

Leaders in Israel



SABBATH—DECEMBER 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Judges 4:1–16; 1 Kings 15:26, 34; Nehemiah 4:7–23; Ezra 7:8–10; Ezra 8:21–23, 31, 32.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then all the people went away to eat and drink. They sent some of their food to others. And they celebrated with great [much] joy. They finally understood what they had been taught” (Nehemiah 8:12, ICB).

BOTH EZRA AND NEHEMIAH are examples of good leaders. They served God with their whole hearts. They did the work God gave them to do. Their love for God helped them to be loyal servants.

This week, we will look at examples of leaders in the Bible. What lessons can their lives teach us? We will look at Ezra and Nehemiah, of course. But we also will look at other leaders too. We will look at the things that make these men and women good leaders. These things make people good leaders today too. Maybe you do not feel you are a leader now. But remember, we all have people in our lives. We have the power to change their lives for the better. So, the lessons their lives have for us are for everyone.

The Bible is important in the lives of the leaders we will study this week. The Bible changed their thinking and their lives. The Bible also helped bring new spiritual life and change to the lives of God's people. The leaders thanked God for the wisdom they found in the Bible. In the same way, we must make Bible teachings a very important part of our lives.



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THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES (Judges 4:1–16)

The Bible shows us examples of leaders. Some good, some bad. Sometimes a leader can be good for a while and bad later. Bad leaders, at times, do some good things. Good leaders, at times, do bad things. Remember, all leaders are human. They can choose to do good or evil.

The problem is that leaders have more power than most people to change many lives. So, it is very important that leaders follow Bible truth in their own lives.

Look up the verses below. What examples of leaders do these verses show us? Are they good or bad examples? Explain your answers.

Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1–16) _____

Peter (Acts 15:7–11) _____

Josiah (2 Kings 23:1–10) _____

Deborah (Judges 4:1–16) _____

Ahab (1 Kings 21:1–16) _____

These stories are only a few examples of leaders in the Bible. What lessons do you learn from their lives about the things that make a leader good or bad? How can these lessons help us in whatever we do in life?



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LEADERS WHO DO EVIL IN GOD'S EYES
(1 Kings 15:26, 34)

Read the verses below. What do they tell us about the leaders? What difference do these leaders make in the lives of their people?

1 Kings 15:26, 34 _____

2 Kings 13:1–3 _____

John 11:46–53 _____



Remember, many people had the chance to see Jesus. They heard Him preach. They saw His miracles. But in the end, they turned away from Him.

Leaders have the power to change people's spiritual lives. Leaders can lift people up. Or pull them down. In the examples we looked at, the leaders pull the people down into sin. Then awful things happen.

Our love for Jesus makes a difference in the lives of the people we meet. Spiritual leaders can lead people to God or away from Him.

Compare the leaders we read about today to Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah have a strong connection with God. They pray. They also fast or go without food for spiritual reasons for a short time. Ezra and Nehemiah pray and fast more than any other leaders in the Bible. When Ezra and Nehemiah lead the country, the people walk with God. Sure, not everything is perfect in Judah at that time. But these leaders tell their people to put God first. True, some people during Ezra and Nehemiah's time do not change their lives for the better. But that just shows us that no one else's faith can change us. We must choose to follow God ourselves. Remember, many people had the chance to see Jesus. They heard Him preach. They saw His miracles. But in the end, they turned away from Him. Yes, we have the power to change lives, for good or evil. But in the end, each person must explain his or her choices in front of God.

COURAGE AND POWER TO DO GOOD (Nehemiah 4:7–23)

How does Nehemiah show courage in Nehemiah 4:7–23? What gives him this courage?

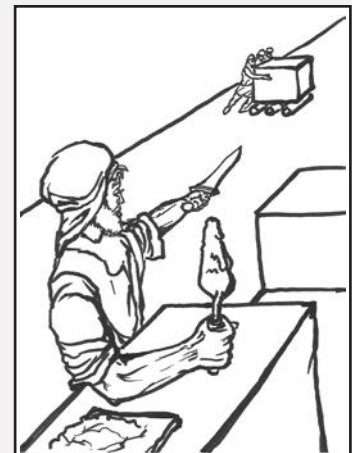
Nehemiah stands against the enemies of his people. The enemies try to make the Jews afraid. Nehemiah takes action. He gets the people ready to fight. Nehemiah does not just say, “All right, God. You do all the work!” No, Nehemiah tells the people to do their part too. The people pick up swords and other weapons. They hold these weapons while they work at the same time. They rebuild the wall. Nehemiah is a good leader. So, the Jews trust God. They are not afraid. Nehemiah encourages the people to protect their city. Nehemiah believes in his people. He helps them. He works with them and shows them what to do in hard times. He gives the power they need to do their work well. But Nehemiah does not only tell the people what to do. He does not give orders and then go to hide in his room. No, he stands with the people on the wall. He does the hard work that needs to be done.

