

## *Promised Land 2 Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Thirteen: The Restoration Period – Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

Read Ezra 1:1-8; 2:68-70; 3:1-4, 8-12; 4:1-4, 24; 5:1-5, 17; 6:1, 7-10, 12, 14-16; 7:1-28; 9:1; 10:1-4, 10-11, 16-17.

- 1) From your reading, identify the following individuals:
  - a) Cyrus the Great (also see 2 Chronicles 36:22, Daniel 1:21, Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, 13) In 539 B.C., Cyrus II (known in history as “Cyrus the Great”) overthrew the Babylonian Empire and became King of Persia. His first year, he sent out a proclamation that any Jew wishing to return to Jerusalem to rebuild God’s temple could do so with his blessing. Amazingly, Isaiah had prophesied about Cyrus by name many years earlier, even before Cyrus’ birth.
  - b) Haggai and Zechariah These men prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem during the post-exilic rebuilding of the Temple (5:1; 6:14).
  - c) Zerubbabel (see also Haggai 1:1; 2:2, 21) Zerubbabel was the governor of Jerusalem who oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple (3:2; 4:1-3; 5:2).
  - d) Jeshua (also called Joshua; see also Haggai 1:1; 2:2, 4) Jeshua was the High Priest who helped Zerubbabel oversee the Temple construction (3:2; 4:3; 5:2).
  - e) Ezra (include information about his mission) Ezra was an Aaronic priest and well-versed in the Law of Moses (7:1-6). King Artaxerxes sent him to Jerusalem with gold and silver to buy the offerings the Lord had prescribed for Temple worship (the Temple rebuilding had been completed 28 years earlier), to appoint leaders, and to instruct the people in the ways of the Lord.
- 2) To what is Ezra 1:1 referring when it says, “...in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah” (see Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10-14; Daniel 9:1-2)? Jeremiah foretold that the captivity of God’s people would last seventy years and then a remnant would return to the land of Judah.
- 3) In which God-assigned task have you faced opposition and, at times, even come to a standstill? How does the book of Ezra encourage you to respond in such situations? Personal sharing

Skim the two chapters of Haggai.

- 4) Summarize Haggai’s message:
  - a) To whom was it delivered (see Haggai 1:1, 2:1-2, 2:20-21)? Haggai gave the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel (governor of Judah), Joshua the High Priest (also known as Jeshua), and the remnant of exiles who returned to Jerusalem.
  - b) What was the essence of Haggai’s message, according to chapter 1? Through Haggai, the Lord told His people to stop procrastinating and build the Temple. He said they needed to put His work first and attend to their personal needs second.
  - c) What was the impact of Haggai’s message, according to chapter 1? The spirits of the leaders and people were stirred up and the building of the Temple resumed.
- 5) According to Haggai 2:3-8,
  - a) why were the people of Jerusalem discouraged? The temple they were building paled in comparison to Solomon’s temple (apparently a few of the older Jews remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple).
  - b) how did the Lord answer their discouragement? The Lord told them to be strong in their work because He was with them. He also gave them encouragement that, although the temple they were building did not seem glorious in their eyes, in the future it would be honored far above Solomon’s temple. This was fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ who taught in the second temple (“The desired of all nations” in 2:7 probably refers to Jesus).

- 6) In what way does Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 6:33 reflect Haggai's message? How might you shift your own priorities so that God's kingdom and righteousness are what you seek first? **Haggai urged his fellow Jewish returnees from exile to stop prioritizing the planting of their crops and the building of their homes over the building of God's Temple. His message is summarized by Jesus' words in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." Personal sharing**

Zechariah chapters 1-8 are historical in nature. In particular, chapters 1-6 describe eight visions given to Zechariah during one night for the purpose of encouraging the Jews of Zechariah's day who were rebuilding the Temple. The culmination of these visions was the crowning of Joshua at the end of chapter 6. Chapters 9-14 are eschatological in nature, meaning they are prophecies about events that will take place in the future.

