

**Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes**  
**Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah***  
**Lesson 12 “Dealing With Bad Decisions”**

**Read for this week’s study**

Nehemiah 13:23–25; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ezra 9, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:10–17.

**Memory Text**

“And I said: ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens’ ”  
(Ezra 9:6, NKJV).

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

- I. Introduction
- II. Nehemiah’s Reaction
- III. Nehemiah’s Reproof
- IV. Ezra Reacts
- V. Ezra Acts
- VI. Marriage Today
- VII. Further Study

**Questions and Notes for Consideration**

**Facilitator: Daniel Duda**

1. “What will Ezra and Nehemiah do with Israel’s intermarriage situation? Will they let it go or stand up against it? This week we will look at the way the two leaders approached this issue.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “The language we speak informs the way we think about concepts, because we use the vocabulary of that culture. [For Israelites] Loss of the[ir] biblical language would have meant losing their special identity.” (Sunday’s lesson) To what extent is language the vehicle of ideas, concepts and beliefs? What role does the culture play in this?
3. “Biblical scholars point out that the actions of Nehemiah were most likely a public shaming of the people as part of prescribed punishments at that time. When it says that Nehemiah rebuked them and cursed them, we shouldn’t think of Nehemiah using foul language and expletives, but rather that he was speaking over them the curses of the Covenant [from Deuteronomy 28].” (Sunday’s lesson) How can complex problems be addressed in an effective way?

4. [Cultural] Anthropologists tell us that in some cultures shame is the main motivating factor (honor-shame culture), but in others it is guilt or fear. Today, as in ancient times, we often see a culture of honor-shame in the Middle East. What is significant about the method that Nehemiah used to solve the problem he faced?
5. At least 30 years had passed since Ezra dealt with mixed marriages (Ezra 9-10) (Tuesday & Wednesday's lesson). Do you see any differences between Ezra's & Nehemiah's leadership styles? Would you describe the historical books of the Bible to be descriptive or prescriptive? How does reflection on what has worked well, or not so well, in the past become part of how God leads us and helps us grow? How can we cultivate this skill? How can we apply guidance from scripture in ways that are helpful and appropriate to those in a culture that may be different from ours? Can taking scripture "the way it reads" be harmful?
6. If a person is struggling with the problem of shame, is a medieval model of Jesus' death (based on guilt), helpful? Do some models of understanding have the potential to be counterproductive, or even dangerous? How do we make sure that a sincere application of something that happened 3000 years ago is not blindly repeated in a different time, place, or culture?
7. How can we bridge the gap between the times in which we live and biblical times when there are so many differences in language, customs, culture, etc.?
8. Nehemiah struggled with an issue that Ezra had tried to resolve 30 years before. What does this tell us about problems that need to be tackled by more than one generation?
9. The Apostle Paul shares counsel about the issue of an unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7:10-17. How does his approach differ from that of Ezra & Nehemiah? What is the significance of this for our times? How do you think Jesus would deal with some of the complex marital problems we see in our society today?
10. How can we best deal with bad decisions of the past? To what extent can we escape the clutches of the prevailing culture where we live? How do we make sure that we are not out of step with that culture to the extent that we are not comprehensible to the majority population?
11. What are the differences between "the world" and "people of God" supposed to be? How do we work towards helping these differences become a reality, and how is this going to vary around the world in different cultures? What does being a "world church" mean in this context?

## Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

And soon Jerusalem was dotted with these shrines. And Solomon thought he could preside over all of this without becoming confused. Though through Moses God had said, “Don’t be so confident. Don’t even run the risk of getting close to these heathen. Don’t marry them. You’re not that strong.” And isn’t the history of Israel the history of the influence of these intermarriages with these other nations, and the gods of these foreign women apparently being very attractive and very seductive, and the Israelites following after these heathen deities? Even wise King Solomon was seduced by this thing.

Years later, after the Babylonian captivity, Ezra is confessing to God how Israel had come so far short, and that God had sent them into the discipline of Babylonian captivity because they really needed it, and Ezra says, “You haven’t punished us nearly as much as we deserve. Because we knew we shouldn’t mix with the heathen the way we did. And now after returning from Babylonian captivity,” Ezra says, “we’ve done it all over again.”

Do you remember, in Ezra and Nehemiah, when those two men came to Palestine many years after the exiles’ return at the end of the seventy years, they found that God’s people had intermarried all over again. And they were practicing all these abominations over again.

So take a look at Nehemiah 13, and notice Ezra’s understanding of this, and why God didn’t want them intermarrying. It isn’t that he didn’t love these heathen women, but Israel simply couldn’t resist the influence. So look at Nehemiah 13:26. Later when we have more leisure, we must look at this in more detail. Nehemiah is urging these returnees from Babylonian exile to separate from the heathen women that they had married. And they had many children who couldn’t even speak the language of God’s people. Maybe start at verse 25:

And I contended with them, and I cursed them, and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves” [The hair pulling and the beating we’ll discuss later when we get to Nehemiah. But Nehemiah says]. Did not Solomon, King of Israel sin on account of such women [and Ezra had been saying the same thing. Did not Solomon king of Israel fail because he made the same mistake?]? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless foreign women made even him to sin [that’s his comment on that, you see]. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?

By foreign, of course, it meant these heathen women who were practicing all these heathen abominations in the worship of fertility. They were doing it all over again. Note this comment as to what it was that confused and almost destroyed even wise King Solomon. And I see him

starting out by being very generous about it, not wanting to force all these wives to act like Jews. But it wasn't safe to do that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – 1&2 Kings, recorded November, 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/17MMPOGIA66> (1 Kings - Part 1)

<http://pkp.cc/18MMPOGIA66> (1 Kings - Part 2)

<http://pkp.cc/19MMPOGIA66> (2 Kings - Part 1)

<http://pkp.cc/20MMPOGIA66> (2 Kings - Part 1)

Last time at the end we were discussing the severity of Nehemiah's separation of the Jews from these foreign women and their children, half of whom couldn't even speak the language of the Jews. And the question was raised, "How do you think God felt about all the wives and children who were sent away?" Do we have evidence? And reference is made to Hagar and Ishmael. God loved the ones who were cast out. But then the question came up afterwards: What if one of the wives had said, "But I'd like to stay. I know I'm a foreign wife, but I love your God, and I'd like to stay"? Do you think she would have been allowed to stay? Could you cite any evidence in scripture to indicate? Well, Ruth is mentioned. Wouldn't Ruth be a case in point? Naomi's son married a heathen woman, and she became a believer, and became one of the progenitors of Christ, one of the forerunners of David. Unfortunately, we don't have those nice stories in Ezra and Nehemiah that some of the wives, maybe some of them did, but the story is not told in great detail about that. At least we know from the rest of scripture how God would regard each person as an individual while this serious action had to be taken. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Esther and Job, 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/25MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/26MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)