

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

for the
Second Quarter
2002

Nehemiah



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Nehemiah

Issued by the
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Postfach 1310
D-74803 Mosbach/Baden

Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse 17
D-74821 Mosbach/Baden
Germany

Telephone (+49) 6261-4357 / Fax (49) 6261-14327
e-Mail: sda.refmov@t-online.de
Internet: www.imssdarm.org

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Introduction

The reformations brought about under the leadership of Ezra the priest needed to be maintained and expanded. But just as water flows naturally downhill, so the human heart which is not connected to the power that draws it ever upward will naturally follow the lusts and evils of the flesh, as well as the corrupt society with which it is surrounded. This is what happened in Israel.

Therefore, as all down through history, God again raised up leaders to plant seeds of righteousness, resist the powers of darkness, and lead the people to reformation. In this line of sanctified servants of the Most High, Nehemiah was unique, for he was a manager, not a gospel worker. "Nehemiah was not a priest; he was not a prophet; he made no pretension to high title. He was a reformer raised up for an important time. It was his aim to set his people right with God. Inspired with a great purpose, he bent every energy of his being to its accomplishment. High, unbending integrity marked his efforts. As he came into contact with evil and opposition to right he took so determined a stand that the people were roused to labor with fresh zeal and courage. They could not but recognize his loyalty, his patriotism, and his deep love for God; and, seeing this, they were willing to follow where he led." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 675, 676.

Today we live in a time of which the Spirit of Prophecy wrote, "We are nearing the close of this earth's history. We have before us a great work—the closing work of giving the last warning message to a sinful world. There are men who will be taken from the plow, from the vineyard, from various other branches of work, and sent forth by the Lord to give this message to the world." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 36.

Therefore, it is particularly appropriate for us to study the experiences made by this faithful reformer! Our study will focus not so much on the history, but more on the issues Nehemiah faced and how he resolved them under God's hand, for "The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth's history....

"In the time of the end every divine institution is to be restored." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 677, 678.

Let us not be careless or succumb to the temptation to think that

our present knowledge is sufficient, or we will suffer the same fate as did ancient Israel. Rather, let us be willing to give up our own ideas and plead with God to give us the mind of Christ, who lives only to bless others and honor His Father. God bless each conscientious, faithful believer who desires constantly to reform and grow in his own life and to be a blessing to everyone within his circle of influence!

THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS
OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Special Sabbath School Offering for the BRAZIL

God bless your special gift!

1

Sabbath, April 6, 2002

Watching, Praying, Acting

OBJECTIVES

- To understand what motivated the two reformers, Ezra and Nehemiah
- To gain a clear perspective of Nehemiah's understanding of and dependence on God
- To learn from Nehemiah's example how to work in cooperation with God

PERSONAL DEDICATION AND PREPARATION

- 1. What lay behind the dedication and spiritual strength of Ezra, the scribe and priest who accompanied the second group of Jews returning to Jerusalem from Babylon? Ezra 7:6, 10.**

Ezra “was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he ‘prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.’ Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God’s people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land.

“To the experiences of Israel from the time the promise was made to Abraham, Ezra gave special thought. He studied the instruction given at Mount Sinai and through the long period of wilderness wandering. As he learned more and still more concerning God’s dealings with His chil-

dren, and comprehended the sacredness of the law given at Sinai, Ezra's heart was stirred. He experienced a new and thorough conversion and determined to master the records of sacred history, that he might use this knowledge to bring blessing and light to his people.

"Ezra endeavored to gain a heart preparation for the work he believed was before him. He sought God earnestly, that he might be a wise teacher in Israel. As he learned to yield mind and will to divine control, there were brought into his life the principles of true sanctification, which, in later years, had a molding influence, not only upon the youth who sought his instruction, but upon all others associated with him." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 608, 609.

- 2. When, about ten years later, Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king of Persia, was informed about difficulties encountered by God's people in Jerusalem, how strongly did he feel about the situation, and what did this cause him to do? Nehemiah 1:2-4.**

"The returned exiles were suffering affliction and reproach. The temple and portions of the city had been rebuilt; but the work of restoration was hindered, the temple services were disturbed, and the people kept in constant alarm by the fact that the walls of the city were still largely in ruins.

"Overwhelmed with sorrow, Nehemiah could neither eat nor drink; he 'wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted.' In his grief he turned to the divine Helper. 'I ... prayed,' he said, 'before the God of heaven.'" —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 628, 629.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

- 3. List the basic issues Nehemiah presented before the Lord in prayer, showing not only that he was very familiar with Israel's history but also that he understood and cherished the ways of God. Nehemiah 1:5-11.**
- 4. What attitude would make it possible for Nehemiah effectively to help the Jewish people? What holy desire was inspired in his mind by the Holy Spirit? Nehemiah 1:6, 11.**

“Not only did Nehemiah say that Israel had sinned. He acknowledged with penitence that he and his father’s house had sinned ... placing himself among those who had dishonored God by not standing stiffly for the truth. Nehemiah humbled himself before God, giving Him the glory due unto His name. Thus also did Daniel in Babylon.” —*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1136.

