

Lesson 3: God's Call

Throughout the pages of sacred writing we find that God has continually called people of varying degrees. The Old Testament scriptures teach that God is creator of all things seen and unseen. As we come into the New Testament we learn that God in Christ is not only Creator but also Redeemer and Saviour of the broken and sinful world. Ezra and Nehemiah and others show what is possible when one humbly and sincerely answers the call of God.

Ezra and his mission. Two generations had elapsed between the close of Ezra 6 and the events with which the final chapters of the book are concerned. The prophetic voice was silent; Haggai and Zechariah had long since passed away. Zerubbabel, the last representative of the house of David, in whose person some had looked for a restoration of the Jewish kingdom, was dead. The high priesthood, which had been filled by the saintly Jeshua, was occupied by Eliashib, who became connected by marriage with two conspicuous enemies of the faith of Israel. We may judge from the book of Esther how unfavourable the times were for carrying on the national and spiritual restoration of Israel. The full extent of the debasement of the settlers in Palestine was not known in Babylon; it broke on both Ezra and Nehemiah with painful surprise (Ezra 9; Neh. 13). But enough was known to awaken concern; he desired "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Filled with this pious desire, he obtained permission to go up to Jerusalem.

Above all, the law of the Lord was the object of Ezra's reverence; he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given;" he "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do and teach it." The precepts of the law were to him "the words of God;" he lived in awe of his will; he had a deep conviction of the evil of sin against him, so deep that it impressed itself on others; they who sympathised with his purpose were those who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel" (Ezra 9:4; 10:3). He had a vivid consciousness of his mission, and the nearness of God to him in its fulfilment; again and again he refers his success to "the good hand of his God upon him. Ezra had courage, but it was the courage of the student; not impulsive, but meditative, he knew and feared the dangers of the way; but he knew how to conquer fear (8:21–23). access them, trembles but advances, which supplies the lack of impulse by resolve. The "fear of the Lord" casts out all other fear.

There is an observable contrast between Ezra and Nehemiah. When confronted with glaring impiety (ch. 9; Neh. 13). Nehemiah is indignant, Ezra is overwhelmed. Nehemiah "contends," Ezra weeps. Nehemiah curses the transgressors, and smites them, and plucks off their hair, and "makes them" amend; Ezra is prostrate from morning until evening, solemnly intercedes with God on their behalf, and wins the people to concern and repentance. This is the sacrificial spirit, feeling and confessing the sins of others as our own, bearing their transgressions, and recovering them by suffering; it is the lesson of the cross, the Christian spirit. The firmness, even ruthlessness, with which he commands the separation of the husbands from their wives and children also bespeak the man of the study

Monday Daniel 9 :24-27

Both Ezra and Nehemiah have contributed to the return of God's people to their native land. But while not directly contributing to future movements Daniel speaks of a time period which would begin during their leadership.

The vision of Daniel 8 gives some information that suggests this to be the vision referred to. Daniel said he did not understand. Gabriel is here understood by name and commanded to give Daniel understanding of the vision of the 2300 days. In chapter 9:25 he is told that from the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince would be 70 weeks or 490 years, (one prophetic day equals one literal year, see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:5-6) There were three separate commands given to restore the Jewish people. Both Cyrus and Darius issued decrees but it was the one issued by Artaxerxes, in 457 B.C, that fulfils the prophecy. The last week of the prophecy ends with the slaying of Messiah

V. 24: introduces some very important phrases:

- 70 weeks are determined/cut off. 70 weeks or 490 days/years.
- Thy people, God's people, the Jewish nation
- The Holy City, Jerusalem finish the transgression: the Jewish people would fill up the cup of their iniquity, which they did by crucifying Christ.
- Make an end of sin: this happened at Calvary. Make reconciliation:
- The sacrificial death of the Son of God.
- Bring in everlasting righteousness: the righteousness that Christ our Lord manifested during His life here on earth. Seal up the vision and prophecy: Made secure Anoint The Most Holy: Ex. 40:9, tells us that before the ministration of the earthly sanctuary began, the tabernacle and all its holy vessels were to be anointed.
- Daniel 8:14 says the earthly sanctuary would give way to the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore the event of the seventy weeks here brought to view is the anointing of the heavenly tabernacle for the beginning of the ministration there.

When would this time frame begin?

V. 25: Know and understand. A sound knowledge of the scriptures is a must for all God's people. A correct understanding is necessary for the proclamation of the gospel. The Ethiopian eunuch did request baptism until he was made to understand. As called out people we must equip ourselves with a thorough knowledge and understanding of God's word.

The explanation is for the vision in chapter 8. 70 weeks are determined on your people, the Jews. Remember one prophetic day, in its symbolism, represents one year.

70 weeks = 490 days or 490 years.

490 years are determined on your people, the word determined here means 'cut off' so 490 years are cut off; cut off from what? The 2300 years. The first 490 years belong to the Jews.

Then he goes on to tell him the events of that period.

