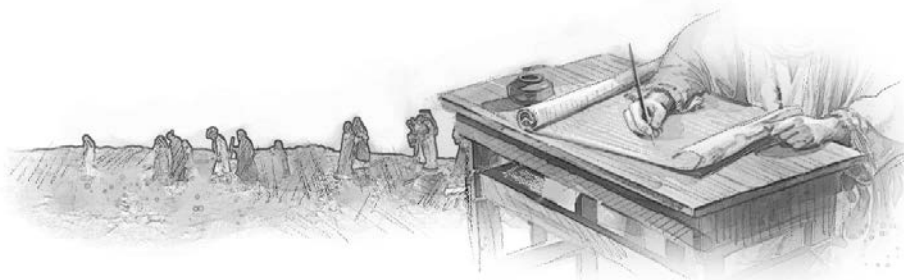


Troubles, Hard Times, and Lists



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ezra 1:9–11; Daniel 1:1, 2; Ezra 2; Ezra 8:1–15; Deuteronomy 30:1–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “So all these people now make this special promise to God. And they all ask for bad things to happen if they don’t [do not] keep their promise. All these people promise to follow the law of God. That law of God was given to us through [by] Moses his servant. These people promise with an oath to carefully obey all the commands, rules, and teachings of our Lord God” (Nehemiah 10:28, 29, ERV).



The God who cares about small birds also cares about us.

WE OFTEN DO NOT READ THE LONG LISTS of people and things in the Bible. But the Lord includes these lists for a reason. God cares about everything. His care for everything, big or small, shows us that He always remembers us.

The lists of names in the Bible show us that God knows all about our families. The different lists of things show us something too. God cares about things that other people may feel are not important. Jesus says that God takes care of the birds. God even counts all the hairs on our heads! “When birds are sold, five small birds cost only two pennies. But God does not forget any of them. Yes, God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. Don’t [do not] be afraid. You are worth much more than many birds’ ” (Luke 12:6, 7, ERV). The God who cares about birds also cares about us.

So, we can fully trust God. He cares about every part of our lives. His care for us gives us comfort. It helps us care more about every part of our lives too.

THE GOD OF HISTORY (Ezra 1:9–11)

Read Ezra 1:9–11 and Daniel 1:1, 2. How do the verses in Daniel help us understand the verses in Ezra?

Both Ezra and Daniel talk about history. They tell the same story in these verses. But the way they tell the story is different. Do you see how Ezra gives us a list of things that the Babylonians took from God's temple? When we compare the verses in Ezra to Daniel 1:1, 2, what do we see? Daniel shows us the big picture about what happened. So, we must read the verses in Ezra and Daniel together. Then we will see God is in control of everything that happens to His people on earth.

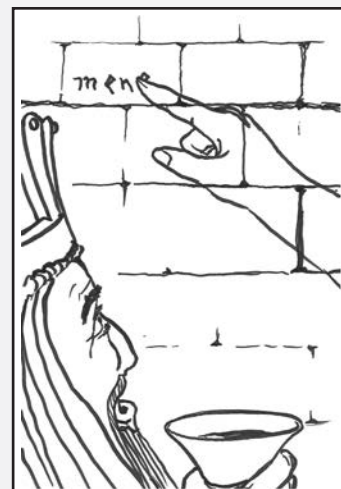
"We can learn a lot from history. God gives each person and country a part in His big plan. Today, God tests humans. He tests the different countries on this earth. All people decide what will happen to them in the future by the choices they make now. God rules over all things. He will finish His plan to save us."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 536, adapted.

Read Daniel 5. What does this chapter teach us about King Belshazzar? Why does God judge him?

The Persians beat the Babylonians in October 539 B.C. Cyrus took the city of Babylon by surprise. Cyrus was the king of the Medo-Persian army. What does Belshazzar, king of Babylon, do the night that Cyrus takes Babylon? Belshazzar throws a wild party! During the wild party, a hand from heaven writes on the palace wall. The words on the wall warn that Belshazzar will soon die. Did Belshazzar learn nothing from what happened in the past to King Nebuchadnezzar? Nebuchadnezzar's heart was filled with pride. So, God caused the king to act the same as an animal. The king ate grass for seven years. At the end of that time, God made the king's mind new. Then Nebuchadnezzar gave his heart to God. That story was a warning. Sadly, Belshazzar learned nothing from Nebuchadnezzar's story.

Daniel explains the writing on the wall. But it is too late to save Belshazzar. He made bad choices in life. These choices cause him to be killed.

How can we make sure we do not make the same mistake that Belshazzar makes? How can looking at the Cross help?



During the wild party, a hand from heaven writes on the palace wall.