“As Nehemiah prayed, his faith and courage grew strong. His mouth was filled with holy arguments. He pointed to the dishonor that would be cast upon God, if His people, now that they had returned to Him, should be left in weakness and oppression; and he urged the Lord to bring to pass His promise: ‘If ye turn unto Me, and keep My Commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there.’ See Deuteronomy 4:29-31. This promise had been given to Israel through Moses before they had entered Canaan, and during the centuries it had stood unchanged. God’s people had now returned to Him in penitence and faith, and His promise would not fail.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 629.

WAITING FOR GUIDANCE

- 5. Even though he understood how severe the situation in Jerusalem was, and even though a plan was forming in his mind, what did Nehemiah do as he waited for divine guidance? Nehemiah 2:1, 2.**

“Four months Nehemiah waited for a favorable opportunity to present his request to the king. During this time, though his heart was heavy with grief, he endeavored to bear himself with cheerfulness in the royal presence. In those halls of luxury and splendor all must appear light-hearted and happy. Distress must not cast its shadow over the countenance of any attendant of royalty. But in Nehemiah’s seasons of retirement, concealed from human sight, many were the prayers, the confessions, the tears, heard and witnessed by God and angels.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 630.

- 6. Even when the king gave him opportunity to present his request, how carefully did Nehemiah proceed? What important lessons for us are contained in his attitude? Nehemiah 2:3, 4.**

“The recital of the condition of Jerusalem awakened the sympathy of the monarch without arousing his prejudices. Another question gave the opportunity for which Nehemiah had long waited: ‘For what dost thou make request?’ But the man of God did not venture to reply till he had sought direction from One higher than Artaxerxes. He had a sacred trust to fulfill, in which he required help from the king; and he realized that much depended upon his presenting the matter in such a way as to win his approval and enlist his aid. ‘I prayed,’ he said, ‘to the God of heaven.’ In that brief prayer Nehemiah pressed into the presence of the King of kings and won to his side a power that can turn hearts as the rivers of waters are turned.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 630, 631.

READY FOR ACTION

7. What was the wonderful result? Nehemiah 2:5-8.

“Nehemiah, in that brief moment of prayer to the King of kings, gathered courage to tell Artaxerxes of his desire to be released for a time from his duties at the court, and he asked for authority to build up the waste places of Jerusalem and to make it once more a strong and defended city. Momentous results to the Jewish nation hung upon this request. ‘And,’ Nehemiah declares, ‘the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 632, 633.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- How do I tend to solve problems? (Common tendencies include moving on impulse, moving too slowly, ignoring the problem, leaving it for someone else to deal with, procrastinating, delegating, etc.)
 - What did Nehemiah’s prayer of confession show about his willingness to accept responsibility for his own actions?
 - Why is it important not to cast blame for difficulties in the church?
 - Considering a current difficulty in my [local church], how might Nehemiah resolve it?
-

Using Opportunities

OBJECTIVES

- To learn from Nehemiah's example how rightly to use God-given opportunities
- To see how to avoid negligence and indiscretion
- To distinguish between impulse and decisiveness

PLANNING

- 1. Constantly seeking wisdom from His heavenly Father, what plans did Nehemiah make and what precautions did he exercise? Nehemiah 2:9.**

“Having secured the help he sought, Nehemiah with prudence and forethought proceeded to make the arrangements necessary to ensure the success of the enterprise. He neglected no precaution that would tend to its accomplishment. Not even to his own countrymen did he reveal his purpose. While he knew that many would rejoice in his success, he feared that some, by acts of indiscretion, might arouse the jealousy of their enemies and perhaps bring about the defeat of the undertaking.

“His request to the king had been so favorably received that Nehemiah was encouraged to ask for still further assistance. To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to provide protection on the journey, he asked for and secured a military escort. He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king's forest in the mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed. That there might be no occasion for complaint that he had exceeded his commission, Nehemiah was careful to have the authority and privileges accorded him, clearly defined.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 633.

2. What important lessons can we learn from Nehemiah's example? Proverbs 14:35.

"This example of wise forethought and resolute action should be a lesson to all Christians. God's children are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligent and provident care. They encounter many difficulties and often hinder the working of Providence in their behalf, because they regard prudence and painstaking effort as having little to do with religion. Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts for the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the carrying forward of sacred enterprises today as in the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

"Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty. The means that he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. These gifts may open ways by which the light of truth shall go to many benighted lands. The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 633, 634.

3. In what manner did Nehemiah analyze the situation on the third night after he arrived in Jerusalem? Nehemiah 2:12-16.

PRAYING

4. What did he do before entering into discussion with his fellow countrymen? Psalm 61:1, 2.

"The remainder of the night he spent in prayer; for he knew that the morning would call for earnest effort to arouse and unite his dispirited and divided countrymen."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 636, 637.

5. How did he present his findings and plans so that the Jews in Jerusalem would be moved to cooperate with him? Nehemiah 2:17, 18.

