

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah*
Lesson 3 “God’s Call”

Read for this week’s study

Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 1:1–11; Daniel 9:24–27; Daniel 8; Romans 8:28, 29; Romans 9; Exodus 3, 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).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Calling of Ezra and Nehemiah
- III. Prophetic Timing
- IV. The 70 Weeks and the 2,300 Days
- V. God’s Election
- VI. Our Responsibility
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. When God calls people to a specific task, is He more concerned with our qualifications or with our willingness to learn and grow? Which is the more important qualification for service in God’s cause; education/training or commitment? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. What does Ezra 7:10 say about Ezra as a person? Why was Ezra chosen by God for his mission? Read Nehemiah 1:1-11. Why was Nehemiah chosen for his mission? How does one recognize the call of God in one’s life? Was there ever a time when you were certain God was calling you? What was that like? How did you respond? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. In what year was Ezra called by God for his special mission? Read Daniel 9:24-27 and Ezra 7:14-15. What did the Persian King Artaxerxes decree in that year and how is it significant for the Adventist understanding of prophecy? How does that prophecy reveal Jesus’ ministry with amazing accuracy? (Monday’s lesson)

4. Read Daniel 8:14, 26-27. What was the one part of the vision of Daniel 8:3-14 that was not explained to Daniel? How is that point clarified in Daniel 9:24-27? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read Romans 8:28-30. What does God call us to do in this passage? What does He choose us for? Read Romans 9:10-18. What kind of election or call of God is described in this chapter? How do Exodus 19:5-6 and Isaiah 19:23-25 help to clarify this passage? Read Romans 9:19-26. How does Paul expand on God's election of Israel in a new context? If God chooses all for salvation, why will some be lost? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Exodus 3:7-12 and 4:1-17. What do these narratives tell us about God and what happens when God calls someone for a particular task? How is Moses' response different from those of Ezra and Nehemiah? What kind of excuses does Moses make? Which kind of response do you think God prefers (Exodus 33:11)? (Thursday's lesson)
7. Dwell more on the idea that God calls us to do things that we love to do. What are some principles anyone could follow to know that they are, in fact, doing God's will? (Friday's lesson)
8. Think of the story of Judas Iscariot. Was it his "calling" to betray Jesus? If he had died before his last journey to Jerusalem, would we think of him very differently today? See *Desire of Ages*, 716. What does his story teach us about the centrality of human freedom in our own lives? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

You remember Jonah went to Nineveh, and he announced, forty days, then they will be destroyed; "And I have the Lord's word on that. My chart is right. Forty days, and you'll be destroyed." And when the forty days were up, he went out to see the fulfillment of the prediction, and it didn't come as he had anticipated. Then he turned to God and said, "I didn't think you'd go through with that, anyway. That's why I ran away. But you put so much pressure on me." And you think of the pressure! You know, if an evangelist was trying to avoid going to a certain city and he spent a while in the belly of a whale, that's pressure! And finally he goes and he gives the message. And then he says, "God, you confuse me. You make me go and deliver the message, and then you don't come through with it. I'm angry!" And God says, "But aren't you pleased that the inhabitants of Nineveh have repented?" But Jonah was more concerned about his reputation. As an advent preacher, he'd given a prophecy, and a date. That's what the charts can sometimes lead us to do. And as you said, the greater concern is that God looked good. And that God did not destroy the inhabitants of Nineveh when they repented made him look very good, and it won some to repentance.

The appeal at the end is so moving in Jonah. “Don’t you care that there are 120,000 people in that city that don’t know right from wrong, and there are even a lot of cattle? Don’t you care, Jonah?” But he didn’t care about God’s reputation. As we study the prophecies here, what do they say about God? Do the prophecies even leave room for delay, by the way? Well, the book of Revelation certainly does. It even speaks of it. “Hold! Do not let these events occur until my servants are sealed in their foreheads.” It’s hard not to get into Revelation when we’re reading Daniel.

As I was reviewing this before coming, it’s significant to me how Jesus commented on the purpose of prophecy. Not just Daniel, of course, but others; but there are so many in Daniel that are so specific. Look at Matthew 24. Jesus himself made some prophecies, and he commented on the purpose of them. Matthew 24:25. You remember they asked how soon he would come. “Well,” he said, “Several things will occur before I come.” In fact, verse 23:

Then if anyone says to you, “Lo, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you beforehand [suggesting that he had warned them in advance, so they’d be prepared].

