



2019 Q4 Ezra and Nehemiah: Lesson 13 Leaders in Israel

by Russell Atkins

SABBATH

What qualities make a great “Leader”? Here’s a list [by no means comprehensive]. Did I miss any?

1. Honesty and Integrity.
2. Accountability.
3. Confidence.
4. Ability to Inspire Others.
5. Commitment and Passion.
6. Good Communication.
7. Decision Making Capabilities.
8. Delegation and Empowerment.
9. Creativity and Innovation.
10. Empathy.
11. Resilience.
12. Perseverance.
13. Transparency.
14. Vision and Purpose.

Have these qualities changed over time or are they timeless?

What applications can we make today for the current state in the SDA church?

From the Lesson: *“Central to the story of these leaders is the Word of God. The Word transformed their thinking and life and resulted in the whole program for revival and reformation. They were totally indebted to God’s Word and His instruction that they found in it. In the same way, no matter who we are, and whatever our role is, we must keep the Word of God central to how we live as Seventh-day Adventist Christians.”*

How much of “The Word of God” did these leaders have? Did they have the Torah [what we know as the first 5 books of the Bible], or did they have more “scripture”?

Why do we automatically consider “Scripture” as God’s ONLY Word?
His creation was his first WORD, “. . . so that men are without excuse.” Rom. 1: 20.

How was God’s Word communicated to them? Is it different today?

Were they expected to advance in greater “Light” or were they to marry themselves to 150 year old [or 500 year old] teachings and not budge from that position?



SUNDAY

The Influence of Leaders

Examples of leadership:

Rehoboam [1 Kings 12: 1-16]: He rejected the advice of his elders, and listened to advice from contemporaries. What could go wrong from listening to those with little to no life experience? In the US, certain groups would have us develop policy [contrary to our Constitution] because high school students want it that way.

<https://marchforourlives.com/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/14/parkland-school-shooting-anniversary-gun-control-victories>

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/us/national-school-walkout-gun-violence-protests/index.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/13/us/parkland-shooting.html>

Time Magazine just named a 16 y/o girl as “Person of the Year” for her role in contributing to the ~~coming ice age, global warming, abrupt climate change,~~ just plain-ol’ climate change.

<https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/>

What happens to a family/school/community/government/culture that abandons reason, devalues the wisdom of its elders and makes decisions based on the emotional whims of children? Rhetorical.

Peter [Acts 15: 7-11]: In this example Peter was the voice of reason and a peacekeeper when the Jews were angry at Paul and Barnabas for taking the Gospel to the gentiles. Not long after, however, he misled the group by his example of not eating with the gentiles and had to be called out by Paul.

Josiah [2 Kings 23:1-10]: Josiah led by example in an effort to stem the tide of depravity caused by King Manasseh. Scripture says of him, “**Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.**” 2 Kings 23: 25. NKJV. It, however, was not enough – Judah was still taken in to captivity because they did not allow the Holy Spirit to heal them.

Deborah [Judges 4: 1-16]: Why was a woman called to judge Israel? Why was a woman called to shepherd the SDA church in its infancy? Read verse 8. This tells you everything you need to know. The men of Israel were mincing, capri-wearing, latte drinking, low-T, soy boys. God will not force anyone [man or woman] in to His service. He wants a service given from free choice. Scripture is silent, however, I will bet that several men were approached to judge Israel at that time, but none were willing. Two were asked to lead the SDA church, before EGW answered “here I am Lord, use me.”



This loss of masculinity in Israel eventually led to God diagnosing their problem in Isaiah Ch. 3 verse 12.

“As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.”

God is speaking to Israel, more specifically, the **MEN** of Israel. He’s telling them to grow a pair. Women HATE, HATE, HATE weak men

Are there any practical contemporary applications?

Ahab [1 Kings 21: 1-16]: Speaking of low-T, soy boys . . . This clown let his wife murder a good man by proxy, so he could have a vineyard. And that was just the icing on the cake of his abuses.

MONDAY

Evil in the Sight of the Lord.

The three passages included in the lesson outline what happens when we “follow the sins of his father[s]”.

I was reminded of Exodus 20: 4-6.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Why do you think these admonitions are in the 2nd commandment? The one outlining idolatry and the grander Law of Worship?