“Nehemiah presented before the people their reproach among the heathen—their religion dishonored, their God blasphemed. He told them that in a distant land he had heard of their affliction, that he had entreated the favor of Heaven in their behalf, and that, as he was praying, he had determined to ask permission from the king to come to their assistance. He had asked God that the king might not only grant this permission, but might also invest him with the authority and give him the help needed for the work; and his prayer had been answered in such a way as to show that the plan was of the Lord.

“All this he related, and then, having shown that he was sustained by the combined authority of the God of Israel and the Persian king, Nehemiah asked the people directly whether they would take advantage of this opportunity and arise and build the wall.

“The appeal went straight to their hearts. The thought of how Heaven's favor had been manifested toward them put their fears to shame, and with new courage they said with one voice, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ ‘So they strengthened their hands for this good work.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 637, 638.

6. What else showed that Nehemiah trusted in God as well in as the resolve of his fellow Jews? Nehemiah 2:19, 20.

“Nehemiah's whole soul was in the enterprise he had undertaken. His hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination, were contagious, inspiring others with the same high courage and lofty purpose. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to make stronger the heart and hand of his neighbor.

“When the enemies of Israel heard what the Jews were hoping to accomplish, they laughed them to scorn, saying, ‘What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?’ But Nehemiah answered, ‘The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 638.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- When Ezra traveled with money and treasure to Jerusalem, he did not request a protective escort, but Nehemiah did. Was one or the other wrong in what he did? What principle do we need to learn from this?
 - In what way do I motivate others when I am given a leadership responsibility?
 - To whom do I give credit when things go well?
-

3

Sabbath, April 20, 2002

Seeking Helpers

OBJECTIVES

- To see how Nehemiah sought for, motivated, and encouraged helpers
- To learn how to appreciate and encourage use of the gifts God entrusts to us and others
- To value mutual dependence

ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKERS

- 1. At the very beginning of the building project, how did the religious leaders set an excellent example for the people? Nehemiah 3:1.**

“Among the first to catch Nehemiah's spirit of zeal and earnestness were the priests. Because of their influential position, these men could do much to advance or hinder the work; and their ready cooperation, at the very outset, contributed not a little to its success. The majority of the princes and rulers of Israel came up nobly to their duty, and these faithful men have honorable mention in the book of God.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 638, 639.

- 2. Nehemiah chapter 3 gives a long list of cooperators, some of whom made repairs near their own homes, both men and women working wholeheartedly. What do you think this work record indicates about Nehemiah as a leader and supervisor?**

“The people in general were animated by patriotism and zeal. Men of ability and influence organized the various classes of citizens into companies, each leader making himself responsible for the erection of a certain part of the wall. And of some it is written that they builded ‘everyone over against his house.’

“Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, now that the work was actually begun. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directing the workmen, noting the hindrances, and providing for emergencies. Along the whole extent of that three miles of wall his influence was constantly felt. With timely words he encouraged the fearful, aroused the lag-gard, and approved the diligent.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 639.

APPRECIATING VARIOUS ABILITIES

- 3. What types of gifts does God entrust to different individuals? 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. How should we see these differences?**

“The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite together in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God's truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 145.

4. What analogy did the apostle Paul give concerning apparently stronger and weaker members? 1 Corinthians 12:22-25.

“Cultivate a disposition to esteem others better than your self. Be less self-sufficient, less confident; cherish patience, forbearance, and brotherly love. Be ready to help the erring, and have pity and tender sympathy toward those who are weak....

“Be courteous, tenderhearted, forgiving toward others. Let self sink in the love of Jesus, that you may honor your Redeemer and do the work that He has appointed for you to do. How little you know of the heart trials of poor souls who have been bound in the chains of darkness and who lack resolution and moral power. Strive to understand the weakness of others. Help the needy, crucify self, and let Jesus take possession of your soul, in order that you may carry out the principles of truth in your daily life. Then will you be, as never before, a blessing to the church and to all those with whom you come in contact.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 133, 134.

EVERYONE’S HANDS ARE NEEDED

5. Nevertheless, what does the Lord say to all? Matthew 20:7.

“When Christ ascended, He left the church and all its interests as a sacred trust to His followers. And the work of the church is not to be left to the minister alone, or to a few leading men. Every member should feel that he has entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord to work for the best interests of His cause at all times and under all circumstances. Each should have some part to act, some burden to bear. If all church members felt an individual responsibility, greater advancement would be made in spiritual things. The solemn burden of responsibility resting upon them would lead them to seek God often for strength and grace.

“The real character of the church is measured, not by the high profession she makes, not by the names enrolled on her books, but by what she is actually doing for the Master, by the number of her persevering, faithful workers. Personal, unselfish effort will accomplish more for the cause of Christ than can be wrought by sermons or creeds.”—*Gospel Workers*, p. 200.