IN THEIR CITIES (Ezra 2)

Read the lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. What do you see in each of them?

Ezra 2 gives a list of people who leave Babylon. Zerubbabel and Joshua lead them to Jerusalem. This same list is written again in Nehemiah 7. There is a reason for that. Yes, these lists may seem boring to us. But they show us an important idea. God cares about the things that may not seem important to us.

At this time, the people finish building Jerusalem's walls. The Bible wants to show us something about the 1st group of people who already came back to Jerusalem. They all work together to help build the walls. They know that their success comes from God alone. The newest group of Jews who come back to Jerusalem help finish the work that the 1st group starts. They all work together. It is a hard job. The people face many problems along the way. They also do not finish the work as soon as they wish to. But they keep working anyway until they finish the wall.

Much of their success comes from Ezra and Nehemiah. These men are excellent leaders. They encourage the people to work hard and not give up. The lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 show us something else. We see that the start of the work in Ezra 2 is connected to the end of the work in Nehemiah 7. The second temple is finally built. Not only that, the people also rebuild the city of Jerusalem too.



Everything happens just as God promised.

Read Nehemiah 7:73. In this verse, we see how much the people want to honor God's plan for their lives. Do the people have success? If yes, how much success do they have?

“So these people all settled in their own towns” (Nehemiah 7:73, ICB).

This verse shows us that God blesses His people with a lot of success. They finished building the temple. Now, they can all go home.

In many ways, the work the people do is a miracle. The Babylonians took the Jews prisoners and carried them away from their country. Their temple was destroyed. So was their city. But they come back. They build it again. It is a real miracle. Everything happens just as God promised.

WHERE ARE THE PRIESTS OR RELIGIOUS LEADERS? (Ezra 8:1–15)

As we read yesterday, God works a miracle to bring His people back home from Babylon.

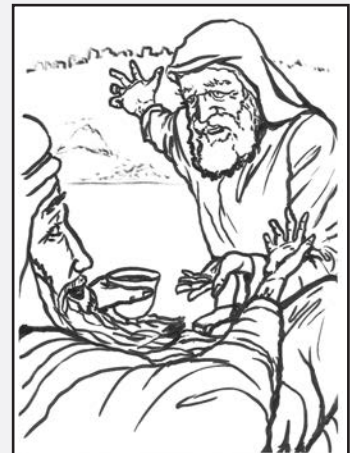
Of course, there are problems. Yes, the Jews know God made them many wonderful promises. He promised to help them rebuild their city. But many Jews do not want to go back to Jerusalem. They want to stay in Babylon.

Read Ezra 8:1–15. Look carefully at Ezra 8:15. What is the big problem the people have?

As we said, not all Jews in Babylon want to go home to Jerusalem. Why is that? There are several reasons. Many of the Jews were born in Babylon. They lived their whole lives there. Babylon is the only city they know. So, many of the Jews do not want to make the long trip back to a land they never knew. The Jews who go back to Jerusalem have another problem. They have trouble finding Levites who will come back to Jerusalem to take care of the temple. We will learn more about that on Thursday.

“By now, the Jews who stayed in Babylon lived there for almost 150 years. We know that many rich Jews lived in the land of Nippur during the time of King Artaxerxes the 1st. So, we think Ezra had a hard time trying to get these rich Jews to leave Babylon to go back to Jerusalem. Life in Jerusalem is going to be hard. It is a lot easier to stay in Babylon. Life there is more comfortable too. So, it is very surprising that Ezra convinces almost 2,000 families to come back with him to Jerusalem.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 376, adapted.

“ ‘We must suffer many things on our way into God’s kingdom’ ” (Acts 14:22, ERV). What does this verse mean? What does it tell us about the troubles and tests that we will meet in this life? Why are these things a part of the experience of the people who choose to serve the Lord?



“We think Ezra had a hard time trying to get [the] rich Jews to leave Babylon.”

HEARTS WITH NO PRIDE (Deuteronomy 30:1–6)

Read Deuteronomy 30:1–6. What promise in these verses does God give to the Hebrew people? How do you think Ezra and Nehemiah feel about this promise? How much do you think this promise means to them?

Ezra and Nehemiah know about God’s promises to His people. They know that God will bring His people out of Babylon to their home. In Nehemiah 9, we learned that the people also understand their history. They know the reason for their troubles. At the same time, they know God has a heart of mercy. He will lead them and show them love when they turn from their sins.

So, the people trust in the Lord. He will give them success. God’s promises do not mean that the people will have no problems along the way.

Read Ezra 8:16–23. What is the problem in these verses? What do the people do to solve it?



