

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah*
Lesson 9 “Trials, Tribulations, and Lists”

Read for this week’s study

Ezra 1:9–11; Daniel 1:1, 2; Daniel 5; Deuteronomy 30:1–6; Ezra 8:1–23; Nehemiah 11:1, 2; 12:1–26.

Memory Text

“These joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes” (Nehemiah 10:29, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The God of History
- III. In Their Cities
- IV. Where are the Priests?
- V. Humbled Before God
- VI. In the Holy City
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. How do texts like Daniel 1:1-2 and Ezra 1:9-11 help us see that “God is in control”? What do we mean when we say that God is in control? What does it mean in today’s world and church?
2. What is the purpose of including (and repeating) the long lists of people in Ezra 2 & Nehemiah 7? Why is it important to rebuild not only the walls but also the community? What is the eschatological significance of this (cf. Acts 2)?
3. Though, for us, this might be a long daunting list of names, it is helpful to remember that they were real people who lived and breathed and were part of God’s people at one time. Titus 3:9 demonstrates how this kind of information can be used in an abusive way. Why is it so easy to lose the forest for the trees?
4. “The Israelites “knew God’s graciousness and leading, despite their sins. Thus, they trusted in the Lord, that He would make the return from captivity successful. Those

promises, however, didn't mean that they would not face many challenges along the way. In much of this quarter so far, we have looked at the trials and tribulations that they faced, even amid the promises of God." (Wednesday's lesson)

5. What does it mean to walk humbly before God? What do we learn from the experience of Ezra (8:22-23) and Nehemiah (2:9)? Both acted faithfully and honorably in their respective roles. What are the implications for our lives in modern, complex society (e.g. physicians, counselors, psychiatrists)?
6. What can we learn from what is going on in Nehemiah 11:1-2? Why would they have to cast lots to see who would have to live in Jerusalem as opposed to living in the other [garrison] cities or in the countryside? What are some contemporary implications for the mission?
7. The promise of the land is one of the central themes of the biblical faith (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:3-8). To what extent is the Israelite return from exile based on their perception of identity defined by a **sense of place** (=space with historical meaning which provide identity and continuity across generations)? Humanness in the Bible is defined in terms of belonging which empowers a purpose within a community.
8. How does the New Testament redefine the promise of posterity, land and relationship from Genesis 12 & 17? Contemporary culture may seem to romanticize a **sense of space**: freedom as detached, unrooted lives of endless choice with absence of commitment, free from outside pressures and authority). That kind of "freedom" often creates a deep sense of rootlessness as evidenced in the increase of violence, criminality, gang rivalry and homelessness. To what extent is meaning connected with our roots?
9. In Nehemiah 12:1-26 once again we have a long list of priests and Levites. These priestly families are not only the connection with previous times, but they also "helped Nehemiah build the walls in order that people could safely worship the living God in the temple. Thus all the people, in their various functions had their roles to play". (Thursday's lesson)
10. How can we, in today's world, get that "glimpse over a wall of time" and in spite of our trials and tribulations seek to introduce other people and new generations to God?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

So what *is* the message of the cross? Evidently it's much more than the payment of a legal penalty so that somehow God can justly forgive you and me. The cross was needed by the loyal angels. And this truly suggests that we ought to go back to the foot of the cross and join the universe, the family of the universe, in watching closely just how Jesus died. And then listening very carefully to how Jesus cried, and what He cried: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What does that mean? And how does that suffering and death bring peace—once again—to God's family? I believe that in the great controversy, all Christian beliefs take on much

broader significance. Particularly does the gospel take on a much larger meaning. You see, while we're still preoccupied with our own salvation, the gospel quite naturally might be understood as the good news about what God has done for me and for you.

But in the larger great controversy setting, the gospel is the truth about our gracious God; the truth that ends the war, and confirms the loyalty of the universe, and wins some of us back to repentance and to trust. I believe (more strongly than I believe anything) that the most important of all our beliefs is the truth about our God. God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, vengeful, and severe. He is instead precisely as his Son revealed him to be. We believe the testimony of Jesus when he said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." God is just as loving and gracious as his Son; just as willing to forgive and heal. Could there be any better news than that? To me, that's the everlasting good news that holds the loyalty of the universe. And wins us back, and will hold our loyalty and trust for the rest of eternity.

And this is the message we have the high privilege of sharing with people all over this planet, who may not know they are members of God's family, but who deserve to know, and who deserve to hear this truth. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #1, "The Conflict in God's Family" recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California}

To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:

<http://pkp.cc/1MMCAG>

Is there a verse in the Bible that says that when Jesus died, he was given up? Romans 4:25 says Christ was given up for our transgressions. And many versions, with their reformation influence; translate this "Christ was put to death." There is nothing in there about being put to death; it says he was given up. To tie that in with the issue in the great controversy, God gave up his Son as if he were a sinner, just as he will give us up, if we are real sinners at the end. Because you can't force people to trust you, in a free universe. What can you do but give people up. When Jesus was given up, yes, he died.

So I believe there were three questions answered by Gethsemane and the cross. One: who is right, God or the devil? Is God a liar when he says sin results in death? The devil says, "Yes, God has lied to you." "You will not die" is the teaching of the devil. God says, "You will die. But, it is not torture and execution at my hands." The devil developed the whole doctrine of hell to turn the universe against God. And God says that is not true. And I say, "Well, how do I know how the wicked are going to die?" He says, "Only one person has ever died the death as a result of sin. It's only happened once in all eternity. I died that death. I wouldn't ask any of you to prove the truthfulness of my word. This is the meaning of substitutionary death."