6. What attitude will give God's people the greatest possible success? Revelation 5:13.

“God fulfills His promise in such a way as to bring the highest glory to Himself and the greatest good to His people. In order to be righteous in His sight, we must not only believe in Christ, but we must depend upon Him for the realization of our highest hopes of success and of salvation, observing all His commandments and ordinances, and discharging with fidelity all the duties that devolve upon us as stewards of His grace.”
—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 360.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- How can I know that I am carrying out God's desire for me in His service?
 - What is the best way I can help and inspire my fellow believers to serve the Master according to their God-given abilities?
 - How do I relate to those who have been chosen as leaders?
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4

Sabbath, April 27, 2002

Working Together in Harmony

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the best way to motivate helpers
 - To grasp how wonderfully God supports those who follow His principles
 - To heed the warnings against criticism and following human ideas
 - To see the importance of having concrete goals in carrying out God's work
- 1. How did Nehemiah motivate the people willingly to take up responsibilities in rebuilding the wall around the city of Jerusalem? Nehemiah 2:18.**

"Although Nehemiah bore a royal commission requiring the inhabitants to cooperate with him in rebuilding the walls of the city, he chose not to depend upon the mere exercise of authority. He sought rather to gain the confidence and sympathy of the people, well knowing that a union of hearts as well as of hands was essential to success in the great work which he had undertaken." —*Christian Service*, p. 174.

2. What divine principles will lead to success? 2 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 2:3-5.

"In loving sympathy and confidence God's workers are to unite with one another. He who says or does anything that tends to separate the members of Christ's church is counterworking the Lord's purpose. Wrangling and dissension in the church, the encouragement of suspicion and unbelief, are dishonoring to Christ. God desires His servants to cultivate Christian affection for one another. True religion unites hearts not only with Christ, but with one another in a most tender union. When we know what it means to be thus united with Christ and with our brethren, a fragrant influence will attend our work wherever we go.

"The workers in the large cities must act their several parts, making every effort to bring about the best results. They are to talk faith and to act in such a way as to impress the people. They are not to narrow the work down to their own particular ideas. In the past too much of this has been done by us as a people, and it has been a drawback to the success of the work. Let us remember that the Lord has different ways of working, that He has different workmen to whom He entrusts different gifts. We are to see His purpose in the sending of certain men to certain places." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 145, 146.

FACING RIDICULE AND SARCASM

3. What may those who are trying to advance God's work also have to endure? Psalm 34:19.

"Those who labor in the cause of truth will find that they cannot do this without exciting the anger of its enemies. Though they have been called of God to the work in which they are engaged, and their course is approved of Him, they cannot escape reproach and derision. They will be denounced as visionary, unreliable, scheming, hypocritical—anything, in

short, that will suit the purpose of their enemies. The most sacred things will be represented in a ridiculous light to amuse the ungodly.... Contempt and derision are indeed painful to human nature; but they must be endured by all who are true to God. It is the policy of Satan thus to turn souls from doing the work which the Lord has laid upon them.” —(*Southern Watchman*, April 12, 1904) *Christian Service*, pp. 173, 174.

4. What warning of Christ is as applicable today as when it was first spoken? Matthew 7:1-5.

“The unkind man, the critic, the one who is full of self-conceit, deceives his own soul, though claiming to be a clear discerner of the defects of others. He who has a disposition to find fault, to be suspicious, to surmise, think and speak evil, has so cultivated this attribute of the evil one that the good qualities of his brethren and sisters in the church do not arrest his attention. If he thinks he has discovered a flaw in the character, a mistake in the life, he is very officious to aim at the mote, when the very trait of character which he has overlooked in himself, which is developed in doing this unchristlike work, is, in comparison to what he criticizes, when weighed in the golden balances of heaven as a beam in proportion to a mote.” —*Review and Herald*, August 16, 1892.

THE GOAL

5. Nehemiah and his helpers put individual teams of workers in charge of specific tasks. How do long-range, intermediate, and short-term goals help God’s work be successful? What generally happens (or does not happen) when there are not clear goals and plans? Luke 14:28-30; Proverbs 29:18.

“While we should ever be ready to follow the opening providence of God, we should lay no larger plans, nor occupy more ground than there is help and means to bind off the work well, keep up and increase the interest already started. While there are broader plans and fields constantly opening for the laborers, our ideas and views must broaden in regard to the workers who are to labor to bring souls to the truth.” —*The Paulson Collection*, p. 367.

**6. With what courage and singlemindedness are we to work?
Luke 9:62; Ecclesiastes 9:10.**

“The churches that are weak and ready to die, need someone who has the ability to set things in operation, and to help devise means and lay proper plans for putting life into their work. But who will do this work? There are many who have ability, and who want to be Christians, who should be set to work in the meetings and out of the meetings. First one should be called upon and then another, to give Bible readings, to pray, or speak, and the Spirit of God will work with your efforts; and as strangers come into your gatherings, they will be impressed, and you can reach the people—not by your own ability, but by the Spirit of God working with your efforts, though of course we want all the ability and power that God has given us, brought into use. We should not be novices forever, but should study how to conduct ourselves properly at all times and all places. We should carry Christian politeness with us in all our work. We must be hewn and squared and fitted, that we may do the work of God in humility, and that the sharp corners which may be in our characters may not be prominent.” —*Review and Herald*, November 6, 1888.

7. Of what can we be assured when, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we put our service for God’s kingdom in first place? Matthew 6:33; Luke 22:35; Nehemiah 2:20.