There are times in the Bible when God tells His people to let Him fight for them. There are many other times when God says, “Get ready to fight. I will help you win!” We must do our part if we want to see God’s blessings.

“Nehemiah cared deeply about doing God’s work. He was firm in his love. He had a loyal heart. He also firmly depended on God for everything. That is the reason Nehemiah’s enemies failed to trap him in their power. The lazy person will fall into sin. But not people who serve God with all their hearts. Evil cannot beat these people. So, we must continue to grow in faith. Then our faith will not weaken. We will see God’s love working for good in everything around us. God’s true servants work with firm hearts. They will not fail. They always depend on God’s throne.”
—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 660, adapted.

In the end, Nehemiah trusts in God’s power. It gives him courage. At the same time, his knowledge about God helps him to act on his faith and beliefs.

Read James 2:18. How does Nehemiah’s life show us the truth in this verse?



Nehemiah stands with the people on the wall. He does the hard work that needs to be done.

A HEART FOR GOD (Ezra 7:8–10)

Read Nehemiah 2:1–10 and Ezra 7:8–10. What do these verses teach us about these two leaders? What is their reason for everything they do?

Ezra and Nehemiah want to follow God's plan. They also want the Jews to follow God's plan for their lives too. Yes, God's people messed up at times. Yes, God punishes them for their mistakes. But God keeps His promises. He gives His people new lives. He opens the way for His people to come back to the Promised Land. He also wants them to do their part in His plan for their lives. He wants them to be a bright light to people from foreign countries. Then these other people will want to worship God too. So, what does the Lord do to work out His plan for His people? He chooses two holy men: Ezra and Nehemiah. These men are much the same as Moses. God gives Ezra and Nehemiah a big part in His plan to make life new for His people. God gave Moses the same job many hundreds of years ago.

Excellent leaders also have an important reason for the work they do. This reason is part of everything they do. Ezra and Nehemiah know what they want for God's people. They have a plan. It is God's plan. Ezra and Nehemiah put everything into making God's plan happen.

Ezra does everything he can to make this plan happen. He studies the Bible. He teaches the people about God and Bible truth. Nehemiah also does his part. He encourages the people to do the right thing. Both Ezra and Nehemiah want to see the people build a new Jerusalem. But they are not only interested in building a new city. They want the people to have new spiritual lives. That is why Ezra and Nehemiah do what they do. They correct God's people when they are wrong. Sometimes Ezra and Nehemiah order God's people to change their lives. Ezra and Nehemiah believe in a loving and powerful God. They believe in a God who can do miracles. Most of all, they want everyone to have a deep connection with God. That is the best miracle of all.

In Nehemiah 1, we see how much Nehemiah loves God's cause. Nehemiah is upset when he sees evil men hurt God's people. In Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah cries about Israel's suffering. Nehemiah prays to God for help. Nehemiah promises God he will do whatever God asks him to do to help the Jews. He is a man of faith. His faith causes him to act. He wants to make this earth a better place to live.



Our connection with God is the best miracle of all.

A HEART WITH NO PRIDE (Ezra 8:21–23, 31, 32)

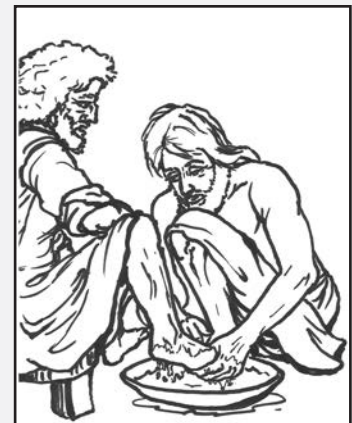
Read about Ezra’s decision in Ezra 8:21–23, 31, 32. What decision does Ezra make? Do you think it is foolish or brave? How do Ezra and the people show they have no pride in their hearts?

Sometime later, Nehemiah accepts the king’s help. The king offers to send men to protect Nehemiah. But in Ezra’s story, we learn that Ezra believes that God can protect him and the people. So, Ezra does not ask the king for men to protect them on their journey home. Then Ezra and the people arrive in Judah safely. Everyone praises God. Maybe we depend too much on other people to help us. We do not let God show Himself to us. We do not give Him the chance to help us. Ezra chooses to let God do the work. God protects Ezra and the people. He keeps them safe on their trip home. Then the King of Persia sees that God takes care of His people. The king sees that God is strong and powerful.

Ezra acts in faith. He does not simply expect God to help him. He and the people meet together first. Then they fast or eat no food for a short time. They pray about their problem. They spend much time with God. They come before God with no pride in their hearts. They ask God to protect them on their trip home. They want God’s help to be a sign to the King of Persia. They want to show the king that God is mighty and powerful. God answers their prayers.

