



2019 Q4 Ezra and Nehemiah: Lesson 9 Trials, Tribulations, and Lists

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SABBATH

Just like the last time I taught this subject matter, the book *Prophets and Kings* is an amazing resource - chapters 45 to 50-ish.

So any thoughts about this week's lesson?

Did anyone read the recommended chapters in Ezra and Nehemiah? If you did, you went through some lists and lineages of the Babylonian exiles who returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

What do you think about these and other lists of genealogies and ancestries we have in the Bible? We have talked at length about the Bible being not only an accurate account of actual, historical events - real people's lives and stories and experiences, but it also serves much larger purposes and provides many profound object lessons.

So why are *these* particular lineages singled out?

From my count, there are 7 of these lists in scripture

1. Genesis 4-5 - The written account of Adam's family line from Adam to Noah;
2. Genesis 10 - "The Table of Nations" or the account of Noah's sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth and their sons;
3. Numbers 26 - "The 2nd Census/Descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel";
4. Ruth 4 - The Geneology of David;
5. 1 Chronicles 1-14 - Historical Records from Adam to David (including the genealogy of Saul) and including the royal line after the exile.
6. Also repeated in Nehemiah; and
7. Matthew 1 - the Geneology of Jesus the Messiah.

When you are reading/studying the Word, do you typically skip these passages or dig in?

The quarterly suggests the reason they are included is to show that God notices the details, the particulars - He knows all about our families and He cares about them all. Of course that's true, but do you think there might be a more significant reason why these specific lists of ancestry are recorded in scripture - particularly in the Old Testament?



What was transpiring on this planet at that time?

Was there a conflict going on involving more than just human beings?

There was no mystery...right there in the Garden of Eden, God promised a redeemer...a savior was coming...and Satan knew that mankind could not be saved without Jesus coming as a human being. After hearing about the crushed head and the bruised heel, did Satan just sit back as an observer...a spectator, and just wait and watch that happen? Or did he set about trying to thwart any such efforts...in fact, he marshalled all his evil resources and poured all his evil energies into opposing Christ at every point - and ultimately tried to prevent God from fulfilling His plan to save this creation? So how would he do that?

Well, God needed cooperative participants to carry out His plan, right - folks who were willing and had hearts open to the Spirit? Satan knew that Christ would not be born to a woman like Jezebel, so he set about hardening and closing hearts...turning them away from God...and at one point in history came *this close* to succeeding when there was only one righteous man left, a single human being remained on the entire planet who was willing to work with God. Of course, after God mercifully intervened with the flood, the Messiah was promised to Abraham's descendents...so Satan could narrow his focus to the Israelites and the Jews, and again he almost succeeded. Are you seeing any parallels between this back and forth struggle in the great controversy...and the lineage lists we just looked at?

Why do you think there are no more of these lists recorded after the genealogy of Jesus Christ?
What about the trials and tribulations experienced by this group of refugees and their ancestors?

They had been taken captive ~70 years prior, their homes - their promised land had been destroyed and decimated, now they faced a dangerous journey back to Jerusalem...and the monumental tasks of rebuilding the temple, rebuilding the wall, rebuilding their city/government/society. There was joy in the homecoming, but these were some trying times. How many of you here have ever packed up and moved to a new neighborhood? A new city? A new state...even a new country...where maybe you were starting over...everything was unfamiliar. Maybe you moved to a place where you didn't know anyone.

This was a part of the captive's journey that I could totally relate to, because I have done it - a lot...more than 15 times in ~15 years...and it can be an ordeal.

Was there purpose in these trials? Is there a purpose in our trials?
One of the founders of our church wrote,



“This present life is our time of test and trial. God placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful garden of Eden, saying to them, “Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat.” But there was one prohibition. “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16,17). God wished to test and try the beings He had made, to see if they would be loyal and true to Him. {1SAT 318.4}

Did God not know what they were going to do so He put this tree there to find out?

Was God setting them up to fail?

Why put trials and temptations in our way?

Why not create a home without a tree which would be used to tempt?

Was God giving them an exam to test them and if they pass they live and if they fail – too bad death sentence?

“Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. . . . They were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested. At the very beginning of man’s existence a check was placed upon the desire for self-indulgence, the fatal passion that lay at the foundation of Satan’s fall. The tree of knowledge, which stood near the tree of life in the midst of the garden, was to be a test of the obedience, faith, and love of our first parents. While permitted to eat freely of every other tree, they were forbidden to taste of this, on pain of death. They were also to be exposed to the temptations of Satan; but if they endured the trial, they would finally be placed beyond his power, to enjoy perpetual favor with God...” {CC 13.2}

Is there purpose to be gained by our enduring trials?

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

Testing has two primary purposes: When a person is sick and goes to the doctor, what does the doctor typically do? Run a bunch of “tests”. Why? To expose the problem, to uncover the defect. Does the doctor do this in order to humiliate, embarrass, ridicule, punish, harass or criticize the patient? Or does the doctor do this in order to help uncover the problem and ultimately heal the patient? The first reason tests come is in order to help us know how sick we are and expose the areas in our lives in which the infection of sin is raging!

When a person “tests their mettle” what does that mean?



When a person has practiced, and studied, and prepared for anything – piano, Olympic competition, biology class, drivers education, auto mechanics, pilots instruction – does there ever come a time when they are to put their training, education, practice to the test? Why? In order for them to fail or in order for them to achieve? To solidify into their character, into their personhood what they have been working toward?

Tests come as a means of helping us overcome defects of character. When a person, who has struggled with addictions, gets into rehab, detoxed, goes to 12 step meetings, avoids places where their substance is used, eventually, in order to be truly free they will one day be faced again with the opportunity to use and will be tested – will they choose to say no, turn away, exercise their power of choice to reach out for help, or will they surrender to the temptation?

God allows tests to come as a means of freeing us from defects of character!

“A refining, purifying process is going on among the people of God, and the Lord of hosts has set His hand to this work. This process is *most trying* to the soul, but it is necessary in order that defilement may be removed. Trials are essential in order that we may be brought close to our heavenly Father, in submission to His will, that we may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. . . The Lord brings His children over the same ground again and again (how many here in this room have been over the same ground again and again and again?), increasing the pressure until perfect humility fills the mind, and the character is transformed; then they are victorious over self, and in harmony with Christ and the Spirit of heaven.”

Are your brains firing? Do any specific texts come to mind that describe this very process?

Consider these verses from Psalm 23, amplified by Dr. Jennings:

“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want - God is watching out for me and I don’t need to worry about where my support will come from. He will provide all my soul needs. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters - He will first provide soul nurturance, support, sustenance to strengthen me and prepare me. He restores my soul - He will heal my inner man, cleanse my conscience, and restore my individuality. He leads me in the path of righteousness for his name sake - He will lead me in the path which restores me to righteousness, the path that makes me right inside, like He originally intended, so that He and His ways will be glorified in my life. When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me - He, then, after providing for me, strengthening me, cleansing my conscience, removing my guilt, restoring my individuality, leads me in the path to ultimate righteousness, the path which is through the valley that feels like I am going to die.



The valley in which self surrenders and is crucified, the valley which frees me from the domination of fear and selfishness. Your rod and staff comfort me - He comforts me with his shepherd's rod and staff, which is used by the shepherd to beat back my attackers, and lift me out of the ditch when I fall."

Isn't this such a beautiful and accurate description of conversion? And is this typically a one-time event...one and done? Or is it an iterative process of growing and maturing?

This is the Lord bringing his children over the same ground again and again! Back to the quote:

"The purification of God's people cannot be accomplished without suffering. . . . He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. True grace is willing to be tried. If we are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is one of peril." {My Life Today 92.2}

"It is in mercy that the Lord reveals to men their hidden defects. He would have them critically examine the complicated emotions and motives of their own hearts, and detect that which is wrong, and modify their dispositions and refine their manners. God would have His servants become acquainted with their own hearts. In order to bring to them a true knowledge of their condition, He permits the fire of affliction to assail them, so that they may be purified. The trials of life are God's workmen to remove the impurities, infirmities, and roughness from our characters, and fit them for the society of pure, heavenly angels in glory. . . . The fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine. {ML 92.3}

Do you think God was trying to accomplish some of this character development and refining and maturing through these trials the Israelites experienced?

And how many of the trials they (and we) experienced...were of their own making?