“The Lord does not press on anyone burdens too heavy to be borne. He estimates every weight before He allows it to rest upon the hearts of those who are laborers together with Him. To every one of His workers our loving heavenly Father says: ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.’ Psalm 55:22. Let the burden bearers believe that He will carry every load, great or small.” —*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 116.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- What other principles can I think of that are important to observe when working in cooperation with others?
- How is it possible for humility to take the place of pride in the character?
- How willing am I to allow the Holy Spirit completely to guide me?
- To what extent do I consult my personal desires and feelings before serving Jesus?

Facing Foes and Difficulties

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the manner in which foes attack God's work
- To see how to meet both subtle and direct challenges
- To understand how humbly, yet earnestly one must contend with the foe

PLOTS, UNDERMININGS, AND OPEN ATTACKS

1. **What arguments were sounded in the people's ears in the attempt to impede the work? Nehemiah 4:2, 3.**

2. **How did Nehemiah respond to this treachery? Nehemiah 4:4-6.**

3. **When their psychological pressure had no success, what other tactics did the enemies and supposed friends of Judah use to try to impede the work? Nehemiah 4:8.**

"They were compelled to guard continually against the plots of their adversaries, who, professing friendliness, sought in various ways to cause confusion and perplexity, and to arouse distrust. They endeavored to destroy the courage of the Jews; they formed conspiracies to draw Nehemiah into their toils; and falsehearted Jews were found ready to aid the treacherous undertaking. The report was spread that Nehemiah was plotting against the Persian monarch, intending to exalt himself as a king over Israel, and that all who aided him were traitors.

"But Nehemiah continued to look to God for guidance and support, and 'the people had a mind to work.' The enterprise went forward until the gaps were filled and the entire wall built up to half its intended height."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 642.

- 4. Although some people were distracted by the threats (Nehemiah 4:11, 12), what immediate, decisive action did Nehemiah take to keep the work going forward? Nehemiah 4:13-16.**

- 5. How can we compare Nehemiah's offensive and defensive actions (Nehemiah 4:17-21) with what is needed in God's work around the world today?**

"Beside Nehemiah stood a trumpeter, and on different parts of the wall were stationed priests bearing the sacred trumpets. The people were scattered in their labors, but on the approach of danger at any point a signal was given for them to repair thither without delay. 'So we labored in the work,' Nehemiah says, 'and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.'" *—Prophets and Kings*, p. 644.

"Those who occupy the position of undershepherds are to exercise a watchful diligence over the Lord's flock. This is not to be a dictatorial vigilance, but one that tends to encourage and strengthen and uplift. Ministry means more than sermonizing; it means earnest, personal labor. The church on earth is composed of erring men and women, who need patient, painstaking effort that they may be trained and disciplined to work with acceptance in this life, and in the future life to be crowned with glory and immortality. Pastors are needed—faithful shepherds—who will not flatter God's people, nor treat them harshly, but who will feed them with the bread of life—men who in their lives feel daily the converting power of the Holy Spirit and who cherish a strong, unselfish love toward those for whom they labor." *—The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 526.

- 6. How closely did Nehemiah require the people to stay together? What showed how earnestly he, his servants, and the guards worked? Nehemiah 4:22, 23. How is such effort greatly needed today?**

“The best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. Give each one something to do for others. Help all to see that as receivers of the grace of Christ they are under obligation to work for Him. And let all be taught how to work. Especially should those who are newly come to the faith be educated to become laborers together with God.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 82.

7. What gave them the strength to persevere against so many obstacles? Ephesians 6:16. What parallels to their experience are there in God’s work today?

“The opposition and discouragement that the builders in Nehemiah’s day met from open enemies and pretended friends is typical of the experience that those today will have who work for God. Christians are tried, not only by the anger, contempt, and cruelty of enemies, but by the indolence, inconsistency, lukewarmness, and treachery of avowed friends and helpers. Derision and reproach are hurled at them. And the same enemy that leads to contempt, at a favorable opportunity uses more cruel and violent measures.

“Satan takes advantage of every unconsecrated element for the accomplishment of his purposes. Among those who profess to be the supporters of God’s cause there are those who unite with His enemies and thus lay His cause open to the attacks of His bitterest foes. Even some who desire the work of God to prosper will yet weaken the hands of His servants by hearing, reporting, and half believing the slanders, boasts, and menaces of His adversaries. Satan works with marvelous success through his agents, and all who yield to their influence are subject to a bewitching power that destroys the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent. But, like Nehemiah, God’s people are neither to fear nor to despise their enemies. Putting their trust in God, they are to go steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, and committing to His providence the cause for which they stand.

