills. Last, he pointedly asked God to send someone else. And yet, as we read the story of Moses, we learn what a powerful, though flawed, leader Moses became. He was someone who faithfully did the task that the Lord had called him to do.

What excuses do we often find that keep us from doing the things we know the Lord would have us do?

Further Thought: Read carefully *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 697–699, regarding the 70-week prophecy and its historical fulfillment.

“The time of Christ’s coming, His anointing by the Holy Spirit, His death, and the giving of the gospel to the Gentiles, were definitely pointed out. It was the privilege of the Jewish people to understand these prophecies, and to recognize their fulfillment in the mission of Jesus. Christ urged upon His disciples the importance of prophetic study. Referring to the prophecy given to Daniel in regard to their time, He said, ‘Whoso readeth, let him understand.’ Matt. 24:15. After His resurrection He explained to the disciples in ‘all the prophets’ ‘the things concerning Himself.’ Luke 24:27. The Saviour had spoken through all the prophets. ‘The Spirit of Christ which was in them’ ‘testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.’ 1 Peter 1:11.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 234.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on this idea of God’s calling you to do something that you love to do. What are some principles you could follow to know that you are doing God’s will, not just in the case of something you love to do, but in general?
- 2 Read the story of Jonah and how he responded to God’s calling in his life. What lessons can we take from his experience? At the same time, contrast what Jonah did to what Paul did when he was called by the Lord. (See *Acts 9:1–20*.) What were some of the major differences between them?
- 3 “The history of Judas presents the sad ending of a life that might have been honored of God. Had Judas died before his last journey to Jerusalem he would have been regarded as a man worthy of a place among the twelve, and one who would be greatly missed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 716. Think about the story of Judas Iscariot. Was his “calling” to betray Jesus? If so, how fair would that be to him? How can we understand Judas and the opportunities he had in contrast to what he eventually ended up doing? What lessons can we take away from his story about the power of free choice in our lives?

Japanese Pastor Finds \$30,000

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

The large water bill shocked Japanese church leaders in Tokyo. Astonished that the bill had doubled from the previous month, leaders of the Amanuma Seventh-day Adventist Church contacted the water company and soon learned that an underground pipe had burst and was spewing water. The water pipe could not be repaired, and the water company advised the church to install an aboveground water pipe. The cost: 7 million yen, or about US\$70,000.

Moreover, church leaders faced another major expense. They needed to raise 16 million yen (US\$160,000) to purchase equipment so their church could be one of 161 sites across Japan participating in the 2018 evangelistic meetings.

Complicating matters, church members weren't enthusiastic about the evangelistic meetings, complaining that the expense and work were too much. "It was very stressful," said Kyoichi Miyazaki, the first elder of the Amanuma church.

The church board met to pray about the water pipe. Immediately after the prayer, the church's associate pastor, Myunghoon Rha, went to his office. On the desk he found 3 million yen (US\$30,000) in cash.

Rha, a missionary from South Korea, was thrilled, and he excitedly broke the news to the other church board members. The next Sabbath, he announced the need for the water pipe to the congregation. He told how the 3 million yen had appeared in his office, and he appealed for more contributions.

A short time later, a surprise appeared in the Sabbath School offering plate: an envelope containing 1 million yen (US\$10,000).

Church leaders were delighted, but they worried that perhaps the giver hadn't fully understood his or her actions. In the moments after the offering was collected and counted, they determined that the money had been given by a first-time visitor, and they pulled her aside. "Did you really intend to give this much money?" they asked her.

"I had a dream last night," she said. "In the dream, someone told me to make a donation to a Christian church. I'm not a Christian, and I don't know any Christian churches. So, I looked for a Christian church, and I found you."

She insisted that the church keep the 1 million yen.

After that Sabbath, the woman was never seen again. The church also never learned the source of the 3-million-yen donation. Through such miracles, the church managed to raise the funds for the new water pipe—and for the equipment for the evangelistic meetings. Rha said the miraculous donations and baptisms have helped change the atmosphere at the Amanuma church, the largest Adventist church in Japan, with 900 members.



"People were negative, but now they are enthusiastic," said Rha, left. "They know God is alive."