We now understand the connection between choices and gene expression [epigenetics], so there’s BOTH a hereditary and cultural cause for the degeneration of the kings of Israel throughout the generations.

From the Lesson:

“It is a sobering thought to many of us who hold positions of leadership in any capacity that our leadership has the potential to bring people down or up spiritually. And, in all the cases here, the effect was devastatingly negative. [Yes it its. I stress about this every time I teach this class.]

More specifically, our character and dedication to Christ make a difference to those with whom we interact. Spiritual leaders influence others, either toward God if they themselves seek God, or toward evil if they do not. [Everyone influences others for or against God, whether we like it



or admit it.]

In contrast to what we have seen today, the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah had a strong relationship with God is undeniable. The amount of fasting and praying that is recorded in these books about Ezra and Nehemiah exceeds what the Bible reports for other great leaders.” **[Are fasting and praying evidence of great leadership? Are they evidence of transformation of character? Of being on God’s side?]**

****my comments are bold & bracketed****

TUESDAY

Courage and Empowerment.

Personally, I hate these two words – courage and empowerment – they have become “buzz words” for culturally Marxist policies and policy makers that are antithetical to Design Law. Men who want to use women’s rest rooms are described as “courageous” and women who want to engage in sex acts on film are described as “empowered”. We need to revisit the meanings of these words and take them back.

But the lesson chose them, so . . .

The lesson details the process whereby Nehemiah supervised the rebuilding of the last sections of the wall, and his leading by example, along with the builders arming themselves [figuratively and literally]. Given that the rebuilding of the wall was both literal and metaphorical [*see below*] are there any lessons to be gleaned from the “arming”?

The prophet here [ref. Isa 61:4] describes a people who, in a time of general departure from truth and righteousness, are seeking to restore the principles that are the foundation of the kingdom of God. They are repairers of a breach that has been made in God’s law—the wall that He has placed around His chosen ones for their protection, and obedience to whose precepts of justice, truth, and purity is to be their perpetual safeguard. PK 677.

Should Christians carry weapons? Should they arm themselves?

WEDNESDAY

Purpose and Passion.

Again, two words that I’m not fond of. Does it matter what our purpose is? What our passion is?

Do Islamist suicide bombers have purpose and passion? Did the Jews, who killed God Himself, have purpose and passion? Did the Crusaders, who burned Jews and Muslims at the stake, have purpose and passion?



I understand where the lesson is going with this and hope I'm not a distraction, however, we need to rise above the buzz words and discern deeper than pretty speech. Those who opposed Nehemiah were driven by purpose and passion as well. What matters more is the source of our purpose and passion.

From the Lesson: *"In all that they did, Ezra and Nehemiah were seeking to see God's will done in the lives of His people. Yes, the people had messed up; yes, they were punished for it."*

Were the tribes of Judah/Benjamin being punished? Disciplined? Did God take them into captivity Himself? Or did He remove a hedge of protection, and allow a heathen nation to take them captive?

THURSDAY

Humility and Perseverance.

Ezra turned down an offer from the Persian king for an armed escort to Jerusalem, and relied on God's hedge of protection. It seems to me that the lesson would have us focus on the prayer and fasting ahead of the trip as the source of God's protection.

From the Lesson: *"However, Ezra didn't act with presumption. He called the people together, and they fasted and prayed over the situation. They didn't engage in their journey until they had spent serious time with God. They came before God humbly, **requesting that His protection become a sign of His power, and God answered.**" [emphasis mine.]*

What level[s] of moral development are displayed here? Did they ask for the protection because their faith was weak? Did God's protection demonstrate their faith was strong?

Was Nehemiah's faith weak for having the half of the people carry weapons and function as armed guards? The work could have been done in ½ the time if he had everyone working on the wall.

Was Ezra humble for not taking the king up on his offer? Was he humble for calling for a fast?

Was Nehemiah humble for working on the wall himself? Was he humble for refusing Shemaiah's invitation to sleep in the protected temple for safety?

Again from the Lesson: *"True leaders must be willing to humble themselves and be servants. Competent leaders do not require or need a "title" to gain honor."*

Well said.