

Rebellion and Redemption ***The Controversy Continues***

Lesson #5 for January 30, 2016

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 17:43-51; 2 Samuel 11:1-17; 1 Kings 18:21-39; 2 Kings 19:21-37; Esther 3:8-11; Nehemiah 1.

1. The Bible is full of real-life heroes. Their stories have been thought to make great children's stories. But, what are the children to learn from these stories? What do these stories tell us about the great controversy between God and Satan? How can we learn great truths from the stories of David, Elijah, Hezekiah, Esther, and Nehemiah? Are there common themes in these stories? What kind of obstacles did each of these people face in his/her attempt to serve God? Why does God seem to act with considerable force in some stories while in others He apparently stands by?
2. It is particularly important to recognize that God acts especially forcefully when His name and His reputation or character are being challenged. Is anything of that nature taking place in our day? A correct understanding of God and His character and government makes it possible for us to rejoice in God's victory even as we face difficult trials and evil forces in our day. We must remember that despite what happens to us as individuals or as a church, God has already won the great controversy. We must remember that God's side is the winning side even though at times it may not seem like it.
3. What Christian child has not heard the story of **David** and Goliath? (Read 1 Samuel 17:43-51.) What was David's attitude as he approached the mighty giant Goliath dressed in his armor with a metal helmet while David himself was armed only with a sling and five smooth stones? On what basis did David feel confident that "the battle is the Lord's"? (1 Samuel 17:47) Or, "that there is a God in Israel"? (1 Samuel 17:46) In our day, could we feel confident as we approach our enemies and God's enemies that the battle is God's? Shouldn't Saul have been the one to go out and fight Goliath? Did God guide David's stone?
4. When God's people and God's name were being abused, God was more than happy to assist even a very young man to work on His behalf in defeating the enemy and making a statement about Himself, His name, and His power. By contrast, when personal passion is a motivating factor, disaster is always near.
5. David definitely had high points in his life. David's killing of Goliath led to envy and jealousy on the part of King Saul. But, the low point in David's life is recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1-17. Was David thinking about how he could best represent God during those events describing his great fall? Did David have an excess of testosterone? One good thing about the story of David is that Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 describe his honest repentance when God pointed out his sins. David is mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11.
6. Isn't it true that each of us has his/her own private battles, and God is fully aware of every temptation that comes our way? Unfortunately, the Devil is also aware of each temptation. The battleground of the great controversy is in our minds.
7. Review the story of **Elijah** in 1 Kings 17-19. Try to imagine the conversation that must have

taken place between God and Elijah who was living in the remote village of Tishbe on the eastern side of the Jordan River when God told him that it was his job to pronounce judgment on King Ahab in the capital city of Israel! How did Elijah manage to enter the very throne room of King Ahab; pronounce the sentence from God as recorded in 1 Kings 17:1; and then, escape without anyone knowing where he went? After spending some time at the brook of Cherith and then even more time in the coastal town of Zarephath—very near Jezebel’s home town!—Elijah was told to return to speak to King Ahab. Jezebel’s father was the king and high priest of Baal at his capital of Sidon. Jezebel was regarded as a high priestess as well. Ahab had sent messages to all the surrounding countries asking them to find Elijah and take him to Ahab! Do you think that if a strange man showed up and moved in with a widow and her son and they never ran out of food, they might have attracted some attention?

8. The challenge that Elijah and God set up was so reasonable that it was hard for anyone to object. Once again, we see that there was a direct showdown between God and Satan (as represented by the pagan fertility gods and their prophets). See *Prophets and Kings* 144-153.
9. Try to imagine the children of Israel—thousands of people—gathered on Mount Carmel, watching as the 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth tried to call down fire from their gods to burn up the sacrifice. Hours later, after they had failed, Elijah repaired God’s altar, placed the wood and the calf on it, poured water over it, and then knelt with a simple prayer to God. The lightning struck out of the blue sky, consumed not only the calf and the wood but also the stones and the water, and left a black hole in the ground! How do you think you would have responded if you had been one of the Israelites present on that occasion? Was there any doubt left as to whether Baal or God was powerful? We each need to recognize that God not only has power to control the lightning but also is the power source keeping each one of us alive moment by moment.

Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890 par. 15.

