

# God's Call



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## 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 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?

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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.

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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.**

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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?**

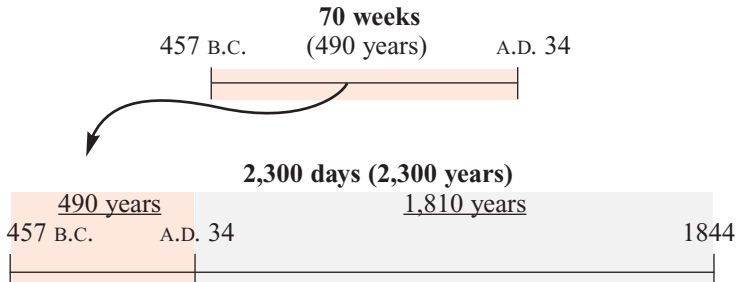
## The 70 Weeks and the 2,300 Days

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?**

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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?**

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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?

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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?**

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**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."





## ***Part I: Overview***

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**Key Texts:** *Ezra 7:10, 27; Romans 8:28*

**Study Focus:** *Ezra 7, Daniel 8:14, Daniel 9:24–27*

God calls Ezra and Nehemiah for a specific task: to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. But most important, God calls these men to “rebuild” the remnant of God’s people in order that they should once again function as missionaries to the world. Ezra responds to God’s call to be a teacher of His Word. In company with a group of returnees, he journeys to Jerusalem in order to teach the people about God. There Ezra prepares the people to do the work of restoring Jerusalem. Spiritual revival always precedes the reformation of life; decisive actions are the natural outgrowth of such revival. Thus, Ezra pours himself into educating the people about who God is in an effort to inspire them to fully walk with Him.

When Nehemiah, a man of action, comes on the scene, God calls him to specifically rebuild the physical structures of Jerusalem, to inspire the people to stand for justice, to trust in God’s protection, and to bring about reform in the civil life of the nation (justice and care for the less fortunate are a priority for Nehemiah). He demonstrates what the life of a Christian, living every day for God, looks like.

Additionally, this lesson confirms the decree from Artaxerxes, in Ezra 7, as the starting date for the 2,300 day/year prophecy of Daniel 8:14 and for the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27. God’s election, in the context of Romans 8 and 9, also is discussed.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **Prophetic Time Period**

God calls Ezra at the beginning of the 70-week prophetic period, outlined in Daniel 9:24–27. The onset of this prophetic period corresponds with Artaxerxes’s command to restore the city of Jerusalem in the year 457 B.C. This week’s lesson explains in detail what that prophetic period meant and how it corresponds with the 2,300-year prophecy. Through prophecy, God especially demonstrates that He is in charge of events and watches over our world. Moreover, God sets a prophet or leader over His people during the beginning of each prophetic period or time of crisis in Israel and someone over the end of each period, as well. For example, Moses comes at the time of the Exodus, while Joshua comes at the end of Israel’s wilderness

sojourn as God's people enter the Promised Land. The following outline demonstrates that prophets were called at a crucial time in salvation history, corresponding to the beginning and ending of a prophetic period:

- Noah—commissioned to serve God before the Flood.
- Abraham—called out to be the father of God's people.
- Moses—leads God's people during the Exodus to the borders of the Promised Land.
- Joshua—ushers God's people into the Promised Land.
- Samuel—judges during the beginning of the monarchal period.
- Hosea and Amos—prophesy before the fall of the northern kingdom and Samaria in 722 B.C.
- Ezekiel and Daniel—enter their prophetic ministry during the Babylonian exile.
- Haggai and Zechariah—serve after the return from exile.
- Ezra and Nehemiah—commence serving God at the beginning of 2,300 day/year prophecy (457 B.C.).
- John the Baptist—calls Israel to repentance prior to the onset of Jesus' ministry.
- Stephen—witnesses, after which the gospel went to the Gentiles (at the time in which the 70-week prophecy ends, in A.D. 34).
- Ellen G. White—called at end of 2,300 day/year prophecy (1844).

So one can detect from this outline a pattern of God's working plan. In God's plan of redemption, there are expressed specific prophetic time markers. Whenever there is a spiritual crisis, God sends His prophets, who fulfill His mission by calling people back to God and to obedience to His Word.

### Personal Timing

Election also may be the calling to fulfill a specific task such as is the case for Ezra and Nehemiah (*and many other of God's servants; see Exodus 3:9–12; Isaiah 6:7, 8; and Jeremiah 1:5–9*). In the same way, we are called to reflect the character of Jesus and do something definite for God. It may be a job that we perform for Him; an action He impresses us to do, such as helping someone; or a specific career that lasts a lifetime.

