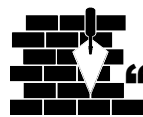


Ezra - "Loving The Window Of God's Word"



“Building Blocks”

1. **(Snapshot)** The Babylonian Exile is a key period in OT history. It lasted 70 years, as predicted by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12). There are some very relevant facts that help make sense of the Book of Ezra:
 - a. The “Exile” occurred in stages, *not* all at once;
 - (1) **609 BC** – Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and took some of the best of its youth, including Daniel, back to Babylon for training (Dan 1:1-2).
 - (2) **597 BC** – Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again and took the Temple treasures as well as a number of priests, including Ezekiel, back to Babylon (2 Kg 24:1-17).
 - (3) **586 BC** – Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem a final time, destroyed the Temple and the city, and took the majority of the Jews to Babylon. *This event is most always associated with the “Babylonian Captivity”* (2 Kg 25; Jer 39; Ezek 24).
 - b. The “return” from captivity *also* occurred in three stages, each led by a different person:
 - (1) **539 BC** – Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple. He helped finance the venture (Ezra 1:1-2:1). The primary figure in this migration was Zerubbabel. (**Note:** The 70 years of Jeremiah’s prophecy match this return with the first deportation in 609 BC. If you try to use the “big” deportation in 586 BC, it creates a “contradiction.”) The prophets, Haggai and Zechariah ministered in Jerusalem during this period (Ezra 5:1).
 - (2) **458 BC** – A second group returns to Jerusalem, led by Ezra, to “rebuild” the soul of the nation. This group returned 58 years *after* the Temple was rebuilt, and 18 years *after Esther preserved the nation!* (cf. Ezra 7:8; Artaxerxes followed Xerxes or Ahasuerus).
 - (3) 440 BC – The third and final group returns under the leadership of Nehemiah, to rebuild the wall around the city. Ezra and Nehemiah minister side-by-side. This is the final OT narrative. (Neh 1-2).
 - c. Background on the man, Ezra:
 - (1) He was given the charge by Artaxerxes, to appoint leaders who *knew the word of Yahweh*, and if there were insufficient numbers of these men, he was to train more (Ezra 7:25-26).
 - (2) Many scholars think Ezra “closed” the OT canon. There is no history after Nehemiah, and tradition makes Ezra the most respected scholar of his era.
 - (3) It is likely that Ezra is the authors of the Books of Chronicles as well, for they are clearly written from a post-exilic point of view.
2. **(Q2, p14)** The Hebrew verb translated, “*study*,” is an aggressive word. Its range of meanings include the ideas of seeking, praying, demanding, and inquiring. The point here is that Ezra was committed to “searching out” God’s Law. The Berean Jews nearly

500 years later did the same thing in the face of Paul’s radical interpretation of the Law and Prophets:

“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” **Acts 17:11**

3. **(Q3, Rom 15)** Paul is very careful to link the “scriptures” to “endurance.” The former is the thoughts of God, the later the difficult effort I must make. We *must* assume Paul is speaking of difficult circumstances here because of his choice of words:
 - (a) “*endurance*” – (Gk is hupomonē) means to bear-up (i.e. “live,” “remain,”) beneath difficult *circumstances*.
 - (b) “*encouragement*” – (Gk is paraklēsis) means to “put courage into”; to keep someone from falling down.
4. **(Q3, Acts 17)** The word translated “examine” here can mean to sift, to interrogate, or make some type of judgment *after* an investigation. It is a word of thorough “looking.”
5. **(Q3, Ps 119:11)** We tend to run to verses about God’s mercy, love, faithfulness, and care, *after* we sin. This verse tells us that memorizing and reflecting on those same verses can also *keep us from sin*—and for all the right reasons!
6. **(Q3, Deut 32)** We must not lose sight of the *context* of this statement. Moses makes an unmakeable connection between one’s own attitude towards God’s Word and the outcome of the lives of one’s posterity! The notion of “my choices” is foreign to reality!
7. **(Q4, p16)** We must not lost sight of the *context* of this statement by Jeremiah. He was despised by most Jews in Jerusalem, and viewed as a *traitor* to the cause of national Israel *because* he was telling them what God had instructed him to say! It is in *this context* that God’s word was a “joy and delight” to him.
8. **(Q5, pg 16)** The Hebrew word for “knows” here (*yada*), is the same word used in Gen 4:1 for Adam’s union with Eve that resulted in the conception of Cain. To “know” someone, sexually, in the Hebrew mind, was more a statement of intimacy than pleasure. God is talking here about intimacy *with Him!* And He chooses a word that would immediately be identified by the Jewish mind as the most profound intimacy possible.



