

**Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes**  
**Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah***  
**Lesson 4 “Facing Opposition”**

**Read for this week’s study**

Ezra 4:1–5; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ezra 5:1–5; Haggai 1; Ezra 4:6–24; Nehemiah 4; Nehemiah 6:1–13.

**Memory Text**

“But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter” (Ezra 5:5, NKJV).

**Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide**

- I. Introduction
- II. Opposition Begins
- III. Prophets Encourage
- IV. Work Stoppage
- V. Nehemiah Takes Action (444 B.C.)
- VI. Doing a “Great Work”
- VII. Further Study

**Questions and Notes for Consideration**

**Facilitator: Jon Paulien**

1. Ezra, chapters 3-6, is structured thematically, covering different historical periods of opposition to the rebuilding of the temple, crucial background to the story of Ezra and Nehemiah’s missions that are the primary concern of these books. With the arrival of Ezra (457 BC) and Nehemiah (444 BC) things changed. The city of Jerusalem and its walls were completely rebuilt. But the whole story of rebuilding the temple and then the city was in the context of opposition and resistance. How does our picture of God and the cosmic conflict impact the way we understand religious and political opposition to the gospel today? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Ezra 4:1-5. Why do you think the remnant of the Exile refused the help of other people in rebuilding the temple? How does 2 Kings 17:24-41 help explain the conflict between the Exiles and the people who were already living in the land? Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. Does this text help to clarify the Exiles refusal of help? Does this text apply to all circumstances? How do you balance meeting people where they are with protecting believers from evil influences? (Sunday’s lesson)

3. Read Ezra 5:1-5. Why does God send the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to the Jews? What is the result of their prophesying? Read Ezra 5:6-17. Be prepared to summarize this pagan historical document and explore why it ended up in Scripture. Read Haggai 1:1-15. What was the prophet's analysis of the situation, how did he address it, and what was the result? (Monday's lesson)
4. Read Ezra 4:6-24. How do the three kinds mentioned in this passage relate to each other and the timeline of the chapter? What are the king's motives for shutting down construction of the temple? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read Nehemiah 4:1-23. What did the Jews under Nehemiah's leadership do to stand up to their opponents? Why did they feel that they needed to fight rather than just depend on God's protection? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Nehemiah 6:1-13. Why do you think Nehemiah sees the work he is doing in Jerusalem as a "great work?" What did his opponents do to try and stop him? (Thursday's lesson)
7. How can we know when we should or should not collaborate with people of other faiths? (Friday's lesson)
8. While there are dangers in compromising one's faith with the world, what are the dangers of going to an extreme to avoid compromising the faith? How does one find one's balance between the extremes of rigidity and compromise? (Friday's lesson)

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

But at the end of the seventy years, when they had an opportunity to come home, how many came? Well, you read Ezra and Nehemiah. Not that many cared to come. But the few who did, set out, at first, to rebuild the temple and rebuild Jerusalem; but they ran into a great deal of opposition and difficulty, as you recall, and they became discouraged. Meanwhile, back in Mesopotamia, do you remember the situation there? There was a death decree to destroy the Jews. And there's a marvelous book that describes how God looked after the Jews who didn't have enough faith or interest to go home at the end of the seventy years. And God looks good in the book of Esther.

But meanwhile, back in Palestine, to encourage the people, these two men, Haggai and Zechariah, join with Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, to stimulate the people to get on with the building. But you remember, even after that, there was great apostasy; all that intermarriage. And so Ezra and Nehemiah came and worked with them. Remember all the violation of the Sabbath that was going on, that Nehemiah had to try to straighten out in various disciplinary ways. But then there was a great revival under the ministry of Ezra, when he read the Bible to them, in the form that it was in in those days. So eventually they had the temple erected; they had the walls built; and they established the scriptures as their supreme

authority. And yet, look what happened in the years that followed. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, recorded March, 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/49MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/50MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

### **Further Study with Ellen White**

The Christian always has a strong helper in the Lord. The way of the Lord's helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him. {PK 576.1}

But when we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment. He would not have us conjecture as to the success of our honest endeavors. Not once should we even think of failure. We are to co-operate with One who knows no failure. {COL 363.1}

But though the conflict is a ceaseless one, none are left to struggle alone. Angels help and protect those who walk humbly before God. Never will our Lord betray one who trusts in Him. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says; for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands. {PK 570.4}

Every weak, doubting, struggling soul who yields fully to the Lord is placed in direct touch with agencies that enable him to overcome. Heaven is near to him, and he has the support and help of angels of mercy in every time of trial and need. {AA 299.1}

The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper. {DA 490.5}

If in our ignorance we make missteps, the Saviour does not forsake us. We need never feel that we are alone. Angels are our companions. The Comforter that Christ promised to send in His name abides with us. In the way that leads to the City of God there are no difficulties which those who trust in Him may not overcome. There are no dangers which they may not escape. There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy. {MH 249.1}

God has angels whose whole work is to draw those who shall be heirs of salvation. Whenever one takes a step toward Jesus, Jesus is taking steps toward him. The angels' work is to keep back the powers of Satan (MS 17, 1893). {7BC 922.5}

God does not ask us to do in our own strength the work before us. He has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. . . . {8T 19.1}

Christ has made provision that His church shall be a transformed body, illumined with the light of heaven, possessing the glory of Immanuel. It is His purpose that every Christian shall be surrounded with a spiritual atmosphere of light and peace. There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God. {8T 19.3}

Our God is an ever-present help in every time of need. He is perfectly acquainted with the most secret thoughts of our heart, with all the intents and purposes of our souls. When we are in perplexity, even before we open to Him our distress, He is making arrangements for our deliverance. Our sorrow is not unnoticed. He always knows much better than we do, just what is necessary for the good of His children, and He leads us as we would choose to be led if we could discern our own hearts and see our necessities and perils, as God sees them. But finite beings seldom know themselves. They do not understand their own weakness. . . . God knows them better than they know themselves, and He understands how to lead them. . . . {OHC 316.4}

Heaven's plan of salvation is broad enough to embrace the whole world. God longs to breathe into prostrate humanity the breath of life. And He will not permit any soul to be disappointed who is sincere in his longing for something higher and nobler than anything the world can offer. Constantly He is sending His angels to those who, while surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace. In various ways God will reveal Himself to them and will place them in touch with providences that will establish their confidence in the One who has given Himself a ransom for all, "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments." Psalm 78:7. {PK 377.1}

He who slumbers not, who is continually at work for the accomplishment of His designs, can carry forward His great work harmoniously. That which appears to finite minds entangled and complicated, the Lord's hand can keep in perfect order. He can devise ways and means to thwart the purposes of wicked counselors, and those who plot out mischief. {4BC 1161.1}