- 7) Read Zechariah 3:8 and 6:9-13, recalling the identity of Jeshua/Joshua from Question 1.
- In what sense was Joshua "symbolic of things to come" (see also Isaiah 4:2)? **Joshua is called "the Branch," but he prefigures a greater "Branch" – the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Joshua/Jeshua was High Priest and rebuilt the temple; Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is building His Church.**
  - Which two offices would "the Branch," whom Joshua prefigured, unite (see Zechariah 6:13 with Hebrews 7:24 and Revelation 19:16)? **The Messiah would "sit and rule on His throne" and "be a priest on His throne." Jesus is both King of kings and our great High Priest. Zechariah 6:13 says, "And there will be harmony between the two [offices of king and priest]."**
- 8) *Messiah* is a word derived from the Hebrew, meaning "Anointed One." The equivalent Greek (New Testament) word is *Christ*. What Messianic event is predicted in the following verses in Zechariah?
- Zechariah 9:9 (see Matthew 21:1-11) **The triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem before His crucifixion**
  - Zechariah 11:12-13 (see Matthew 26:14-15, 27:3-10) **The thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas for betraying Jesus**
  - Zechariah 12:10 (see John 19:34, 37) **The crucifixion of Jesus**
  - Zechariah 13:7 (see Mark 14:27, 50) **The stricken shepherd is Jesus (who was crucified) and the scattered sheep are His disciples (who fled).**
  - Zechariah 14:4 (see Acts 1:9-12) **Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives and His return to that location**
  - Zechariah 14:6-8 (see Revelation 20:5, 21:1-22:5) **A description of the Millennium and/or the New Jerusalem**
  - What do you notice about the order of these events, as foretold by Zechariah? **They are presented in the same order in which they actually occurred in history.**
- 9) Which of the following verses will you choose to apply to your life today and how will you do so: Zechariah 1:3, 4:6b, 8:13b, 10:1? **Personal sharing**

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4, 11b; 2:4-6, 11-12, 17-20; chapter 4; 6:5-9, 15-16; 7:5a; 8:1-3, 8-10; 9:1-3, 32-38; 10:29; 11:1-2, 20; 12:27; 13:6-9, 25, 28, 30.

- 10) Extrabiblical records confirm that Sanballat the Horonite was the Governor of Samaria. Conduct some Bible research by examining 2 Kings 17:24-33 (as a reminder about the identity of the Samaritans), Ezra 4:1-5 (to recall how the Samaritans had been rebuffed by Zerubbabel), and Nehemiah 6:5-7 (to discover why Sanballat felt threatened). Then, look ahead to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4, reading verses 9 and 19-26. Record items from this research that you find interesting or helpful. **The Samaritans were a mixed breed of Jews and transplants from foreign countries (the king of Assyria had sent these foreigners into Samaria after he had deported the Israelites). Sanballat, governor of Samaria, was threatened by Zerubbabel and Nehemiah's effort to rebuild the Temple and the walls surrounding Jerusalem, believing the Jews were preparing to rise up and assert political independence. Later, the**

Samaritans established their own temple on Mount Gerizim and their own version of the Law of Moses (the “Samaritan Pentateuch” [which is still in existence today]). The Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus referred to the ongoing rift between Jews and Samaritans (the Jews were proud of their racial purity and resented the Samaritans’ occupation within their land). Jesus told her that God the Father was less concerned about the location of one’s worship (one of the points of contention over which Jews and Samaritans were divided) than the heart of the worshipper.

- 11) Which verses and phrases in Nehemiah 4 talk about the way in which the work on the wall of Jerusalem was conducted? “Worked with all their heart” (4:6); “prayed” and “posted a guard” to meet the threat against them (4:9); “stationed some of the people... by families” (4:13); “half...did the work, while...half were equipped with spears...and armor” (4:16); “did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other” and builders “wore his sword at his side as he worked” (4:17); “Neither I nor...my men...took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water” (4:23).
- 12) What do you learn from Nehemiah 4 that will help you carry out God’s work? God’s work always meets opposition. Nehemiah and his workers learned to be prayerful and practical. They never worked without posting a guard posted and preparing for battle (i.e. a tool in one hand and a sword in the other).