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Q1, p14)** The phrases, “*the hand of the LORD...*” almost always has to do with God stepping into time and becoming engaged in the lives of people. But, it also has to do primarily with *His* plans and purposes (cf. Is 41:20; Jer 5:17; Lk 1:66; Acts 13:11). Interestingly, this phrase appears 7x in Ezekiel, all in regard to God using him to *speak* to His people. We tend to think of the phrase as it appears in the Book of Ezra, as a statement about the “blessing” of God on Ezra’s life. Unfortunately, our understanding of “blessing” almost always focuses on *us*, the one *receiving* the “blessing.” We see it as a “gift” from God *for* us, rather than *to* us. However, in God’s way of seeing life and living it, a “blessing” from God is usually an empowerment for the good of *someone else*. This has been God’s design from the beginning. We see it first and clearest in His original statements to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:2).

2. **(Q3, Rom 15)** Difficulties and pain in life threaten to drive us *away from* God in our minds. Staying *out* of the Scriptures during times like this because I don't "feel" like reading, is foolish and a prescription for disaster and a subtle distance from God.
3. **(Q3, Acts 17)** Be very careful not to so emphasize *what* the Bereans did that you miss the more serious fact that they *could do* it in the first place! Their "Scriptures" would have been a series of rolled-up documents, written in a language no one spoke, and lacked page numbers, chapter divisions, and verse numbers!
4. **(Q3, Ps 119:45)** It is interesting that we tend to think that the more I know of the Bible, the "narrower" my path becomes. God's desire is to get us on a *wider* path, which is what the psalmist means here by walking in "liberty." It is sometimes referred to as a "broad path" (Ps 18:19; 31:8). Our problem is that we do not like the fact that there is a narrow "gate" at the *beginning* of the journey.



"Going Deeper"

1. **(Q3)** When you think of getting to know the Bible better, do you think of having to *do* more as a result, or getting a clearer perspective on things? Explain. **(NOTE:** Typically, we don't reflect on the fact that our perspective on ourselves, on God, on others, and on life itself is skewed. The Scriptures are not a "guidebook" on how to live, even though there is amazing insight. They are God's self-disclosure, His thoughts about life, which, in the final analysis, is reality itself.)
2. **(Q3, Ps 119:11)** When you read this verse, do you think of memorized verses that speak to the *behavior* in question (e.g. gossip, envy, anger, etc.), or verses that speak of the nature and character of God? Explain. **(NOTE:** Memorizing verses that deal only with our sins and God's contrary commands is helpful, but David was likely talking about Scriptures that reminded him of God's steadfast love, faithfulness, etc. It's very likely he's talking about memorizing Scripture about the One we might sin against, rather than prohibitions about the sin itself.)
3. **(Q3, Matt 4)** Do you believe (i.e. *really* think) that you need God's Word as much as food? What evidence in your life is there that this is true?
4. **(Q5, p16)** What were your answers here? **(NOTE:** Don't lose sight of the fact that there are four possible "boasting" areas here. Talking about the other three is probably a good idea: wealth & possessions, power & status, and knowledge & education.) You might even want to ask, "*How important is it to you, that others know what you have, know, or can do/have done?*"



"Brainstorming"

1. Perhaps it might be healthy and helpful, if it fits the group, to brainstorm about some passages of Scripture to memorize that portray *God's behavior towards us*, as a way to deal with sinful behavior towards others we want to deal with. For instance, if I find myself constantly nagging someone, rather than memorizing verses that speak of that behavior, memorize verses that deal with God's reasonableness in dealing with us (e.g. Jms 3:17).
2. Determine what part Scripture memory is going to have in this group. This chapter provides you with an excellent context for starting some type of memory component. If you do, Scripture memory stands or falls on *review*. Make sure you have some type of review protocol in mind that includes a set amount of time and accountability.