



## 2019 Q4 Ezra and Nehemiah: Lesson 12

### Dealing with Bad Decisions

by Tim Jennings (announcements last page)

Before we get into this week's lesson, I want to follow up from last week's lesson and address an issue in Thursday's lesson because recently I have received several emails concerned with my position on God's action in the OT to keep open avenue for the Messiah.

There is the view that God never uses His power to put people to sleep in the grave, i.e. first death. That all occasions in the Bible are always God withdrawing when we insist and the devil or evil people doing the harm. Let's examine this in light of Nehemiah's statement.

#### **THURSDAY From lesson 11**

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The lesson points out that Nehemiah reminded them that their forefathers broke trust with God and states, "Did not our God bring all this evil upon us?"

Does God bring evil? Absolutely Not! God never brings evil.

So what can this statement mean?

- People attributing to God what God permits but doesn't actively prevent
- People misunderstanding a therapeutic action, like discipline of a parent, as evil when it is redemptive or protective

Let's examine some cases:

The point of biggest controversy amongst Christians is when the action result in the death of people.

The argument goes that God will never use His power to cause death—that death only and always comes from breaking God's law, from beings who are sinful—i.e. Satan and evil people.

And, the confusion comes because the Bible has a *human* and a *divine* definition for death.

The human definition for death is what all of us call death and what we have grieved when our loved ones have died. This, however, is not what God calls death. God, including Jesus when on earth, did not refer to this as death, but called this sleep.

In fact, Jesus said that those who believe in Him will never die—millions sleep in the grave but they don't die. This sleep death, what we called death, is also known as the first death, the death from which there is a resurrection.



What God calls death is the second death, the eternal death, the death from which there is no resurrection.

How many people in history have died the second death—the death from which there is no resurrection? None—if none have died, then how can we say God kills? We say it because we use the human definition for death and thus we misrepresent God as killing, when God does not kill. God is the source of life and death does not come out from Him.

There is an error on both sides of this question. On the one side, failing to understanding the difference between first and second death, people look at the OT and teach God kills and thus God is the inflictor of pain, suffering and death as punishment for sin on those who disobey.

Those who have come to know God's character of love have rightly rejected the idea that God is the source of death, but having not made the distinction between first death of sleep and second death, which is what God calls death, they fall into the opposite error teaching that God never in history used His power to put people into sleep mode, the first death.

This is where one must move away from claims, statements, proclamations to actual historical evidence. When it comes to the first death, sleep death, there are many causes. Natural causes—disease and old age with no specific person inflicting this, the body just wears out. There are accidents, falls, injuries, again without a specific infliction of death, just the result of our bodies being subject to damage and first-death.

But there are many examples in Scripture of the first death being brought not by natural causes but by other means. Let's examine those:

- Sometimes in Scripture Satan acts to cause harm or first death and it is attributed to God: “The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!” Job 1:16 NIV84
- Sometimes evil people do the act and it is attributed to God: “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.” 1Chron 10:13,14 NIV84
- Sometimes God acted and it was rightly attributed to God: Platoons that came to arrest Elijah: Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

<sup>11</sup> At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says, ‘Come down at once!’ ”

<sup>12</sup> “If I am a man of God,” Elijah replied, “may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

<sup>13</sup> So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. “Man of God,” he begged, “please have respect for my life



and the lives of these fifty men, your servants! <sup>14</sup> See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!”

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.”  
So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king. (2Kings 1:10-15)

- And then other times it was God removing His protection and allowing nature or natural results of others to take their course, such as the scorpions and snakes in the desert, or when the Babylonians took them captive.

So, we find in Scripture that some of the things attributed to God are not done by God. But sometimes, God did act to put people to sleep in the first death.

It is not reasonable to believe that Satan—after years of trying to silence Elijah in order to have Baal worship totally eradicate the truth about God—would destroy the platoons sent by Ahab to arrest Elijah. It is also unreasonable to suggest that God would rely upon Satan to endorse Elijah as a man of God by sending fire from heaven when Elijah called upon it as proof that he spoke for God.

I also reject the view that God was punishing people for sin, as punishment for sin is eternal death; and since these were all sleep deaths they cannot be the punishment for sin.