“Amidst great discouragement, Nehemiah made God his trust, his sure defense. And He who was the support of His servant then has been the dependence of His people in every age. In every crisis His people may confidently declare, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ Romans 8:31. However craftily the plots of Satan and his agents may be laid, God can detect them, and bring to nought all their counsels. The response of faith today will be the response made by Nehemiah, ‘Our God shall fight for us;’ for God is in the work, and no man can prevent its ultimate success.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 644, 645.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- Am I ready to defend God's work as conscientiously as were Nehemiah and his servants, even sleeping in my clothes if necessary?
 - Have I ever been responsible for weakening the hands of the workers or disparaging God's cause?
 - What can make me a true, solid supporter of the heavenly kingdom?
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6

Sabbath, May 11, 2002

Sin and Injustice in One's Own Ranks

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the plight of the poor and the temptations of the rich
- To obtain discernment and wisdom in how to deal with injustice wherever it is found
- To be hidden in Christ, pleading with Him to remove injustice from our ranks

AN ASTONISHING PLIGHT

- 1. What terrible condition was brought to Nehemiah's notice? What was the reason for this situation? Nehemiah 5:1-5.**

"In the unsettled state of the country, tillage had been to some extent neglected. Furthermore, because of the selfish course pursued by some who had returned to Judea, the Lord's blessing was not resting upon their land, and there was a scarcity of grain.

"In order to obtain food for their families, the poor were obliged to buy on credit and at exorbitant prices. They were also compelled to raise money by borrowing on interest to pay the heavy taxes imposed upon them by the kings of Persia. To add to the distress of the poor, the more wealthy among the Jews had taken advantage of their necessities, thus enriching themselves." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 646.

- 2. What provisions had God made for Israel to keep just such distress from developing, and particularly to keep the rich from the temptation to oppress their less fortunate brethren? Exodus 22:20-26; Deuteronomy 23:19; 15:7, 8, 11.**

- 3. How had Nehemiah's actions been exactly the opposite of those practiced by the wealthy nobles? Nehemiah 5:6-8.**

RECOGNITION, REPENTANCE, REFORMATION

- 4. How did God's servant clearly and earnestly present the sins of the nobles to them, despite the fact that the work needed the financial support of these men? Nehemiah 5:7, 9-11.**

"The fact that the oppressors were men of wealth, whose support was greatly needed in the work of restoring the city, did not for a moment influence Nehemiah. He sharply rebuked the nobles and rulers, and when he had gathered a great assembly of the people he set before them the requirements of God touching the case." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 648.

- 5. How did the noblemen respond, and what covenant agreement did Nehemiah obtain from them? Nehemiah 5:12, 13.**

- 6. How else did Nehemiah set an example of generosity and discretion? Nehemiah 5:14-19.**

- 7. What is still a temptation within the church today? How does the entire church suffer physically, mentally, and spiritually when such practices exist? Leviticus 25:17; James 5:1, 3-6.**

“Even among those who profess to be walking in the fear of the Lord, there are some who are acting over again the course pursued by the nobles of Israel. Because it is in their power to do so, they exact more than is just, and thus become oppressors. And because avarice and treachery are seen in the lives of those who have named the name of Christ, because the church retains on her books the names of those who have gained their possessions by injustice, the religion of Christ is held in contempt. Extravagance, overreaching, extortion, are corrupting the faith of many and destroying their spirituality. The church is in a great degree responsible for the sins of her members. She gives countenance to evil if she fails to lift her voice against it.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 651.

- 8. Jesus wants to draw both the poor and the rich to Himself. What great standard of love does He present? Proverbs 13:7; 22:2, 16; 2 Corinthians 8:9.**

“The customs of the world are no criterion for the Christian. He is not to imitate its sharp practices, its overreaching, its extortion. Every unjust act toward a fellow being is a violation of the golden rule. Every wrong done to the children of God is done to Christ Himself in the person of His saints. Every attempt to take advantage of the ignorance, weakness, or misfortune of another is registered as fraud in the ledger of heaven. He who truly fears God, would rather toil day and night, and eat the bread of poverty, than to indulge the passion for gain that oppresses the widow and fatherless or turns the stranger from his right.

“The slightest departure from rectitude breaks down the barriers and prepares the heart to do greater injustice. Just to that extent that a man would gain advantage for himself at the disadvantage of another, will his soul become insensible to the influence of the Spirit of God. Gain obtained at such a cost is a fearful loss.

“We were all debtors to divine justice, but we had nothing with which to pay the debt. Then the Son of God, who pitied us, paid the price of our

redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich. By deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us.” *—Prophets and Kings*, pp. 651, 652.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- Am I or someone I know guilty of overlooking sin in someone whom we are perhaps afraid to offend?
 - Why is partiality to or indulgence of one’s family members or friends especially grievous to God?
 - In what way is such indulgence both destructive and unkind—to the person indulged?
 - Why are riches a great temptation and test? See 1 Timothy 6:6-12.
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7

Sabbath, May 18, 2002

Malice and Undermining

OBJECTIVES

- To recognize the forces working against Nehemiah—and all reform
- To see how such forces can be successfully resisted
- To be inspired with courage to face the trials ahead of us through God’s power and Spirit

DIRECT ATTACKS AND MALICE

- 1. What lay behind the attempts of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem to stop the work of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem? Nehemiah 6:1.**

“In this case a spirit of hatred and opposition to the Hebrews formed the bond of union and created a mutual sympathy among different bodies of men who might otherwise have warred with one another. This well

illustrates what we frequently witness in our days in the existing union of men of different denominations to oppose present truth, men whose only bind seems to be that which is dragonic in its motives manifesting bitterness and hatred against the remnant who keep the commandments of God.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 572.