Each of the leaders mentioned above was specifically chosen by God for "such a time as this" (*Esther 4:14*). They called for action, repentance, and a deep commitment to God. Ezra and Nehemiah had a role to play as leaders of God's people at the beginning of the longest prophetic time period. They also exhorted the people to live for God and to demonstrate their commitment through faith and action. The people

returned from Babylon steeped in the Babylonian way of life and the worship of many deities. Fortunately, despite whatever other problems challenged them in their post-exilic life, idolatry was not one of them. Nonetheless, their past religious pluralism was not without its deleterious effects. Even though the Jewish community no longer worshiped idols, their former idolatry made it necessary for Ezra and Nehemiah to teach the people again what it meant to worship the God of heaven and to live for Him. Their apparently harsh way of approaching situations (such as intermarriage in the later chapters of Ezra and Nehemiah) should not surprise us because both leaders wanted to teach the people what it meant to live holy lives and to radically change their ungodly lifestyles. Thus, both Ezra and Nehemiah called for unreserved commitment to Yahweh, total reform, and passionate service to God.

### **Called to Restore: A Collaboration**

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem (445/444 B.C.) some 13 years after Ezra's group. But Nehemiah's mission of rebuilding Jerusalem would not have been as successful without the work of Ezra. Ezra was busy teaching the people about God. In other words, God was using Ezra to spiritually "build up" people so that the people could "build" physical structures once Nehemiah arrived. God was working in the background, preparing the hearts of the people and the two leaders. Ultimately, God wanted not only a restored Jerusalem; He also wanted a restored people who belonged to Him. Therefore, Ezra and Nehemiah's foremost job was to bring the people back to God. They not only inspired the people for the work to be done on the ruins, but most important, they inspired the people to discover a passion for God. Ezra and Nehemiah modeled that passion in their own lives through prayer, fasting, seeking God, and acting in accordance with God's Word.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah were chosen for a specific task during a strategic time in history. They were called as leaders, each in his own unique way, based on their talents. Ezra was a priest and a scribe, and thus his main influence was through teachings of the Torah. Nehemiah, on the other hand, was a cupbearer to the king and had incredible leadership abilities to motivate and rally people to get a job done. Ezra was a teacher; Nehemiah was a doer. Both were leaders and yet led in different ways. At the same time, both of their leadership styles were important for the mission at hand. They complemented each other and cooperated in order to make a difference for God. God used their varied personalities and passions to bring about a change in the nation.

Ultimately, we are responsible for what we do with the task or position God gives us. The decision of whether our task is completed with

excellence or mediocrity falls on us. God will help us every step of the way; however, He will not do for us the work He has given us to do. We may have every gift under the sun, but if we are not using them for God, they are useless. We each have to decide to put our all into everything God calls us to do in spite of opposition. Ezra and Nehemiah could have given up, but they did not. They persevered because they fixed their eyes on God. The importance of their call outweighed their fear of negative consequences that arose from standing for the Lord. They were sure that their mission was worth it.

### Predestination

God called, or predestined, His people, the nation of Israel, to be a light to the world. Paul deals with that call in Romans 9–11 in view of the fact that Israel’s leaders did not accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior. However, God’s call did not change but was modified, for God’s values and gift of salvation also needed to be revealed to the Gentiles. God called specific people to a specific task. God desired that both believing Jews and Gentiles would be saved and together be the light of, and the blessing to, the world.

Predestination in the Bible has three basic meanings:

1. God predestined that there is only one way of salvation, namely, through Jesus Christ (*John 14:6, Acts 4:12*). We are elected in Christ to eternal life if we accept Him as our personal Savior (*Rom. 8:29, Eph. 1:3–8*). He wishes for everyone to be saved (*1 Tim. 2:3, 4*).
2. God predestined some people (both as individuals or as a community of believers) to a specific task, to a particular mission (as He ordained the faithful remnant to proclaim the eternal gospel). God has a worldwide mission (*Isa. 49:6*).
3. God has predestined the final climax of human history when He will come as Judge and give His reward (*Daniel 2*). The ultimate outcome will be His eschatological triumph. The goal of the electing will of God is not the salvation of a few but the gathering of as many people as possible from among the nations into the final eschatological gathering (*Rev. 21:3*).

## ***Part III: Life Application***

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The following questions deal with prophetic time periods:

1. **Peruse again the aforementioned list of prophets. Focus in on a few names. Discuss specifically how each one of them received his**

**or her call. How did this prophet know that he or she was called?**

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**2. Why does Ellen G. White fit within this list? How did God use her to be a spiritual leader of His people?**

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**3. How have people reacted to God's called leaders throughout history? Why is the acceptance of God's chosen leaders and their leadership so complicated?**

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**4. What makes the job of God's called leader difficult?**

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**Personal Reflection:**

1. How does one recognize God's will in life?
2. What are your passions? In what way does God call you to use your desires and gifts for Him?
3. How can you collaborate in your church with other gifted people whom God has called to serve but who are very different from you? How can the differences between you become strengths?
4. How can you be sure that you are doing what God is calling you to do?