

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Fourth Quarter 2019: *Ezra and Nehemiah*

Lesson 13 “Leaders *in* Israel”

Read for this week’s study

1 Kings 12:1–16; Acts 15:7–11; John 11:46–53; Nehemiah 4:7–23; Ezra 8:21–23, 31, 32.

Memory Text

“And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them” (Nehemiah 8:12, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Influence of Leaders
- III. Evil in the Sight of the Lord
- IV. Courage and Empowerment
- V. Purpose and Passion
- VI. Humility and Perseverance
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week we will look at examples of leadership found in the Bible, including the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah. These are not exhaustive lessons, for sure, as there are many more that could be discussed. However, the lessons that were chosen are essential for any leader.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Sunday’s lesson discusses the influence of leaders: “When you are in a leadership position, be it spiritual, political, or both, the influence is greatly multiplied.” How does this depend on the time and culture where you live and lead?
3. There are leaders who hold a position of power or authority. And then there are leaders we follow because they inspire us. We follow them, not because we have to, but because we want to. Most people have a good idea **what** they should do, or even **how** they can accomplish it. True leaders inspire action by first making clear **why** the direction is important, why it should happen.
4. Tuesday’s lesson talks about courage and empowerment. Can you give examples of courage which are inspiring to you? How can we empower others? Why is this so important for leaders?

5. Wednesday's lesson is about purpose and passion. There is no question that Ezra & Nehemiah had both. How do we find this for our own lives and go about passing it on?
6. Many people go through life without much purpose or passion, just working to survive. If they see a leader with purpose and passion, they may want to be a part of what that leader has to offer. The goal is not just to give people what they want; the goal is to inspire them with what you believe. If you give people what they want, they'll adore you. But if you find people who believe what you believe, the door is open for strong, enduring commitment and action for the cause.
7. Thursday's lesson deals with humility and perseverance. Why are these traits so important in a leader? How do you express those in a culturally sensitive way?
8. What is your impression of the conclusion to the Ezra-Nehemiah book? It comes to a puzzling and anti-climatic end (see 13:31 cf. 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29). Compare this with other Bible stories and their endings (see Jonah 4:10-11 & Mark 16:9 and the parable of the Prodigal son[s] in Luke 15:32.)
9. Nehemiah's reforms were not an end in themselves, but rather a response to the gracious Lord of the covenant. Because the future is only known by God, Nehemiah did not know if his work had been worthwhile or if it had an effect on the nation's future.
10. When difficult problems arise, we need to take action, but our solutions may turn out to be temporary. There is a limit to what our best efforts can achieve. We, or someone else, may need to take action again, even in generations to come. Nehemiah freely expresses his anxiety to God and then leaves matters in God's hands.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, even, and the Amorites [aren't those familiar names? They weren't even supposed to be there, but there they were, and they have not separated themselves from them. They've gone right back to where they were before]. They have even taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons; so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness, the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost."

And isn't that the way it was with the leaders before God let them go into Babylonian captivity? The leaders. The prophets that are coming up now will make that very plain. Hosea is going to speak of the leaders of Israel going up into the mountains and sacrificing with the cult prostitutes. The leaders! "And when I heard this [Ezra says], I rent my garments and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled."

Now, one doesn't do it that way now. You remember when Job was depressed. If you do that now, folk will wonder about you, if something else is going wrong. This isn't the way we express grief. But that's the way they did it in those days. {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)

You notice the influence of leaders, as in all the other books? Look at 10:2, 3. Not that this is an excuse, but leaders do have a tremendous influence. You remember, when there was a good king, things went better; when there was a bad king the people seemed to follow like sheep. Look at [Zechariah] 10:2, 3:

For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for want of a shepherd. My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud steed in battle. Out of them shall come the cornerstone, out of them the tent peg, out of them the battle bow, out of them every ruler [and so on].

Leaders do have tremendous influence and tremendous responsibility. But why do we have to be like sheep all the time? We can't say, "I'm lost because I had bad parents," or "I was misled. I had a bad pastor." We stand on our own, do we not? And yet, leaders can exercise very significant influence, and the Lord holds them very much accountable. {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:*

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My conviction is that Paul could read James and say, “Well said!” and vice versa. I see no conflict at all between the two. Isn’t it true that faith without works is a dead faith? Is anyone saved by a dead faith? So you don’t really trust. I don’t see any disagreement between the two at all.

Now, if a man tries to be saved by works without any faith; I mean, can God save those who do not trust him? No matter how hard they work? No. There must be trust. But the man who says, “I trust you, but I don’t have time to listen, and I don’t intend to follow your instructions, because if I were to follow your instructions, that would be works.” That makes nonsense out of faith. “I trust you, but I’m not going to do what you say.” Try that on your doctor.

You say, “I’m very sick, and I trust you.”

And the doctor says, “Do the following.”

“Oh no! It would only be faith if I can go to bed tonight and wake up well in the morning.” Well, it doesn’t come that easily, does it? It’s a faith that works. Faith is a willingness to listen and to carry through with the instructions as best one can. Now it’s true, our efforts may not be at all perfect—quite fumbling. But the trust must be complete. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – 1&2 Peter and James*, recorded July, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/75MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/76MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Paul even said we should pray without ceasing. You note that last familiar verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Never stop praying.” (*Norlie*)

Or as Goodspeed translates it, “Never give up praying.” But if we should spend all our time on our knees, we would never get anything else done. So how can one pray without ceasing and still be effective in this life? But prayer, you see, in its very essence is thinking toward God. It means that God is at the very center of our thoughts. Eventually it becomes a habit that God should be at the very center of all our plans, always.

