

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah*
Lesson 10 “Worshiping the Lord”

Read for this week’s study

Nehemiah 12:27–47; 1 Chronicles 25:6–8; 1 John 1:7–9; John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:1–11.

Memory Text

“And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: ‘For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel’ ” (Ezra 3:11, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Singing the Songs of the Lord
- III. Purification
- IV. Two Large Thanksgiving Choirs
- V. Sacrifices as Part of Worship
- VI. Priests and Levites as Part of Worship
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “Following the listing of genealogies in Nehemiah 11 and 12, the author transitions to the time when they celebrated the dedication of the city wall. It was customary for the nation to dedicate things to God: the temple, a city wall, or even houses and public buildings. [...] This week we will look at how they worshiped the Lord during this time and see things that we, who worship the same Lord, can apply to ourselves.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. If any work that we do for God succeeds, it is because of His working in us (Philippians 2:12-13). Gratefully, Nehemiah celebrated the accomplished work, and dedicated it to God for His glory. Nehemiah and Ezra each led one of the two choirs as they sang their way around the city walls (9ft/2.7m wide) and meet at the temple area (Tuesday’s lesson). The word for “choir” is related to the word for “thanksgiving”, powerfully suggesting that the singers’ praise was not merely a musical performance, but part of their whole being and experience.

3. Monday's lesson discusses purification (Nehemiah 12:30; 1 John 1:7-9): "The Temple and its services were crucial components of the religion of ancient Israel. But the Temple and its services were a means to an end, not an end in and of themselves. And that end, of course, was to lead the people into a saving relationship with their covenant God, . . ." Their concern for purification shows their desire to see Jerusalem as a "holy city" (Nehemiah 11:1). What value is a dedicated wall without dedicated people?
4. "Notice, too, how many times the idea of joy and rejoicing appears in Nehemiah 12:43 alone." (Wednesday's lesson) The repetition emphasizes the magnitude of their rejoicing. This was even greater than the joy at the dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:16), or at the reading of the Torah (Nehemiah 8:12,17). Unlike the mingled rejoicing and weeping in Ezra 3:13, here we read about unrestrained gratitude that "was heard afar off" (12:43).
5. The lesson ends on the important work of priests and Levites in the worship. "[T]he people rejoiced over the important work the Levites would be doing on their behalf. [...] Even during the time of Nehemiah, the support of the Levites was sometimes strong and sometimes very weak. The Levites had to go back to other work many times in order to provide for their families, because the people stopped giving tithes and offerings." (Thursday's lesson)
6. "Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites." (12:44) This suggests that new devotion and energy had been shown by these temple officials. The enthusiasm of the laity is matched by the zeal of the priests and Levites and other temple servants to carry out the commands David and Solomon.
7. Worship is the intentional turning of the mind to God and seeing and ascribing to God all of the greatness and goodness and glory that belongs to Him. Worship is giving God the place that rightfully belongs to Him. Worship is an atmosphere in which you can learn to live. "I have set the Lord always before me." (Psalm 16:8)
8. One way of describing worship is to say that it is "orientation" or "reorientation," because so many things in life demand our attention, many of which can be quite trivial. If there is nothing to "reorient" us, we may waste a lot of energy and enthusiasm on them, though their significance and impact on our lives and the community is minimal.
9. "The first duty of all created beings is worship. All else flows from our worship, from who God is. The way you worship depends on your picture of God. Worship is transformation through adoration." (Graham Kendrick) "Worship is responding to all that God is with all that we are."
10. How can true worship be transformational in our lives and local church?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

“But God is saying now, ‘Don’t bring me any more dead sheep or dead pigeons, but please bring yourselves. And bring yourselves in the best condition possible. This will be an act of intelligent worship. Because I have so much to tell you, if you could just listen. But some of you are in such miserable health, you find it very difficult to listen. So please, even this far from the tree of life, look after yourselves. Be living sacrifices, and listen.’” “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” so look after it, please, “that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

What I like about this is, the kind of worship God desires is described as rational, intelligent, spiritual worship; not mechanical, not ritualistic, not ceremonial. But we worship an intelligent God. He wants us to worship him in spirit and in truth, Jesus said. So to do something mechanical, learned by rote, is a terrible misrepresentation of the truth about God. Remember Isaiah? “Your worship of me is but the commandments of men learned by rote.” You come into the temple, but your hearts aren’t in it. Remember the Sabbath-keepers in Amos? All that kind of unthinking obedience suggests an unthinking God. {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)

Amos 5 as to what God really wants. Amos 5:21, where God says to the people who obviously were performing all the sacrifices and ceremonies:

I loathe and despise your festivals; your meetings for sacrifice give me no pleasure. You may bring me your burnt-offerings, your meal-offerings, or your thank-offerings of fat cattle, and I shall not so much as look at them. Let me have no more of your noisy hymns.