“The wall about Jerusalem was rapidly approaching completion. When it should be finished and its gates set up, these enemies of Israel could not hope to force an entrance into the city. They were the more eager, therefore, to stop the work without further delay.” –*Prophets and Kings*, p. 653.

- 2. What stratagem did these foes use to try to lure Nehemiah away from his work? What did he reply to them? Nehemiah 6:2-4.**

- 3. When their first ploy wasn’t successful, what did Sanballat try next? Nehemiah 6:5-7.**

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

- 4. How did the Holy Spirit inspire Nehemiah to answer in a clear, straightforward manner? Nehemiah 6:8.**

- 5. And when another entrapment was planned–this time in the temple–how did Nehemiah see through the plot and refuse to be ensnared? Nehemiah 6:11-13.**

- 6. How did this man of God maintain such wonderful spiritual balance? Nehemiah 6:14.**

“Had Nehemiah followed this treacherous counsel, he would have sacrificed his faith in God, and in the eyes of the people he would have appeared cowardly and contemptible. In view of the important work that he had undertaken, and the confidence that he professed to have in the power of God, it would have been altogether inconsistent for him to hide as if in fear. The alarm would have spread among the people, each would have sought his own safety, and the city would have been left unprotected, to fall a prey to its enemies. That one unwise move on the part of Nehemiah would have been a virtual surrender of all that had been gained.

“Nehemiah was not long in penetrating the true character and object of his counselor. ‘I perceived that God had not sent him,’ he says, ‘but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.’

“The infamous counsel given by Shemaiah was seconded by more than one man of high reputation, who, while professing to be Nehemiah’s friends, were secretly in league with his enemies. But it was to no avail that they laid their snare. Nehemiah’s fearless answer was: ‘Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 655, 656.

TREACHEROUS FRIENDS

- 7. Less than two months after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, the wall was completed. But how did traitors within Judah now pose an even greater threat to God’s cause? Nehemiah 6:15-19.**

“When the poor and oppressed had appealed to Nehemiah for redress of their wrongs, he had stood boldly in their defense and had caused the wrongdoers to remove the reproach that rested on them. But the authority that he had exercised in behalf of his downtrodden countrymen he did not now exercise in his own behalf. His efforts had been met by some with ingratitude and treachery, but he did not use his power to bring the traitors to punishment. Calmly and unselfishly he went forward in his service for the people, never slackening his efforts or allowing his interest to grow less.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 658.

- 8. How does Satan work to destroy God’s people and work? Psalm 12:2.**

"Satan's assaults have ever been directed against those who have sought to advance the work and cause of God. Though often baffled, he as often renews his attacks with fresh vigor, using means hitherto untried. But it is his secret working through those who avow themselves the friends of God's work, that is most to be feared. Open opposition may be fierce and cruel, but it is fraught with far less peril to God's cause than is the secret enmity of those who, while professing to serve God, are at heart the servants of Satan. These have it in their power to place every advantage in the hands of those who will use their knowledge to hinder the work of God and injure His servants." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 658.

FIRMNESS TO PRINCIPLE

9. What principles are very important for us to learn from these incidents in the experience of Nehemiah? 1 Peter 3:15, 16.

"As the time of the end draws near, Satan's temptations will be brought to bear with greater power upon God's workers. He will employ human agents to mock and revile those who 'build the wall.' But should the builders come down to meet the attacks of their foes, this would but retard the work. They should endeavor to defeat the purposes of their adversaries, but they should not allow anything to call them from their work. Truth is stronger than error, and right will prevail over wrong.

"Neither should they allow their enemies to gain their friendship and sympathy, and thus lure them from their post of duty. He who by any unguarded act exposes the cause of God to reproach, or weakens the hands of his fellow workers, brings upon his own character a stain not easily removed, and places a serious obstacle in the way of his future usefulness....

"In Nehemiah's firm devotion to the work of God, and his equally firm reliance on God, lay the reason of the failure of his enemies to draw him into their power. The soul that is indolent falls an easy prey to temptation; but in the life that has a noble aim, an absorbing purpose, evil finds little foothold. The faith of him who is constantly advancing does not weaken; for above, beneath, beyond, he recognizes Infinite Love, working out all things to accomplish His good purpose. God's true servants work with a determination that will not fail because the throne of grace is their constant dependence.

"God has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. He provides opportunities and opens chan-

nels of working. If His people are watching the indications of His providence, and are ready to cooperate with Him, they will see mighty results.”
—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 659, 660.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- In reviewing my own experience, how have I met the temptations placed in my path?
 - Being willing to recognize and confess my own failings and sins of the past, especially those which may have undermined confidence in God and His work, how can I be truly loyal?
 - What steps do I need to take to make my service for God more effective than it has been in the past?
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8

Sabbath, May 25, 2002

Spiritual Renewal

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the completeness of God’s work of redemption
- To gain an appreciation of Nehemiah’s sacred mission as well as that of gospel ministers

ESTABLISHING ORDER AND RENEWED SPIRITUALITY

- 1. Once the wall was rebuilt around Jerusalem, what steps did Nehemiah take to bring order to the society? Nehemiah 7:1-5, 66-73.**
- 2. At the beginning of the seventh month of the Jewish year, it was time to celebrate the autumn festivals. How did the aged Ezra, the priests, and the Levites minister to the spiritual needs of the people? Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5, 6.**

3. Why was it necessary to put forth special care to explain the basic concepts? Nehemiah 8:6, 7.

“Through the intermarriage of the people with other nations, the Hebrew language had become corrupted, and great care was necessary on the part of the speakers to explain the law in the language of the people, that it might be understood by all. Certain of the priests and Levites united with Ezra in explaining the principles of the law.” –*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 661, 662.