Read Nehemiah 5:14–19. How does Nehemiah show he has no pride in his heart?

True leaders must be willing to be servants. Good leaders do not need a big title or name to give them honor. They believe that true honor comes from serving God. Nehemiah shows he has no pride in his heart. He gives many gifts to the people. His unselfish spirit is an example to the people. Yes, Nehemiah is a strong man. He does not put up with sin. At the same time, he does not act as if he is better than anyone either. Nehemiah is the top leader in Judah at the time. But does he act the same as a king? Does he show off his power? No, he acts the same as a servant. In this way, Nehemiah’s life shows us the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus teaches us that the best way to lead people is to serve them. We must do the same today.



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of Prayer,” pages 93–104, in *Steps to Christ*.

“God chooses Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah to do special work. These leaders help rebuild Jerusalem. They help God’s people make changes for a better life. The work these leaders do is a word picture. It shows us the spiritual work that God wants to do in us in the end times. He wants to make us new. The Jews who go back to Judah are weak. Their enemies hurt them. But God has a plan for His people. God wants the Jews to keep the knowledge about God and His law alive on the earth. God gives His people the job of protecting His law. They also protect true worship on the earth. God’s people have many experiences as they build again the temple and the city wall. Enemies try to stop their work. But the leaders move forward to do the work God gives them. They trust in God. They have hearts with no pride. They depend firmly on God. They believe God will cause His truth to win. Nehemiah does the same thing King Hezekiah does long ago. ‘Hezekiah was loyal to the Lord. He did not stop following the Lord. He obeyed the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the Lord was with Hezekiah. He had success in everything he did.’ 2 Kings 18:6, 7 [ICB].”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 677, adapted.



“God wants the Jews to keep the knowledge about God and His law alive on the earth.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why must we do all we can, with God’s help, to support our leaders?
- ② Why is it hard for a leader also to be a servant? What gets in the way? At the same time, why is being a good servant leader so rewarding? Why is it important for a Christian leader to be a servant?
- ③ Both Ezra and Nehemiah are men who pray a lot. Count how many times you find the words “prayer” or “prayed” in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. You will see these men prayed a lot! What does that tell us about how much we need to pray?
- ④ “Hezekiah was loyal to the Lord. He did not stop following the Lord. He obeyed the commands the Lord had given Moses” (2 Kings 18:6, ICB). How do we stay loyal to the Lord? What answer does this verse give us?

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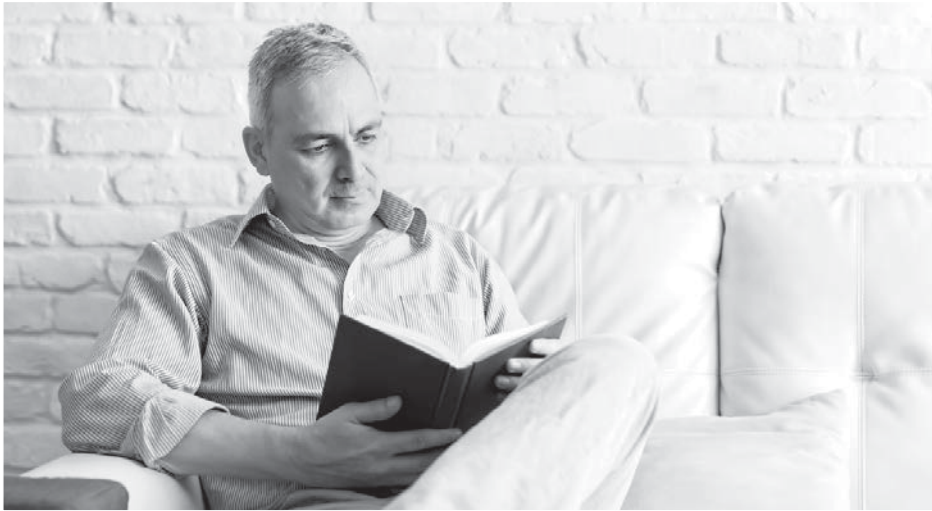
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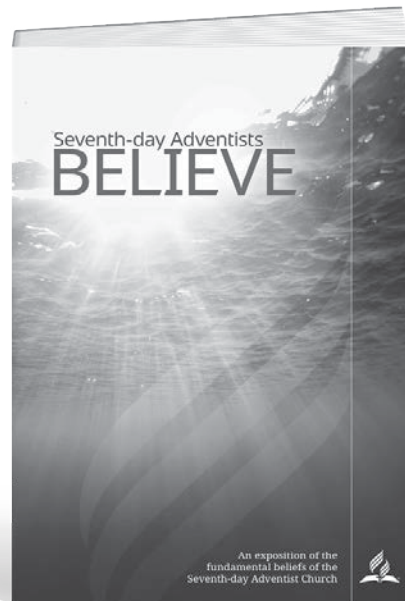


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