When we see him face-to-face, as we know we shall, will that be the end of prayer? Does that mean that prayer is yet another of the emergency measures God has used to keep open the channels of communication between himself and his children until the time comes when there will be no need to talk together anymore?

What do we mean when we sing, “Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer?” “Farewell, farewell, I will never talk to you, God, again.” No, if prayer is conversation with a friend, when we meet God, the hour of prayer will have barely just begun. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #15, “Talking to God As a Friend” recorded May,

1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/15MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

The God whom we serve is no respecter of persons. He who gave to Solomon the spirit of wise discernment is willing to impart the same blessing to His children today. “If any of you lack wisdom,” His word declares, “let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James 1:5. When a burden bearer desires wisdom more than he desires wealth, power, or fame, he will not be disappointed. Such a one will learn from the Great Teacher not only what to do, but how to do it in a way that will meet with the divine approval. {PK 31.1}

So long as he remains consecrated, the man whom God has endowed with discernment and ability will not manifest an eagerness for high position, neither will he seek to rule or control. Of necessity men must bear responsibilities; but instead of striving for the supremacy, he who is a true leader will pray for an understanding heart, to discern between good and evil. {PK 31.2}

God’s law is the law of love. He has surrounded you with beauty to teach you that you are not placed on earth merely to delve for self, to dig and build, to toil and spin, but to make life bright and joyous and beautiful with the love of Christ—like the flowers, to gladden other lives by the ministry of love. {MB 97.3}

When we are faithful in making God known, our impulses will be under divine supervision, and we shall make steady growth, spiritually and intellectually. {UL 81.4}

The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands to be channels of light, our means of doing good will never be exhausted, for the resources of the power of Jesus Christ are to be at our command. We may draw upon His fullness and receive of that grace which has no limit. The Captain of our salvation at every step would teach us that almighty power is at the demand of living faith. He says, “Without me ye can do nothing;” but again declares that “greater works than these shall ye do; because I go unto my Father.” {HP 319.4}

As the Lord co-operated with Daniel and his fellows, so He will co-operate with all who strive to do His will. And by the impartation of His Spirit He will strengthen every true purpose, every noble resolution. Those who walk in the path of obedience will encounter many hindrances. Strong, subtle influences may bind them to the world; but the Lord is able to render futile every agency that works for the defeat of His chosen ones; in His strength they may overcome every temptation, conquer every difficulty. {PK 487.1}

The faith that works by love and purifies the soul produces the fruit of humility, patience, forbearance, long-suffering, peace, joy, and willing obedience. {HP 109.6}

But notice here that obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love. The law of God is an expression of His very nature; it is an embodiment of the great principle of love, and hence is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life? When the principle of love is implanted in the heart, when man is renewed after the image of Him that created him, the new-covenant promise is fulfilled, “I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.” Hebrews 10:16. And if the law is written in the heart, will it not shape the life? Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship. Thus the Scripture says, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” 1 John 5:3; 2:4. Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience. {SC 60.2}

To us today, as verily as to the first disciples, the promise of the Spirit belongs. God will today endow men and women with power from above, as He endowed those who on the day of Pentecost heard the word of salvation. At this very hour His Spirit and His grace are for all who need them and will take Him at His word. —*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 20. {ChS 250.1}

Jesus, the brightness of the Father’s glory, thought “it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.” Philippians 2:6, 7, R.V., margin. Through all the lowly experiences of life He consented to pass, walking among the children of men, not as a king, to demand homage, but as one whose mission it was to serve others. There was in His manner no taint of bigotry, no cold austerity. The world’s Redeemer had a greater than angelic nature, yet united with His divine majesty were meekness and humility that attracted all to Himself. {MB 14.2}

The enemy cannot overcome the humble learner of Christ, the one who walks prayerfully before the Lord. Christ interposes Himself as a shelter, a retreat, from the assaults of the wicked one. The promise is given, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” . . . {ML 316.2}

Christ is our tower of strength, and Satan can have no power over the soul that walks with God in humility of mind. The promise, “Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.” In Christ there is perfect and complete help for every tempted soul. Dangers beset every path, but the whole universe of heaven is standing on guard, that none may be tempted above that which he is able to bear. Some have strong traits of character, that will need to be constantly repressed. If kept under the control of the Spirit of

God, these traits will be a blessing; but if not, they will prove a curse. . . . If we will give ourselves unselfishly to the work, never swerving in the least from principle, the Lord will throw about us the everlasting arms, and will prove a mighty helper. If we will look to Jesus as the One in whom we may trust, He will never fail us in any emergency. {ML 316.4}

The mind devoted unreservedly to God, under the guidance of the divine Spirit develops generally and harmoniously. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed through the power of God to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion and piety establish so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. After association with the Son of God the humble follower of Christ is found to be a person of sound principle, clear perception, and reliable judgment. He has a connection with God, the Source of light and understanding. {TMK 124.4}

And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption. He has granted men the privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature and, in their turn, of diffusing blessings to their fellow men. This is the highest honor, the greatest joy, that it is possible for God to bestow upon men. Those who thus become participants in labors of love are brought nearest to their Creator. {SC 79.1}