One version says, “I cannot stand the sound of your noisy hymns.” I wonder if, in the middle of one of our song services, the Lord up there is saying, “I just can’t stand the sound of those noisy hymns.” If we heard that from heaven, we certainly would re-examine what we were doing, wouldn’t we? You mean we could be having a song service and the Lord not find it very pleasant? Here we’re holding that last note, that high one, so long, and he’s got his hands over his ears! “I cannot stand the sound of your noisy hymns. My ears are closed to the music of your harps,” and your organs and your pianos. “Instead, let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream!” That’s what he wants. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Leviticus, recorded October, 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 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/5MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/6MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Now some of our hymns don't really bear too much theological analysis. Oh, you know the one about prayer we often have? "I'll sing while passing through the air, farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer." And if prayer is conversation with God as with a friend, as demonstrated in the Psalms, would you sing while passing through the air, "God, I'll never speak to you again"? We're just on our way to talk to him face to face. Well, one has to understand what was meant, that that would be the end of praying to an unseen person or praying formally. And yet even prayer on this planet is supposed to be conversation with God as with a friend. So if you understand prayer that way, how could you sing, "Farewell, farewell, sweet conversation with God as with a friend"? So whoever wrote that had some other conception of prayer. Even that highly emotional and very sentimental song, "I come to the garden alone, and he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own," and some men find that altogether too sentimental to sing. Until you read the story of the one who wrote it, a person who felt very warm, very close to God at the time and expressed it this way. And when people are expressing their feelings, that's a highly individual matter, isn't it? We have to leave them free to do it their way, and make lots of allowances for it. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Psalms*, recorded January, 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/27MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/28MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

The Jewish refugees under the Babylonian invasions went down to Egypt. Generations began to grow up who didn't know the Hebrew, and so the Old Testament was translated into Greek for them. The translators of this Greek Septuagint came to this word in the Hebrew for the lid, the cover of the ark. And they didn't choose the Greek word for a lid or a cover; they chose this word right here, which shows what meaning they read into that cover of the ark—a place or means of reconciliation. *Hilastêrion*. And Paul says, "When Jesus died, he became" this word. Is it right to compare what Jesus became with what was represented by that golden cover of the ark? Isn't that our understanding of it? It's a place or means of reconciliation. On the day of covering, on the Day of Atonement, think what the High Priest did. So the symbolism is right, isn't it?

The mercy seat, incidentally, came much later, when Luther was translating the Bible into German the best of 2000 years later. He came to this word in the Greek, or the Hebrew word, and he rendered this into the German *Gnadstul*, *Gnadenstuhl* in the modern German, which is the seat of grace, and mercy. And Tyndale, who was a good friend of Luther's, carried this over into the English, and for the first time, you see the name mercy seat. There's no word in the Hebrew or the Greek that says mercy seat, though that's a very nice interpretation of this place or means of reconciliation, which goes back to that lid, that cover. But it was a very special lid, with special meaning. Doesn't that invite one to read into this verse the whole significance of the ceremonial system there in the Old Testament? It's a proper connection, isn't it? Now, of course, if one can read the whole story of the life and death of Jesus, and it not win one back to faith in God, it hasn't done any good, has it? Many people stood at the foot of the cross and went away just as rebellious as before. God can't force this on us. But those of us who are won back to faith by this revelation, experience its reconciliation.

In what way, though, does the death of Christ serve as a place or means of reconciliation? Well, it says, "This death was to demonstrate God's own righteousness." And if he's righteous, then he's trustworthy. Who ever questioned God's righteousness? And on what basis did they question his righteousness? Look what's picked out of all the things that could have been mentioned among Satan's charges against God. "Because, in his divine forbearance, he had apparently overlooked men's former sins." That's cruel. God's merciful forgiveness of Adam and Eve is now thrown back in God's face as evidence that he was a liar. Satan had said, "You won't die", and because God, in his mercy, gave them time to come to know the truth and be won back, Satan crowed in the great controversy. He gleefully said, "I told you so. God is a liar. He said you would die and you're not dying."

Now, in due course of time, people died of old age, died of disease, they died in battle or they died because God wouldn't let them eat of the Tree of Life. But no one died that awful death that God had predicted, because God was not going to ask anybody to die that death. God was not going to ask anyone else to prove that he had told the truth. He wouldn't do that. God was going to provide that evidence himself. And God came to this earth in human form so he could die, and he died the awful death that he warned would be the natural consequence of disorderly living in his orderly universe. Was he not made to be sin, though he knew no sin? He died the death of a sinner.