V. 25: Know therefore and understand, when a particular event takes place it will be seven weeks, three score and two weeks i.e. 69 weeks or 483 days/years. From the going forth of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem unto Messiah shall be 483 years.

This 70 year period of time is divided into three parts:

- 7 weeks, from the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem.
- 62 weeks, for the entrance of Messiah the Prince
- 1 week, in the midst of this Messiah would be killed and sacrifice and oblation cease.

When was the decree issued?

There were actually four decrees which could answer the question,

- The decree of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the house of the Lord, 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4)
- The decree of Darius for the prosecution of that work which had been hindered, 519 B.C. (Ezra 6:1-12)
- The decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra, 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:13)
- The commission of Nehemiah from the same king in his 20th year, 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2)

The first two of these would have been completed well before the Christian era and therefore do not fit the bill. In 457 B.C. the Persian king Artaxerxes granted a decree to Ezra, in which as many who wanted could return with him to Jerusalem. He was given an unlimited amount of treasure to beautify the house of the Lord, as well as the power to collect offerings for its service.

Lets see how these dates fit the prophecy, our starting point is 457B.C.

The first 7 weeks or 49 years. Prideaux says, the 15th year of Darius ended the 1st seven weeks of the 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy. The restoration of the church and state in Jerusalem was completed as recorded in the 13th chapter of Nehemiah.

Now let look at the 69 weeks or 483 years which were extended to Messiah the Prince. Dating from 457 B.C. they ended in A.D. 27. Luke 3:21 In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, this was AD 27. Christ was anointed at His baptism by the Holy Ghost and this was in AD 31 Daniel 9:25: know, understand.

V.26. After 62 weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself. After 62 weeks Jesus would be crucified but not for Himself. He was crucified for us.

Continuing in V. 26: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood ----- . Jerusalem in AD70.

V. 27: He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week:

In the midst of that week he would cause the sacrifice to cease, He would confirm the covenant. From 457 along the prophetic line of 483 years takes us down to AD 27. 69 of the 70 weeks were for the Jews, there would be one week left, that would take us down to AD 34. In the midst of that 70th week, half way in that last seven years the Messiah would be crucified. AD 31 the covenant would be sealed and all sacrifices would cease. These verses tell that Messiah would die by crucifixion on the 14th day of the first Jewish month in the year AD31, and these details have been fulfilled in every detail.

On the day of the Passover as the priest was about to kill the lamb Christ was crucified.

This should give us confidence in this Book

According to the prophecies of Daniel, God's covenant with the Jews would cease in AD 34. At the end of AD34 the Jews would seal their destiny as God's people. This does not preclude the individual Jew from being saved, but as a nation they had lost that special relationship with God.

In AD34 Stephen, the first Christian martyr was stoned. The Jewish leaders rejected the Gospel and it went to the Gentiles. (Acts)ended in 34 AD

Gabriel was explaining the 2300 years, the first 490 years. The first part of the vision had to do with the first coming of Christ, and the second part has to do with His second coming. If the first part came through just as was foretold, then we can be assured that the second part will be just as sure.

Back to 8:14: unto 2300 days then shall the sanctuary be cleansed. The cleansing of the sanctuary would come at the end of the 2300 years. The first 490 years ended in 34 AD. Taking 490 from 2300 leaves 1810 years. Adding this 1810 to 34AD brings us to 1844.

This then begins the "time of the end" the cleansing of the sanctuary. What and where is this Sanctuary? Many views have been set forth.

The word sanctuary occurs 144 times in the Old Testament. From the Bible and other lexicographers we learn that "sanctuary" is used to signify a holy or sacred place, the dwelling place of the Most High God.

Some say the earth: but the earth is neither a holy nor sacred place, and it is nowhere in scripture called sanctuary.

Canaan? No The church? Psalm 114:1-2 says When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. In its literal sense this text says the sanctuary was confined to one of twelve tribes. God chose Jerusalem, which was in Judah, as the place of His sanctuary. The tribe was not the sanctuary but when Israel came out of Egypt God chose Judah as the tribe in which the sanctuary would be located. The church is nowhere called a sanctuary. The book of Hebrews clearly affirms the cleansing of both the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries. Heb, 9:22-23

What is the nature of the cleansing and how was it carried out? By blood. It is therefore not a physical cleansing from physical impurities for blood is not a cleansing agent. There must therefore be another reason, and that is, without the blood there is no remission of sin.

We are living in the last moments of time. Jesus came on time at his first coming. He was baptized on time. Be assured His second coming will be on time. Many believe His coming is delayed. Acts 17:31: He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained.

Wednesday

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." This was a remarkable statement for the Apostle Paul to make, especially when we consider how much he had suffered because of *his* love to God and his truth. He had been imprisoned, he had been stoned, he had been beaten with stripes; and yet, after all this, he is able to say that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Others like Paul have borne similar testimony. David said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). And again, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy Word.... It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:67, 71).