Therefore, we must have another explanation—and that explanation is found in understanding the larger context: the great controversy, God’s design law, and what God was actually working to accomplish. In other words, how reality works. In this context, we discover that God has always been working to heal and to save.

Once Adam sinned, the human race could not be saved without Jesus coming. The Messiah was promised in Genesis chapter 3 when the serpent was told that Eve’s seed would crush his head. Thus, the Old Testament points directly to the larger battle between good and evil, with God working to bring the Messiah, while Satan would be working to obstruct it.

If Satan could have gotten every person on earth to harden their heart against God, there would have been no one through whom Jesus could be born in order to save the human race. God would not have Jesus born to a woman like Jezebel or force any woman against her will to be the mother of Jesus. Thus, God needed a righteous woman who would be willing to be the mother of Jesus. At the time of the flood, there was only one righteous man and his family left on the earth. All the others living on earth at that time had hardened their hearts. Wouldn’t love act to keep open an avenue for Messiah in order to save the species? Remember, not kill—rather, put people to sleep and wake them up later to finish out their lives. This is exactly what love did.

Some still don’t like this and argue:

*Thus to rely on the argument that God was compelled to “put to sleep,” often through violence, millions of evil people at the flood or at other times in order to prevent Satan from snuffing out*



*possibility of the Messiah landing on earth, is to agree with Satan that love is not really enough to overcome evil so there must be times when force has to be used.*

But there is one major piece of data missing from their assessment—the condition of humankind after Adam sinned. After Adam sinned, love *could not win* without Jesus. *Once Adam sinned, love could NOT overcome evil in human beings WITHOUT Jesus.* In fact, Jesus was the means for God to restore His character of love into the human species.

One of the founders of the SDA church wrote:

The Lord says, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." The enmity does not exist as a natural fact. **As soon as Adam sinned, he was in harmony with the first great apostate, and at war with God;** and if God had not interfered in man's behalf, Satan and man would have formed a confederacy against heaven, and carried on united opposition against the God of hosts. **There is no natural enmity between evil angels and evil men; both are evil through transgression of the law of God,** and evil will always league against good. Fallen men and fallen angels enter into a desperate companionship. {ST, July 11, 1895 par. 5}

The entire focus of Scripture is the battle between Christ and Satan. In Old Testament times, this conflict was focused around Satan's attempt to prevent Jesus from being born as a human while God worked to keep that avenue open for the Messiah.

Which of the possibilities above would apply to Nehemiah's reference to their sins caused God to bring the evil upon them?

In the story of Ezra and Nehemiah, what is the overriding theme or background?

It is the plan of salvation—humanity is in sin, God promised the Messiah, Satan is working to obstruct the plan of God, God is working to keep open avenue for Messiah.

## **SABBATH Lesson 12**

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Dealing with bad decisions—before we get into the examples from the lesson, I thought it beneficial for us to do a basic outline of a healthy way to deal with bad decisions.

We have all made bad decisions—the difference between mature Godly people and immature people or worldly evil people, is not that the mature never make bad decisions and the immature or evil never make a good decision.

The difference is that the mature will take responsibility for their decisions, will evaluate their choices, will identify what are bad decisions, will learn from their decisions and update their decision-making so they reduce and stop making the same bad decisions over and over again.



The immature and evil people don't do this. When they make bad decisions they deny their responsibility; they avoid looking at their role; they make excuses; they move on to something new, but they don't learn so they repeat the same bad decisions over and over again.

The reasons for this is often an inability to tolerate emotional discomfort, embarrassment, hurt, rejection, or guilt. When we make a bad choice it can be emotional, financially, relationally, occupationally painful. Some people rather than immediately dealing with their choices instead run from the pain, the discomfort and deny, distort, blame, make excuses, or distract themselves from the truth with entertainment or mood-altering substances.

And the underlying root is fear—fear of rejection, punishment, loss of status, position, wealth, esteem—so the immature and evil rather than humbling themselves and being transformed, instead either don't learn or worse justify the bad decision-making as good decision-making repeat it.

But one can never avoid the truth we can only delay the day we deal with it.

The mature have learned this, have become lovers of the truth and have learned to stand their ground, and do not run from the reality, and instead face their choices and learn from them.