**Ezra tells the king,
“ ‘Our God is with
everyone who trusts him’ ”
(Ezra 8:22, ERV).**

Yes, there are problems. One of them is the trip home. Ezra knows there will be a lot of danger on the way. So, he prays to God. He fasts, or stops eating food for a short time. He shows that he has a heart with no pride in it. He shows God that he knows how much everything depends on God. Yes, there are many dangers ahead. But Ezra does not ask the King of Persia for help as Nehemiah does (Nehemiah 2:9). No, Ezra chooses not to ask the Persian king for help. Maybe Ezra wants to show the Persian king that God will protect His people. Ezra said, “ ‘I was embarrassed [ashamed] to ask King Artaxerxes for soldiers and horsemen to protect us as we traveled. There were enemies on the road. The reason I was embarrassed [ashamed] to ask for protection was because of what we had told the king. We had said to King Artaxerxes, ‘Our God is with everyone who trusts him, but he is very angry with everyone who turns away from him’ ” (Ezra 8:22, ERV). In the end, everything works out. Later, Ezra writes that the Lord protected them (Ezra 8:31). They made it home safely.

Of course, we must trust in God for everything. At the same time, when should we ask nonbelievers for help? Why is that often the right thing to do?

IN THE HOLY CITY (Nehemiah 11:1, 2)

Read Nehemiah 11:1, 2. What happens in these verses? Why do the people “dr[a]w [choose] names”? (Nehemiah 11:1, NLV). What do they need to decide?

What does Nehemiah 11 show us? The people need to decide who will live in Jerusalem.

Life in the country is better than in the city. In the country, people have their own land. But if they live in the city, they must give up their land. Not many people want to do that.

How hard do you think it must be to move to a new city or country to share the Good News about Jesus? You must be open to new experiences, right? You must be willing to face hard times too.

“Our workers do not do enough to share the Good News with other people. Our leaders must wake up. They must see the work that needs to be done. I think about the cities where we have done only a little work. Thousands of people live in these cities. They must be warned that Jesus is coming soon. I feel a deep wish to see our men and women go to work in these cities. They must work in the power of the Holy Spirit. They must be filled with Jesus’ love for souls. These souls need a Savior.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 7, page 40, adapted.

Look at the list of priests, or religious leaders, and Levites in Nehemiah 12:1–26. Why do you think this list is in this chapter? What is the connection between these people and the wall in Nehemiah 12:27–47?

God wants things to be done the right way. He needs people who want to serve Him with all their hearts. Then God can use these people to do big things. The families of the priests help Nehemiah build the wall. Then they can safely worship God in the temple. Walls are important. They protect people. But strong walls around the temple are not enough. The temple needs priests too. With no priests, there will be no true worship in the temple. So, we can see that all of God’s people have a part to do in His work.



The people in the cities “must be warned that Jesus is coming soon.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Ellen G. White, “The Test of Discipleship,” pages 57–65, in *Steps to Christ*.

“There are people who know Jesus’ love and forgiveness. These people want to be God’s children. But they know that they are not perfect. They made many mistakes in life. So, they are ready to doubt that the Holy Spirit made their hearts new. I want to say something to these people: Do not pull back from God. Do not be sad. We shall often have to bow down at Jesus’ feet and cry. We will cry because we failed and made mistakes. But do not lose hope. Even if Satan causes us to fail, God does not throw us away. No, Jesus sits at God’s right hand. Jesus asks God to forgive us. . . . God wants to make you new. He wants to bring you close to Himself again. God wants to see His own clean and holy life shine in you. So, give yourself fully to God. He started a good work in your heart. He will not stop until that work is finished. Then Jesus will come. So, pray harder. Believe more fully. Do not trust in your own power to save yourself. Trust only in the power of our Savior. Praise Him. He gives us health.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 64, adapted.



“We shall often have to bow down at Jesus’ feet and cry.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In Daniel 2, we see that Daniel saw the future many hundreds of years ago. He shows us a true picture of future happenings. How does Daniel’s prophecy, or special message, give you comfort and hope? Yes, sometimes life is crazy and awful things happen. But how does Daniel 2 show you that God knows everything about the future before it happens? How does that knowledge help you to trust that He is in control?
- ② God knows all about us. This thought gives us comfort and helps us feel safe. We know that we are in His care (read Isaiah 43:1). How can you help other people to know that God loves them and is with them, even in hard times?
- ③ In Wednesday’s study, we learn that Ezra does not want to ask the king for help. What is Ezra afraid the king will think if he asks the king for help? Let us think about the answer to this question by looking at another example. We know that God heals us. But what if we go to a doctor when we get sick? Does that mean we show no faith in God to heal us? Talk about this idea some more with your class.