There is good in all the providences of God. Many persons think there is good only in those things that give pleasure or delight to body or mind. They will admit that there is good in health

and prosperity. But they find it hard to see what good there can be in sickness, in adversity, in poverty, or in sorrow. The apostle takes a wider view of life's experiences. He holds that "*all things work together for good.*" He could appreciate the joys of life, but he felt that there was a wise purpose and blessing in life's sorrows and trials also.

Our human nature is in itself unholy, alienated from God, easily absorbed by the influences of this present world, and easily led away by temptation and sin. There are no truths more universally admitted than the existence and moral government of God, the certainty of death and of a future state of rewards and punishments. Yet how many do we see around us whose character and conduct afford almost no evidence that they believe in these truths at all! How, then, are men to be roused from their indifference? How are they to be led to think seriously of their own souls and that eternity that awaits them? Some might be disposed to answer—By what we ordinarily call exhibitions of God's love and goodness.

There is nothing more calculated to show a man his own weakness and his dependence upon a higher Power, and to lead him to reflect seriously upon his future prospects, than to find himself, in the midst of important and perhaps pressing duties, suddenly laid aside, stretched upon a bed of sickness, racked, it may be, with pain, and unable to do anything for himself. In such circumstances we must feel that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." There are many Christians everywhere who, with feelings of deep humility and gratitude, are ready to acknowledge that they never had any serious thought of eternity, that they never knew the power of the love of Christ, and that they were never led to seek him as their Saviour, until the day of adversity made them consider; until they were stripped of their dearest possessions; until they were warned by the sudden death of someone who was dear to them; or until they themselves were laid upon a bed of sickness, and brought nigh unto the gates of death.

God calls his people, by the outward Word, by the inward Spirit, or, in other words, invites them to enter into life, and He means what he says. In responding to His call, we have a guarantee which is more sure than the pillars of the universe (Matt. 24:35). But we are also assured that those who respond in accordance with the purpose are justified. And the justification is the pledge and beginning of all blessings in Christ that shall tend to the consummation of the life. It carries with it the regeneration of our nature; it supplies the power that shall issue in our complete sanctification; and it points unfalteringly through all the tears and darkneses of the intermediate discipline to "the revealing of the sons of God." Thus as Christian we learn to avoid murmuring, when we remember that even adverse circumstances are intended to work out our highest good. This conviction can bring new light into our daily experiences; and will be seen as ministrations of Divine love and mercy.

Paul states that when he considers the great privileges of his fellowman (Israel) he is filled with "great heaviness and continual sorrow" for Israel, his kinsmen according to the flesh. It was indeed a saddening reflection to think that a people so highly honoured by God should depart from him. They had the Law for their guidance; the fathers for their example; Christ Jesus, God's own Son, for their Messiah and Deliverer; and the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the promises for their encouragement and inspiration. Yet they crucified their King, and hardened their hearts against God's messages of mercy. Great privileges make our guilt the greater if we reject Christ.

The Jewish people were the benefactors of the whole world and should have been the channel through which blessings come to other nations. But they forfeited the Divine blessing by their impenitence and unbelief!

Paul had already given proof, in a very practical way, of his desire for the salvation of Israel. Wherever he went, "he preached Christ in the synagogues" (Acts 9:20) as he had opportunity, thereby subjecting himself more than once to bitter persecution and attack.

In considering the question what has become of the promise? Paul makes it clear that *It was a promise made on spiritual conditions*. In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. It was not a promise made to Abraham's children according to the flesh, for then Ishmael and his children would have been partakers of it. "

Abraham's true children are those who exhibit Abraham's faith. "For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children" (vers. 6, 7); "The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith" (ver. 30). The same thought is brought out in ch. 4:9–17. Abraham's righteousness was the righteousness of faith. He had this faith when he was yet uncircumcised, "that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised" (ch. 4:11). Hence the Gentiles who exhibit Abraham's faith are heirs of the same promise and partakers of the same righteousness. There is no violation of the Divine promise in rejecting those who are Abraham's seed according to the flesh, but who do not exhibit Abraham's faith, and in including those who are.

A very common objection to the doctrines of Divine sovereignty and election is that, if these be true, man is not responsible. "Why doth he yet find fault? Human responsibility is there, whether we admit it or not we are free agents, to choose between the good and the evil. Our conscience tells us this when it accuses us of guilt. The very condemnation of conscience is in itself a testimony to the freedom of the will and human responsibility.

So, what is our Responsibility?

Like all the patriarchs before us we do have freedom of choice, therefore, To serve or not to serve is the question? Saul was given the great honour to be king over Israel but he strayed from the commands of God and lost his kingdom and his life. The tasks to which we have been called may not be to our liking, it may be hazardous and difficult, but God has promised that if the willingness is there the gift is there, Like Ezra and Nehemiah we can forget the dangers of the way, ignore the treachery all around, and press to accomplish the task assigned to us. Moses demonstrated this when called to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage; he claimed to be slow of speech but acknowledged the claim of God on his life and rose to the occasion. It was reminder that those who God calls he equips. As Christians we choose to follow our great exemplar Jesus Christ. Not only do we follow but we obey the command to go make disciples of all people.