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# The Gospel According to Ezra and Nehemiah



Ezra and Nehemiah were exceptional, God-centered, Word-oriented, and Spirit-led leaders who deeply desired that God’s people prosper and that His name be uplifted and proclaimed worldwide. Their lives modeled what God can do through dedicated, faithful servant leaders.

Because of our sinful natures, cultivated habits, and hereditary traits, we can experience lasting changes only through the study of God’s transforming Word and the Holy Spirit’s assistance. Believers live “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (*Zech. 4:6, NKJV*) and by embracing God’s promises by faith (*Hab. 2:4*), resulting in a vibrant spiritual life.

This quarter’s lessons illustrate that life is complicated. As soon as we try to do good things, obstacles appear and opposition arises. Even friends may openly or secretly oppose us and, perhaps, become our enemies. Hurdles and resistance to good demonstrate that Satan is alive and that sin is real. Fighting Satan is humanly impossible because evil is stronger than we are. Only God can secure victory, revolutionize thinking, and give us power to live balanced lives. Life’s discouragements are opportunities for change. Disappointments may help us focus on essentials and accelerate our spiritual growth, as we obtain victory in each crisis through God’s empowerment.

Neither of the books of Ezra nor Nehemiah ends with optimism. Sin is a serious matter, spreading easily and quickly. The biggest challenge does not come from outside—but from infidelity to God with His own people not following His revealed will. To be faithful to the Lord and persevere in following His instruction is the strongest test for God’s church. As Ezra correctly understood, the only power to change comes through diligently searching,

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comprehending, and internalizing the Scriptures.

In order to fulfill the starting point of the prophecies of the 70 weeks and the 2,300 evenings and mornings (which both began in 457 B.C.), God graciously intervened and influenced King Artaxerxes I to allow Ezra along with a group of Israelites to return to Jerusalem, to ensure the safety of their journey, and even to supply needed physical and financial provisions for the temple services (*Ezra 7:11–28*).

The key theological themes of these two books are God’s providence, faithfulness, and covenant. God fulfilled His promises, even though His people were narrow-minded, disoriented, distracted, and stubborn. Through His servants, He called them from their state of lethargy to revival and reformation.

“The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth’s history. The remnant of Israel were a feeble people, exposed to the ravages of their enemies; but through them God purposed to preserve in the earth a knowledge of Himself and of His law. They were the guardians of the true worship, the keepers of the holy oracles.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 677.

Ezra and Nehemiah are historically linked, and they cover a crucial transition in the life of God’s people. These 23 chapters form one big story—but with subunits; they are complementary and cover similar theological issues. By carefully studying the pattern revealed in the composition of these two books, we can discern God’s great historical actions and gracious leadership.

Keep in mind that not everything presented in these books is written in *chronological order* and that some parts are composed in a *thematic* manner.

As we will see, the challenge for Ezra and Nehemiah was not to reconstruct the temple (it was finished and dedicated in 515 B.C., more than 50 years before Ezra’s arrival) but to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, its administration, and the national autonomy—all eventually paving the way for the coming of the Messiah.

As we study God’s Word this quarter, may the Lord bless us by inspiring us, touching our hearts, transforming our thinking, and enabling us daily to follow Him faithfully and enthusiastically.

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*To be faithful to the Lord and persevere in following His instruction is the strongest test for God’s church.*

# How to Use This Teachers Edition

**“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”**

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

**Final Thought:** What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.