Now this death says so many things about God, and answers so many of Satan's charges. Satan, for example, had charged that if anyone should rebel against God, he wouldn't have enough self-sacrificing love to do anything about it, but that he would execute those who disagreed with him. See, God can't win either way, it would seem. One the one hand, Satan threatens that if you disagree with God he'll kill you, and he cites the flood and all these other things, I'm sure, as evidence of that. And then he says that God has lied when he said you will die because you

haven't died the awful death that he predicted. I don't know how he can put those two together. He just uses every argument he can to undermine our faith in God as righteous.

Now, what caused Jesus to die? That's the crucial thing. Did the Father execute the Son? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Faith, Righteousness and Salvation, #2 "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?", recorded February, 1975, Lynwood, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/3MMFRS> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMFRS> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have,—the great mercy and love of God,—we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God. {SD 122.4}

Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement. As we thus open the heart to the sunlight of the Saviour's presence, we shall have health and His blessing.—*Ministry of Healing*, p. 254. (1905) {Ev 499.4}

It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others. The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies. {DA 348.2}

God's healing power runs all through nature. If a tree is cut, if a human being is wounded or breaks a bone, nature begins at once to repair the injury. Even before the need exists, the healing agencies are in readiness; and as soon as a part is wounded, every energy is bent to the work of restoration. So it is in the spiritual realm. Before sin created the need, God had provided the remedy. Every soul that yields to temptation is wounded, bruised, by the adversary; but whenever there is sin, there is the Saviour. It is Christ's work "to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised." Luke 4:18. {Ed 113.1}

The love which Christ diffuses through the whole being is a vitalizing power. Every vital part—the brain, the heart, the nerves—it touches with healing. By it the highest energies of the being are roused to activity. It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that

crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul, joy that nothing earthly can destroy,—joy in the Holy Spirit,—health-giving, life-giving joy. {MH 115.3}

Our Saviour's words, "Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. Though men have brought suffering upon themselves by their own wrongdoing, He regards them with pity. In Him they may find help. He will do great things for those who trust in Him. {MH 115.4}

The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication. Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His faithful ones. Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them. {AA 532.2}

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." By this parable Christ seeks to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. The process is invisible by which the leaven changes the meal into which it has been introduced; but it continues to work until the meal is converted into bread. So the leaven of truth, working inwardly, produces a complete change in the human heart. The natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. But while every faculty is regenerated, man does not lose his identity. New faculties are not supplied, but a thorough change is made in the employment of those faculties. The heart is cleansed from all impurity, and man is fitted with traits of character that will enable him to do service for God. {ST, October 13, 1898 par. 1}

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. {DA 173.1}

Such transformation of character as is seen in the life of John is ever the result of communion with Christ. There may be marked defects in the character of an individual, yet when he becomes a true disciple of Christ, the power of divine grace transforms and sanctifies him. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, he is changed from glory to glory, until he is like Him whom he adores. {AA 559.1}

God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. Through a connection with Christ he will have clearer and broader views. His discernment will be more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. He who longs to be of service to Christ is so quickened by the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God. {DA 251.1}

To human beings, striving for conformity to the divine image, there is imparted an outlay of heaven's treasure, an excellency of power that will place them higher than even the angels who have never fallen. {HP 148.5}

The gift of Christ reveals the Father's heart. It testifies that, having undertaken our redemption, He will spare nothing, however dear, which is necessary to the completion of His work. {9T 254.1}

The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. That man might be saved, He gave all that He had and then gave Himself. {9T 254.2}

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, "It is finished," had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory. {DA 758.2}

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. Then the prevarications and accusations of him who had once been an exalted angel were seen in their true light. It was seen that his professedly spotless character was deceptive. His deeply laid scheme to exalt himself to supremacy was fully discerned. His falsehoods were apparent to all. God's authority was forever established. Truth triumphed over falsehood. {RC 60.3}

The heavenly universe had witnessed the weapons that were chosen by the Prince of life—the words of Scripture, "It is written"; and the weapons used by the prince of the world—falsehood and deception. They had seen the Prince of life deal in straightforward lines of truth, honesty, and integrity, while the prince of the world exercised his power of cunning, artful secrecy, intrigue, enmity, and revenge. They had seen the One who bore the banner of truth sacrifice everything, even His life, to maintain truth, while the one who bore the banner of rebellion continued to strengthen his accusations against the God of truth. {RC 60.5}