But he gave an additional reason in John 13:19. And I think prophecies have these dual purposes, suggesting it does pay to work them out, indeed. There is warning, unless, of course, we misinterpret them and are looking for the wrong thing. So it pays to study carefully. But an additional reason is given in 13:19: “I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Daniel*, recorded February, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/39MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/40MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Does predestination bother anybody? Romans 8:29:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son [we’re predestined then], And those whom he predestined [verse 30], he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Well, if you’re predestined, then why stay any longer tonight? How about chapter 9, about the potter and the clay? He can take out of one lump; he can take some clay and make vessels made for destruction; take out the same lump and make vessels for salvation. Does that cancel all out? Could I suggest this very quickly? In Romans 8:29, “those whom He foreknew ...” How

many does he foreknow? Everybody. “He predestined.” So how many are predestined? All. And all who are predestined, he calls. How many does he call? All. And those whom he calls, he justifies. How many? And those whom he justifies, he glorifies. How many does he glorify? Well, we have no need to worry! He’s going to justify and glorify everybody! Everybody! Saints and sinners alike? Then no one will be lost? It doesn’t work. So we start back through. How many does he glorify? Only those that he justifies. How many does he justify? Only those whom he calls. But he calls everybody. Then there’s something wrong, because if you start in from both ends, you don’t meet in the middle. So there must be some word misunderstood in there; and I wouldn’t have chosen this so late, except that it fits in with all the purpose of our study—those whom he foreknew. What does it mean in the Bible to know?

“Thee only have I known.” I thought he knew everybody. “Depart from me. I never knew you.” I thought he knew everybody. In the Bible, to know means to know as a friend. It even means to know with love and intimacy. Hence, “Adam knew Eve his wife” and they had a baby. It isn’t that babies come from being introduced. And you remember in Kings, when David had that extraordinary hot water bottle, and it says that he never knew her, (1 Kings 1:4) it doesn’t mean that he never learned her name. So we’re very familiar with this in the Bible. To know means to know in a special way. And to foreknow means to know in a special way. Those whom God foreknew would be his friends. Then all the rest follows. Does God know who will be his friends and who will not? Read Romans 9. Jacob and Esau, and the others. He knows this.

Do you mind that God foreknows the future? Would you trust anybody else with that kind of knowledge? Would God abuse such infinite power and knowledge? Not the kind of God we worship. So I don’t mind how much he knows. So then it makes sense. We’re not predestined. “Choose you this day.” We’re free. “Whosoever will” is made plain all through scripture. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Romans*, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/61MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/62MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

I wonder if tonight we could think back in imagination to the very dramatic events of that first week of this earth’s history. The war had begun already in heaven. Satan had already leveled his charges and his accusations. One third of the angels had already agreed with him that God is not worthy of our love and our trust. Right in the middle of that devastating crisis, God invites his family to watch him as he creates yet another world—this time, ours. How easily he could have created our world with a snap of his fingers, in just an instant of time.

But in the dramatic and significant setting of the great controversy, he chose this time to do it in six twenty-four hour days. On the first day, all he said was “Let there be light.” That’s all. And then day two, three, four, five, as God in unhurried majesty and drama unfolded his plans for

our earth. By the sixth day, what a beautiful place this was. Where now were Satan's charges that God was selfish? I mean, look at the freedom. He created us in his own image with power to think and to do. And we know from human history that he created us free to either love and trust him, or hate him and spit in His face, because it has been done. And he created us able to do it! God even allowed Satan to approach our first parents at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And he didn't hide that tree in some dark corner of the garden; he put it right in the middle near the tree of life, so that Adam and Eve would see it every time they came to that other tree.

Look in Genesis 2:9: "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (NIV)

Of course the God we know could be trusted not to allow our first inexperienced parents to be tested more than they were able to resist. You know he would not do that. And so Satan was only allowed to approach them at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were warned not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. Isn't that the meaning of that famous key text, next on the list, in 1 Corinthians 10:13? "But God keeps his promise [or God can be trusted], and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm." (GNB)