Further, the mature have accepted the truth about themselves that they are not infallible and they are subject to mistakes. They have NOT accepted a falsehood that perfection is about performance, but know it is about maturity. So, they have formed characters with a view of self that accepts they don't know everything, that even at their best they can make a decision that isn't the best, but they know they are able to learn, to assimilate new insights, to grow, to develop, to advance and thus their individuality is not built upon perfect performance but a willingness to grow and mature as soon as one is able.

This is a person who is a lover of truth, who realizes truth is unfolding and they love to grow and don't fear to discover new ways to do things or understand things, in fact they are excited about it.

What hinders people from doing this? Does our view of God have an impact?

So, an approach to healthy decision-making:

- Use reason with a clear conscience
- Always be prayerful, surrendering your life to God and asking the Spirit of truth to enlighten you, giving you wisdom and discernment in your decision-making. Ask God for evidences as to what course you should take. Be patient, study, reflect, and reason things out.
- Ask for input from wise and mature counselors—but do NOT surrender your decisions to them. You must filter that input through your own judgment—every person must be fully persuaded in their own mind.
  - This is one of the problems for many in bad decision-making—they fear making a mistake and thus they seek some other mind, some authority, pastor, doctor, parent, friend to tell them the answer to tell them what to do. This relieves them of the burden



of decision-making and allows them to blame the other party when it doesn't work out. But such people never mature and live in fear and doubt.

- Understand God's design laws—failure to understand the basic laws upon which reality works leads to bad decisions even with good motives. The doctors who bled and leached George Washington when he had pneumonia—they didn't understand basic laws of health and made bad decisions even though their motives were to heal and save.
- Ask, what is right (morally first, legally second), healthy, and reasonable
- Allow feelings to be information you evaluate, but don't make decisions based solely on feelings
- Feelings of discomfort about a decision should be given more weight than positive feelings about a decision. In other words, allow feelings of discomfort to cause you to pause, reflect, consider, evaluate so that you avoid an impulsive decision. But use your wisdom to temper feelings of eagerness.
- In the aftermath of a choice, be open to new information and reassessment and making new choices, even reversing course, if the new information supports that course of action
- When one realizes a bad choice has been made, own it, learn from it, examine where the decision-making process needs to be improved and bring to bear new methods.

Read first paragraph, "Ezra and Nehemiah..." We will get to the marriage question later in the lesson—the key point I want to focus on from this paragraph is the children. It is well known that the way to change a society is to get access to the children and begin to indoctrinate and teach them.

Throughout history this has proven to be true—not just parental teaching, but when we send out children to schools the teachers who teach our children will have a huge impact on them individually, but also over time on society.

Do we see any impacts on the USA from changes in the US educational system over time? Has the change from a God-centered educational system to an evolutionary/Godless educational system had an impact on society as a whole?

What about the teaching about sexuality, marriage, gender—is it having an impact?

What about the teaching about moral relativism—that everyone's "truth" is their "truth" and equally valid?

So, to all parents and grandparents I want to affirm your responsibility to educate your children in the Lord, teaching His methods, principles, truths and teaching them how to think and reason for themselves and how reality works.

Sadly, many Christian parents have fallen into the trap of indoctrination, teaching the "right" answers, i.e. doctrines, but not how to actually reason and think and many of these children grow up to fall away or become intolerant of others.



A recent study published September 2019 in *Pediatrics* found that if children were restricted to less than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day, slept 9-11 hours per night and had 1 hour of vigorous physical activity per day, had less impulsivity and reduced risk of ADHD. <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Adequate-Sleep-Limited-Screen-Time-Can-Decrease-Impulsivity.aspx>

This makes perfect sense if one understands normal brain development. The law of exertion, if you want something to be stronger you must exercise it, but if you don't use it you lose it.

## SUNDAY

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The lesson points out that the loss of the ability to read Scripture threatened them with loss of their special identity as God's chosen people. In other words, if they lost the message of Scripture they wouldn't know what God had called them to fulfill; they wouldn't know the truth about God; they wouldn't understand what they were to teach others; and they would simply fall into the same lies as the rest of the world.