A few years after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews fell into a spiritual stupor, unaware and uncaring about the emptiness of their worship. Malachi prophesied at that time, posing a series of rhetorical questions, which he then answered. His purpose was to confront the Jews with their apathy and stir them to worship their loving and holy God, as He deserved.

- 13) With what two very personal issues did Malachi confront his fellow Jews in Malachi 2:14-16 and 3:7b-12? How would these issues relate to properly worshipping God? Malachi confronted his Jewish contemporaries about the unholy manner in which they handled their marriages and money. Marriage and finances are timeless issues. The way one treats those closest to them and spends his or her money reveals their true heart condition. If we are sinning in these areas (or any area of our life), our worship of God cannot be pure. When we view God as Lord over all the most intimate areas of our lives, then our hearts are pleasing to Him.
- 14) Read Malachi 4:5. Following this prophecy and a period of roughly 400 years of Biblical silence, the last Old Testament prophet ministered on earth and Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled. Who was that prophet and what do you learn about his role from Matthew 17:10-13, 14:3-5, 10; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:11-17, 7:24-28; and John 1:6-8, 15, 23, 3:27-30? John the Baptist was the last prophet who ministered under the Old Covenant. Jesus said John was “the Elijah” that the Jews expected to return to earth before the coming of the Messiah. He was the “voice calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord,’” as foretold by Isaiah. An angelic messenger surprised the childless Zechariah, John’s father, with the news that his wife Elizabeth would bear him this son. John was a Nazarite. He wore clothing made of camel’s hair and a leather belt (reminiscent of Elijah), lived in the desert, and ate locusts and wild honey. He baptized people for repentance of sin, preparing the way for “the Light” (Jesus) and announcing that Someone greater than he was coming. The Jews largely refused to recognize his authority and mistreated him, just as their forefathers had mistreated God’s other spokesmen. John spoke out boldly against Herod’s adultery with his sister-in-law, Herod had him arrested and later, beheaded. When Jesus came on the scene, He made the amazing statement: “Among those born of women there is no one greater than John.”

15) The warnings of the prophets were stern, yet they also foretold a wonderful hope.

a) Try to discern what hope was being offered in each of the following passages:

1. Micah 4:1-4 Restoration of Jerusalem (the earthly or the heavenly city), reception of the Gospel by Gentiles, open worship of the Lord, an age of peace and spiritual enlightenment
2. Micah 5:2, 4-5a A ruler whose greatness would extend to the ends of the earth, who would shepherd His people in the strength of the Lord and bring peace
3. Micah 7:8-20 A time when people of all nations will find their salvation in Zion (Zion may symbolize one of two things: the earthly Jerusalem [the center from which Jesus will reign in the coming millennial age] or God's authoritative revelation of Christ in the Scriptures).
4. Isaiah 2:2-4 An age of justice and peace
5. Isaiah 9:6-7 The birth of a child who would eternally govern His people with perfect justice
6. Isaiah 53:2-12 The ministry of Messiah as a suffering servant (His punishment for our peace)
7. Isaiah 65:17-25 A new age in which there is joy and peace
8. Jeremiah 23:5-6 A "righteous branch": a Davidic king would one day reign and be called "The Lord Our Righteousness"
9. Jeremiah 31:33-34 The New Covenant, in which people's hearts would be so transformed that they would find obedience to God desirable, not burdensome
10. Ezekiel 36:24-28 The re-gathering of the Jews to their own land and the changing of their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.
11. John 14:2-3 Jesus said He was preparing a place for us in heaven and that He would come back and take us there to be with Him

b) Read Romans 15:4, 13. How will your life today be different if you choose to "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (be as specific as possible to your own life and circumstances)?

Personal sharing