It is in this way that trials can lead to growth and overcoming defects of character, as we experience the results of our own choices and learn from them – and that therapy process can be very painful! Remember, once there is brokenness there are no pain-free options...but while it is impossible to avoid pain in this sinful world, being miserable is optional. ☺

SUNDAY

The God of History



Sunday's lesson references Daniel 1:1-2 for the big picture description of Nebuchadnezzar's theft of the temple artifacts, and Ezra 1:9-11 for the detailed inventory of items the captives brought back with them...and then says that "together, these texts show that the Lord is in control."

Any thoughts about that? What is God in control of?

Himself! His design laws.

This quote from *Prophets and Kings* is also in Sunday's lesson...who does this author say is in control?

"The history of nations speaks to us today. To every nation and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. **All are by their own choice deciding their destiny**, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes." (536)

What about Daniel 5 that tells the story of Belshazzar's feast and the writing on the wall...is everyone familiar with that story?

The lesson asks what these texts teach us about the judgment upon Belshazzar...and in the teacher's quarterly it says,

"The listing of the vessels from the temple [the ones being brought back from Babylon] brings us back to the banquet of Belshazzar, who personally offends God by using these sacred items for his feast."?

Who was deciding Belshazzar's destiny that night?

How?

What law lens are you looking through?

What did we just discuss about Satan opposing God's purpose and plan at every juncture throughout the Old Testament?

TUESDAY

Where Are the Priests?

The lesson states, "And one of the big problems was that, despite all the wonderful promises of restoration after exile, many of the Jews did not want to return to the land of their ancestors. That is, they preferred to stay in Babylon. Why would that be?" Thoughts?

What instructions were they given at the time they were taken captive?



Multiple times in Jeremiah, they were told: “It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.” Many likely took that instruction to heart and settled in and put down roots, which made it very difficult to leave.” Is it good that some of the Jews stayed in Babylon? (Esther, Mordecai)

Ezra's main concern is for the priestly lineage because he was a priest and they were critical to the proper function of the temple services. After Ezra gathers the people at the river Ahava to travel to Jerusalem, he is saddened because the Levites didn't come. Those who were to teach the people about God and had the greatest role in restoring the people to “walking with God” did not make the decision to return to the land of Israel. So, Ezra acts. He calls nine leaders and a couple men who are described as “men of understanding” (Ezra 8:16) and gives them the task of going to a man named “Iddo” in Casiphia and requesting that he send them Levites, as well as some Nethinims. Not much is known about Iddo or the place of Casiphia, except that it must have been a densely populated site by the Jews.

Ezra then praises God because Iddo sent 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims, who were appointed to serve the Levites and help in the temple. The priestly group responded to the Holy Spirit's prompting and decided to join the assembly at the Ahava River.

“By now, the Jews who remained in the land of exile had been there for almost a century and a half. Excavations of Nippur have brought to light numerous documents that show that many wealthy Jews lived in that region of Mesopotamia during the reign of Artaxerxes I. Hence, it may have been a difficult task for Ezra and his fellow leaders to convince as many to return as did accompany him. These returning colonists could expect only a hard pioneering life in the old homeland, with far fewer comforts than in Babylonia. In view of these considerations it is surprising to find that Ezra succeeded in persuading almost 2,000 families to cast in their lot with their brethren in the old homeland.” [SDA BC vol 3, p 376]

Interestingly, animals were also counted in the list of exiles who returned from Babylonian exile, specifically 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

WEDNESDAY

Humbled Before God

Wednesday's lesson contrasts the different approaches by Ezra and Nehemiah when each of them led a group of captives back to Jerusalem. Both knew how dangerous the journey was...Ezra fasted and humbled himself before God, and felt like asking the king for help and protection would have brought dishonor to the Lord and perhaps shown a lack of trust. Nehemiah did have an escort to protect him, and had no problem asking for that help. The pink box says, “Of course, we are to trust in God for



everything. At the same time, too, what are times we do call upon even those not of our faith for help? In many cases, why is that not wrong - but perhaps even appropriate?" Thoughts?

THURSDAY

In the Holy City

What is going on in Nehemiah 11:1-2: "Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem." Why would they have to cast lots to see who would have to live in Jerusalem as opposed to the other cities?