Yes, He died in our place, but not for legal reasons. He died because he wouldn't think of asking anybody else to go through that painful experience to demonstrate the truth. Besides, our death wouldn't have answered it anyway, because if our dying would have answered the question, then he might as well have let Lucifer die in the beginning.

But you remember the explanation. Had he left Lucifer to die, the universe would have misunderstood and assumed God had put him to death. So only by God coming; he said, "No one takes my life from me. Nobody can kill me. I'm going through this myself. I have arranged this with my Father." And the universe looking on said the Father isn't killing the Son; God isn't killing God. And it was clear enough to them that they could say, "Our questions are answered."

One—sin does result in death. Two—it is not torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God. Only one thing left. "God, why were you so concerned that we understand this?" God says, "Because if you serve me from fear, it will turn you into rebels—holy rebels." He says "come to Calvary." On Calvary, Jesus was tortured to death. By whom?—the most devout, blueprinting Adventists the world has ever known. Absolutely dedicated to God, the scriptures, creation, Sabbath, the Ten Commandments, you name it. Jesus said you even strain gnats out of your goat's milk. Real health reformers. You couldn't fault them for a thing. You couldn't have disfellowshipped one of the people who crucified Christ. Their lives were apparently without blemish.

But they hated him; they hated his picture of God. They killed him to silence his unbiblical heresy. And the angels looking on said, "We thought, by sending your Son to Palestine, you did that to get a good running start with people who already agreed with you. We didn't realize you sent him there to prove this costly point, that if we obey you for the wrong reason, because we don't really know you, we could turn into your worst enemies in the middle of our Sabbath keeping and our tithe-paying and our health-reforming." And that's why I think the biggest mistake the Adventist Church could make in these last days is to have one tremendous revival in reformation, get out the blueprint, straighten out our lives, without spending much more time on the picture of God. Because if we do the right things for the wrong reason, we'll do what some of the Jews did, and become his enemies.

So I believe the cross was the only way to answer the questions. Without answers to the questions, there would be no peace, no freedom, no security throughout the universe. So it was for these specific reasons. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Questions People Are Asking About the Plan of Salvation, recorded April, 1983, Redlands, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP> (Part 2)

Then seventy years later, as Jeremiah had prophesied, there was this decree by Cyrus that they could go home, about 537, and they went home in 536, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. How many, by the way, did you estimate came home? The whole group, thrilled that the seventy years were up? No, only a remnant went home. Most of them stayed behind. Is there any book that describes what happened to those who stayed behind?

The Book of Esther describes how God looked after those who didn't have enough faith to go home. So in 536 this group of maybe 40-50,000 came home and began to restore the temple; but in 522 the work ground to a halt. In 520, two years later, two prophets arrived, Haggai and Zechariah. This is where those two belong. Unfortunately, we won't read them for quite awhile. But these two men came and urged the Jews to get on with the building of the temple.

In 515, the temple was finished and dedicated. And as we read last time, the older people wept when they saw it, because they remembered the magnificent one that had been built under the reign of Solomon. In 483, jumping down now—how many years is that? Thirty-two years? Vashti refused to come in before the king. And in 479 and 478, somewhere in there, Esther became queen.

In 457, note the passage of the years, there came the third decree of Artaxerxes, and the return under Ezra. And that's a famous date for us, isn't it? 457 BC. In 444 BC Nehemiah came, sometime after Ezra, as the governor. And when you have a minister and an administrator together, things begin to move. Nehemiah, I am sure you would agree, was a very forceful person. Whereas Ezra would pull out his own hair, you remember, Nehemiah would pull out other people's hair to get them to move, and get on with the work. And the walls were now completed. For twelve years, Nehemiah was their leader. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Ezra and Nehemiah*, recorded December, 1981, 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/23MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/24MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

But then you also mentioned preparation for the last days. 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)

Further Study with Ellen White

These things were not written merely that we might read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God’s servants of old might work in us. In no less marked a manner than He wrought then will He work now wherever there are hearts of faith to be channels of His power. {CG 43.1}

As the wheellike complications were under the guidance of the hand beneath the wings of the cherubim, so the complicated play of human events is under divine control. Amidst the strife and tumult of nations He that sitteth above the cherubim still guides the affairs of this earth. {PK 536.1}

Divine wisdom will order the steps of those who put their trust in the Lord. Divine love will encircle them, and they will realize the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. {OHC 324.6}

Amid the perplexities that will press upon the soul, there is only One who can help us out of all our difficulties, and relieve all our disquietude. We are to cast all our care upon Jesus, and bear in mind that He is present, and is directing us to commune with Him. We are to keep our minds stayed upon God; and in our weakness, He will be our strength; in our ignorance, He will be our wisdom; in our frailty, He will be our enduring might. {SD 27.2}

The only-begotten Son of God came to this world to redeem the fallen race. He has given us evidence of His great power. He will enable those who receive Him to build up characters free from all the tendencies that Satan reveals. We can resist the enemy and all his forces. The battle will be won, the victory gained, by him who chooses Christ as his leader, determined to do right because it is right. {HP 17.2}