What about us today? Most of us cannot read Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, so we read translations—what if the translators translated the Bible through legal lenses? What if the translators sincerely believed God's law functions like human law, could this result in misunderstandings being translated into the Scripture?

And this is exactly what has happened, the biases of the translators do come through. People who believe in eternal souls that remain conscious and active after death translate the story of the thief with a comma that puts the thief in heaven that day. Those who believe the soul sleeps, put the comma so the promise was made that day, but not the fulfillment.

If you have read *The Remedy* you have noted the difference it makes when one reads through the design law lens. I suggest to you, the greatest infection in Christianity is the lie that God's law functions like human law and sadly this idea has been translated into the common language Bibles.

## MONDAY

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Read first paragraph, "Solomon was led deeper..." Why was it wrong to have many wives and pagan wives? Was it wrong because it broke God's specific command, or did God give this specific command because it was wrong? In other words, if God hadn't taken the initiative to give this specific command would it have been right to do? Was it wrong before God gave the specific command? Why or why not?

Has God given a specific command not to smoke cigarettes? Is it wrong to do it? Why is it wrong? What makes it wrong?

What kind of law is involved?



What is the problem when right and wrong is determined by commands?

Read second paragraph, “The command not to intermarry...” What is the lesson for us today? Are we to marry people who are complementary to us? Does this mean same beliefs about God? What about same denomination? Can people be of the same denomination but worship different gods?

Read last paragraph, “The Bible gives formulas...” What are formulas based upon? What are math formulas or chemistry formulas based upon? Are they not based upon reality, which are fundamental laws of how the universe runs?

So, would God’s “formulas” for our relationships also be based upon His design laws?

### **WEDNESDAY**

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Read first paragraph, “Together, the whole...” What do you think of sending away mothers and children? Some argue a God of love would never do this. That this was Nehemiah’s own plan, but not one he got from God because love would never do this.

Such thoughts are predicated on emotionalism rather than understanding reality and how love functions.

Love always heals, always saves, never destroys—but in order to know what action is necessary one has to understand reality, what is transpiring.

A person wrote to me objecting to the idea that God would have marriages dissolve like this. He argued it presents God as cruel and mean to have wives and children sent away.

Are doctors mean and cruel for amputating limbs from people? Does the condition of the limb matter? If the limb is gangrenous is amputating it cruel? What is the limb is healthy?

Can we decide merely upon the fact that a limb was amputated or must we know more?

God hates divorce because divorce only happens when love breaks down. But God gave the writ of divorcement because of the “hardness of their hearts.” In other words, love had been obstructed and when relationships become destructive either from hard hearted husbands who abuse their wives, or from idolatrous wives who corrupt their husbands, either way the marriages rather than being blessings are like gangrenous limbs and need to be severed in order to save the people in them.

Further, in the context of ancient Israel, they were the conduit for Messiah these marriages to pagan wives were part of Satan’s plan to destroy this branch of the human family and thus prevent Jesus from coming as our Savior—if that happens then 100% of all humans are lost. So, again God’s actions were redemptive to save and heal not destroy. The narrow view misses these larger realities and thus attempts to teach God would not do such things.





From the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*:

"By leading Israel to this daring insult and blasphemy to Jehovah, Satan had planned to cause their ruin. Since they had proved themselves to be so utterly degraded, so lost to all sense of the privileges and blessings that God had offered them, and to their own solemn and repeated pledges of loyalty, the Lord would, he believed, divorce them from Himself and devote them to destruction. **Thus would be secured the extinction of the seed of Abraham, that seed of promise that was to preserve the knowledge of the living God, and through whom He was to come—the true Seed, that was to conquer Satan. The great rebel had planned to destroy Israel, and thus thwart the purposes of God.** But again he was defeated. Sinful as they were, the people of Israel were not destroyed. While those who stubbornly ranged themselves on the side of Satan were cut off, the people, humbled and repentant, were mercifully pardoned. The history of this sin was to stand as a perpetual testimony to the guilt and punishment of idolatry, and the justice and long-suffering mercy of God" PP 335.