10. Unfortunately, somewhat like the story of David, Elijah was overcome by the power and influence of a woman, Jezebel. For forty days he ran for his life!
11. **Hezekiah** was one of the few kings of Judah who actually seriously attempted to follow the true God. When the new superpower, Assyria, conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and then began to overrun Judah, Hezekiah recognized that Judah’s only hope of salvation was in the God of heaven.
12. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel had already been scattered throughout the territory the Assyrians controlled. God could no longer work with them while they were doing everything possible to ignore Him and turn against His teachings.

That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be

revealed to the nations of earth.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.2.

13. King Sennacherib of Assyria exacted a very heavy tribute from King Hezekiah. After conquering the entire land except for Jerusalem itself, King Sennacherib was certain that his final victory was within reach. (Read 2 Kings 18:13-35.) He sent several of his high officials to offer Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem terms of surrender. He made fun of Judah's God because he clearly believed that the gods of Assyria were more powerful than the God of Israel and Judah. When God's reputation and character were assaulted and Hezekiah with the help of Isaiah turned to God in prayer, it was time for God to act. Once again, there was a direct challenge to *Yahweh*. What was the result? Read either Isaiah 37 or 2 Kings 19; the wording is the same. One of the most remarkable victories God ever gave the people of Israel was the night He slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers while they were sleeping! (2 Kings 19:35) How often does God act on behalf of His people when they put their full confidence in Him? Does He still do that today? What did Sennacherib have to say to his people when he came home with no army? God repeatedly acted to protect His own reputation. Is that really necessary? Do we need to see that there is really only one true God? What weapons does Satan use in the great controversy? What weapons does God use? Truth and love!
14. The story of **Esther** is the story of a young orphan girl raised by her cousin far away from their homeland in the city of Susa, one of Persia's capitals. Why weren't Mordecai and Esther back in Jerusalem? Should they have been? Why were they in Susa? It is even further east and farther away from Jerusalem than Babylon! A casual reading of some translations of Esther 2:6-7 might suggest that Mordecai had himself gone to Babylon from Jerusalem at the time when many of the Jews were carried away from Judah in 598/597 B.C. The story about Esther takes place 118 years after that captivity and about 60 years after Cyrus had allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. A careful reading of the Hebrew would suggest that it was probably either Kish or Jair, one of the ancestors of Mordecai, who was actually taken to Babylon. Whatever the case, we do not know why Mordecai and Esther were still far away from their home in Jerusalem. Did they not care enough to go home? Were they in Susa as official representatives of the people of Judah? We do not know.
15. What we do know is that: 1) Esther was beautiful; and 2) Through some remarkable circumstances, Esther became the favorite Queen of King Xerxes who was sometimes called Ahasuerus. Haman was a descendant of the kings of the Amalekites who had almost been wiped out by King Saul and the Hebrew people earlier in their history. When Haman saw an opportunity to destroy his ancestral enemies, the Jews, he tried to do so. Without realizing what was involved, King Xerxes agreed to the plan.

Little did the king realize the far-reaching results that would have accompanied the complete carrying out of this decree. Satan himself, the hidden instigator of the scheme, was trying to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 600.3-601.0.
16. It was not just Haman who was trying to destroy the Jewish people. Satan knew that

someday a Messiah would come from the Jews; he sought every opportunity possible to destroy as many of them as he could. (Compare Exodus 1:15-21.) He believed that Haman's plan would do exactly what he wanted.