You see, that tree was not put there as a test of obedience—an arbitrary test of obedience. That tree was put there to help them, to protect them. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was not placed there before sin, but after sin. If it was before sin, it was an arbitrary test. After sin, it was to help them and protect them like every other one of God's gracious laws. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #10, "The Reminder of the Evidence" recorded Marcy, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/10MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Not one cloud has fallen upon the church that God has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork the work of God but He has foreseen. All has taken place as He has predicted through His prophets. He has not left His church in darkness, forsaken, but has traced in prophetic declarations what would occur, and through His providence, acting in its appointed place in the world's history, He has brought about that which His Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to foretell. All His purposes will be fulfilled and established. His law is linked with His throne, and satanic agencies combined with human agencies cannot destroy it. Truth is inspired and guarded by God; it will live, and will succeed, although it may appear at times to be overshadowed. The gospel of Christ is the law exemplified in character. The deceptions practiced against it, every device for vindicating falsehood, every error forged by satanic

agencies, will eventually be eternally broken, and the triumph of truth will be like the appearing of the sun at noonday. The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth with healing in His wings, and the whole earth shall be filled with His glory. {2SM 108.2}

In the plan of restoring in men the divine image, it was provided that the Holy Spirit should move upon human minds, and be as the presence of Christ, a molding agency upon human character. Receiving the truth, men become also recipients of the grace of Christ, and devote their sanctified human ability to the work in which Christ was engaged,—men become laborers together with God. It is to make men agents for God, that divine truth is brought home to their understanding. . . . {RH, February 12, 1895 par. 5}

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health. It is the Heaven-ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and characters (Letter 406, 1906). {6BC 1074.2}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {PP 68.2}

All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, ... that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. {TMK 99.5}

Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts. {AG 54.6}

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their

faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. {DA 827.3}

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. {SD 23.2}

Christ is ready to impart all heavenly influences. He knows every temptation that comes to man, and the capabilities of every human agent. He weighs his strength. He sees the present and the future, and presents before the mind the obligations that should be met, and urges that common, earthly things shall not be permitted to be so absorbing that eternal things shall be lost out of reckoning. {SD 23.3}

There was but one hope for the human race—that into this mass of discordant and corrupting elements might be cast a new leaven; that there might be brought to mankind the power of a new life; that the knowledge of God might be restored to the world. {Ed 76.1}

Christ came to restore this knowledge. He came to set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him. He came to manifest the nature of His law, to reveal in His own character the beauty of holiness. {Ed 76.2}

The Holy Spirit will not compel men to take a certain course of action. We are free moral agents; and when sufficient evidence has been given us as to our duty it is left with us to decide our course. {RH, July 17, 1888 par. 4} {FE 124.1}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {GC 493.2}

Through the ministry of the angels the Holy Spirit is enabled to work upon the mind and heart of the human agent and draw him to Christ. . . . But the Spirit of God does not interfere with the freedom of the human agent. The Holy Spirit is given to be a helper, so that man may cooperate with the Divine, and it is given to Him to draw the soul but never to force obedience. {TMK 57.2}

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the

influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. {MB 142.1}

It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture (*Redemption: or the Miracles of Christ*, pp. 112, 113). {1BC 1120.5}

God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes. {GC 541.3}

Christ does not drive but draws men unto Him. The only compulsion which He employs is the constraint of love. {MB 127.1}

Every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they can find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who will consent to enter into covenant relation with the God of heaven are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. They are invited by the Saviour, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. The spirits of darkness will battle for the soul once under their dominion, but angels of God will contend for that soul with prevailing power. The Lord says, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? . . . Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." Isaiah 49:24, 25. {DA 258.6}

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 8. {SC 34.2}

The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, an unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. "Come now, and let us reason together" is the Creator's invitation to the beings He has made. Isaiah 1:18. God does not force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly

and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton. Such is not the purpose of the Creator. He desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. {SC 43.4}

I saw that the angels of God are never to control the will. God sets before man life and death. He can have his choice. {EW 221.1}

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God. {DA 466.4}

The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. "The truth shall make you free;" and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one's self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is "the law of liberty." James 2:12. {DA 466.5}

The Lord will not compel men to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God; He sets before the human agent good and evil, and makes plain what will be the sure result of following one course or the other. Christ invites us, saying, "Follow Me." But we are never forced to walk in His footsteps. If we do walk in His footsteps, it is the result of deliberate choice. As we see the life and character of Christ, strong desire is awakened to be like Him in character; and we follow on to know the Lord, and to know His goings forth are prepared as the morning. We then begin to realize that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—R. & H., March 31, 1896. {CS 138.1}

God never compels the obedience of man. He leaves all free to choose whom they will serve. {PK 510.4}

It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. {DA 487.3}