Read second paragraph, "The specific..." What if people were sewing onto their bodies limbs from animals? A person has eagles wings sewn onto their back, or another person has a tiger's paw sewn onto their chest—and after doing so they developed infections and immune reactions and were getting sick and dying.

If a doctor came along and amputated those appendages, would such a doctor be cruel, mean, hard-hearted, or unkind? Would it be in harmony with God's design, will and purposes to remove such appendages?

This is a metaphor to how Ezra and Nehemiah saw things—these women, because they were not converted, were not part of God's kingdom, not part of God's family, but were agents of Satan to infect and destroy not only the individual husband's they married, but the nation and the avenue for the Messiah.

So, I do believe a God of love would act to sever such attachments because to do so is to bring healing. But those who live upon rules, without understanding the actual reality of what is transpiring, would argue that to divorce would be sin and would promote a policy that would have destroyed the avenue for Messiah.

What are the implications for us today? Does this mean that marriages that are legal in terms of civil government don't necessarily constitute marriages as God understands them?

Jesus said what God has joined together let no one separate. Can two people get a legal marriage, but not have their hearts and minds joined together in unity by God? Are they actually married in God's eyes?

It appears Ezra didn't believe they were because these marriages were not unity of heart nor were they in harmony with God's prescription for Israel.



Do you think Christianity has been better served by requiring people to stay in loveless marriages in which the two people were never joined in heart and mind?

## **THURSDAY**

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Read first paragraph, “From what we have...” Healthy relationships require healthy people. It doesn’t matter how healthy you are if you marry an unhealthy person the marriage will not be healthy, unless that person becomes healthy. Consider Jesus and Judas, their relationship—though not a marriage relationship—was not healthy, why?

Why did Paul tell Christians to stay with agreeable spouses who didn’t believe, but Ezra told them to divorce such spouses?

Could it have to do with Jesus having already come and fulfilled His mission as Messiah and there was no longer any need to keep open the avenue for Him to come as our Savior?

The last paragraph states, “God doesn’t abandon us even when we make choices contrary to His will, and if we ask Him for help, He will provide it.”

This is well said.

## **FRIDAY**

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Read and discuss questions



## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**Questions:** If you have questions please email them either at [requests@comeandreason.com](mailto:requests@comeandreason.com) or [topics@comeandreason.com](mailto:topics@comeandreason.com). If you post on Facebook it is likely they will not be answered as I often miss questions posted on Facebook.

**Audio version of the Remedy is Now available for Streaming:** Download the free app SoundCloud and **you do NOT have to purchase** a subscription to SoundCloud. Just search for Remedy Bible or use this link [https://soundcloud.com/the\\_remedy\\_nt/albums](https://soundcloud.com/the_remedy_nt/albums) and you should find it and you can stream it at no cost. Just click “follow” on the album and you will go to it easily in the future.

**The New Paradigm about the Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment Has been Changed:** Thanks to your feedback I have rewritten portions of this document making it friendlier and less likely to cause offense. The new title is *The Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment for the Modern World*. It has a new cover, new introduction, the call to action section has been removed and other edits to clarify potential misunderstandings have been made throughout. It is already up on our website and print versions will be available November 14. **Please throw away any of the first edition you may still have in your possession and use this version going forward.**

**PODCAST: Come and Reason with Dr. Tim Jennings** weekly Podcast is now broadcasting, please follow us.

*The Remedy Psalms* is complete and online but the update to the app has been delayed. The developer has retired from this project and is no longer working to update the app and we now must find a new developer.

**REASONETTES:** Recently I began drawing cartoons and have started a new section on our website entitled *Reasonettes*. They are illustrations designed to make a point inviting you to think and reason about an idea or issue. Be sure to visit our website or Facebook page each Tuesday for a new cartoon. I hope you enjoy them.

**January 17-19, 2020:** The Power of Love Training and Equipping Course. If you would like to be prepared to more effectively share this message then come to this course. More details will be forthcoming shortly. Allen Texas (30 miles north of DFW airport). See [events.comeandreason.com](http://events.comeandreason.com) for more details and to sign up.

**March 27,28, 2020:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at an AACCC River Conference at Plano, TX. More info at <http://theriverconference.com/>

**April 17,18, 2020:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at the Lakewood SDA church in Lakewood OH.