17. Of course, Esther was challenged by her cousin to stand up for her people and was ultimately successful, resulting in the hanging of their archenemy, Haman, on the very gallows Haman had constructed to kill Mordecai.
18. It is particularly significant to notice that Haman accused the Jews of being different and of worshiping differently than others did. Does that remind you vaguely of Revelation 13:15? How will we react when we are told that we cannot buy or sell unless we receive the mark of the beast? How do you understand the words of Revelation 13:3-4,7-8, suggesting that the entire world will wander after the beast? Satan is hoping finally to destroy God's faithful people.
19. **Nehemiah** was a faithful servant to King Artaxerxes. Both Artaxerxes and Nehemiah were, no doubt, familiar with the stories of Esther, Haman, and Mordecai. But, things were not going well back in Jerusalem. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4. Hanani, one of the relatives of Nehemiah, returned to Babylon to report what a difficult time his fellow Jews were having in Jerusalem. Nehemiah mourned, prayed, and fasted for them. Several months later, he apparently was looking a little sad when serving the emperor. The emperor was led to ask what the problem was. After offering a short prayer, Nehemiah explained about the problems back in Jerusalem. The emperor, trusting Nehemiah, offered to give him the support necessary to try to fix things in Jerusalem.
20. Read Nehemiah's prayer recorded in Nehemiah 1:5-10. How would you compare his prayer with Daniel's prayer recorded in Daniel 9:4-19? Notice in both cases that Daniel and Nehemiah were not praying for benefits for themselves but rather for God's reputation and His "name" among the heathen. When God's reputation is at stake, He often does whatever is necessary to deal with the problem. The king gave Nehemiah the means to get the job done.
21. After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah did his investigations in secret and found out why the Jews there were so discouraged about repairing the walls and gates. Then, he challenged them, offering the support which he had received from the emperor and encouraging them to finish what needed to be done. Fifty-two days later, despite all kinds of opposition from their neighbors, the task was finished.
22. How often do we face friends, neighbors, or associates at work who make fun of us, our church, or the principles which we believe are important? Are we prepared to stand firmly as Nehemiah did on God's side? Do we have the faith in God necessary to allow Him to deal with our enemies while we proceed forward with our plans to correctly serve God?
23. Although today things seem quite comfortable for us as Seventh-day Adventists in most parts of the world, we know that a time is coming when there will be a great change. We are certainly not foolish enough to believe that Satan will stand by quietly as he sees a group of people standing more and more firmly and decidedly on God's side and being given the latter rain to represent God to the world.
24. Are we prepared to accept the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 as still being true in

our day? Are we so completely committed to God that not only in the big battles in the public arena but also in the private battles in our own minds, we are prepared to stand firmly on God's side? Is it clear in your mind the role God played in the battles of David and Goliath, Elijah versus the prophets of Baal, Hezekiah versus Sennacherib, and Esther versus Haman? Do you have the kind of resolve that Nehemiah had to work night and day with almost no breaks to accomplish the mighty task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem?

25. Are there times and places in our day when God's name and reputation are being challenged? Does God show up when He is really needed? What about all the people in the Western world who do not believe that God even exists? Is that a challenge to God's name and reputation? Would God assist us in some way to challenge their thinking? Does God still act on behalf of His faithful followers in our day?
26. In the process of God slowly removing His influence from our earth and allowing Satan to have his way, are we no longer able to call upon God to stand with us? How are we meeting the challenges from God's enemies in our day? What about the challenges in our own personal experiences? Have you had any personal experiences in which you were quite certain that God had acted on your behalf?
27. Even the Bible heroes in our stories for this week had their problems. For David, it was Bathsheba and Uriah. (2 Samuel 11) For Elijah, it was running from Jezebel. (1 Kings 19) For Hezekiah, it was showing off his wealth to the Babylonians. (2 Kings 20:12-18). Are we prepared to enter into a faith relationship with God despite problems that we may have had in our lives?
28. Review again briefly how God acted to preserve His "name" in our stories for this week. (Read 1 Samuel 17:43-51; 1 Kings 18:21-39; 2 Kings 19:21-34; Esther 3:8-11; and Nehemiah 1.)
29. What common themes do you see in these stories? On a theoretical level, we must admit that God is just as willing to work with us as He was with the people in Old Testament times. But, on a practical level, does that seem to be true? Are the battles that we fight today different from the battles we have been studying this week? Remember that God is just as willing to forgive and work with us as He always has been. But, it is important to remember that:

One act does not determine the character, but it breaks down the barrier, and the next temptation is more readily entertained.—Ellen G. White, *5T* 396.3; *GW92* 343.3; *CC* 84; *AH* 392.2; *CM* 50.2.

30. What questions would you like to ask David, Elijah, Hezekiah, Esther, and Nehemiah when you see them in heaven? Are we prepared to put our lives on the line for God?
31. Are we ready to allow the Holy Spirit to enter our minds and our hearts and guide us to the kind of relationships needed to be members of God's faithful final church?

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