SORROW OF HEART FOR SIN

4. When they heard the law, conviction gripped the people’s hearts and they cried because of their violations of it. But what did Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites instruct and encourage them to do? Nehemiah 8:9-12.

5. What spiritual cleansing did the people experience as they celebrated the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles? Nehemiah 8:17.

6. What occurred every day during this holy convocation? Nehemiah 8:18.

“As they had listened from day to day to the words of the law, the people had been convicted of their transgressions, and of the sins of their nation in past generations. They saw that it was because of a departure from God that His protecting care had been withdrawn and that the children of Abraham had been scattered in foreign lands, and they determined to seek His mercy and to pledge themselves to walk in His commandments. Before entering upon this solemn service, held on the second day after the close of the Feast of Tabernacles, they separated themselves from the heathen among them.

“As the people prostrated themselves before the Lord, confessing their sins and pleading for pardon, their leaders encouraged them to believe that God, according to His promise, heard their prayers. They must not only mourn and weep, and repent, but they must believe that God pardoned them. They must show their faith by recounting His mercies and praising Him for His goodness. ‘Stand up,’ said these teachers, ‘and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 665, 666.

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION PUT INTO ACTION

- 7. After they worshiped God, a prayer summarizing His leading Nehemiah 9:6-38) concluded with a solemn covenant, which was publicly signed by Nehemiah, the priests and the princes. Study this covenant, and list the areas of life covered by the principles which the people promised to observe. Nehemiah 10:28-39.**

“They had suffered punishment for their sins; now they acknowledged the justice of God’s dealings with them and pledged themselves to obey His law. And that this might be ‘a sure covenant,’ and be preserved in permanent form, as a memorial of the obligation they had taken upon themselves, it was written out, and the priests, Levites, and princes signed it. It was to serve as a reminder of duty and a barrier against temptation. The people took a solemn oath ‘to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes.’ The oath taken at this time included a promise not to intermarry with the people of the land.

“Before the day of fasting ended, the people still further manifested their determination to return to the Lord, by pledging themselves to cease from desecrating the Sabbath. Nehemiah did not at this time, as at a later date, exercise his authority to prevent heathen traders from coming into Jerusalem; but in an effort to save the people from yielding to temptation, he bound them, by a solemn covenant, not to transgress the Sabbath law by purchasing from these vendors, hoping that this would discourage the traders and put an end to the traffic.

“Provision was also made to support the public worship of God.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 666, 667.

- 8. Explain the steps of conversion, by which the Holy Spirit leads the soul back to harmony with the God of heaven. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16.**

“Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. He sees himself condemned as a transgressor. But he is not, because of this, to give way to despair; for his pardon has already been secured. He may rejoice in the sense of sins forgiven, in the love of a pardoning heavenly Father. It is God’s glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 668.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- As evidenced in the work of Nehemiah and also that of Christ, what physical healing or change of circumstances must often precede spiritual healing or progress?
 - What is still lacking in my personal conversion?
 - What is the Holy Spirit convicting me to do to help bring about spiritual renewal in myself and within my circle of influence?
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Unholy Alliances

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the height of spiritual blessing God wants us to reach
- To see how that blessing is threatened by improper relationships
- To grasp how influences from the world affect our spirituality

Nehemiah 11 and 12:1-26 list the names of family heads and Levites who bore responsibilities in Jerusalem; the rest of the people resided in the surrounding cities of Judah. Those who served in Jerusalem were considered as bringing special service and sacrifice for the Lord. Nehemiah 11:2.

PRAISE AND GLORY TO GOD

1. **In Nehemiah 12:27-43 is a description of the inspiring service conducted to dedicate the wall that had been rebuilt around Jerusalem. According to Verse 43, how great and impressive were the celebration and rejoicing for God's honor?**
2. **That was a glorious, memorable moment in Israel's history. However, what far more glorious event may we have the opportunity to experience? Revelation 5:12, 13.**

"Through trials and persecution, the glory-character-of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. They walk in narrow paths on earth; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. They follow Christ through sore conflicts; they endure self-denial and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence.

Being partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory. In holy vision the prophet saw the triumph of the people of God. He says, 'I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory,... stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,...'” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 31.

3. **What else was dedicated and set in place? Nehemiah 12:44-47.**

4. **After the Jews read in the book of Moses about prohibitions concerning the Ammonites and Moabites (Deuteronomy 23:3-6), what decisive action did they take? Nehemiah 13:1-3.**

SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE AND NEGLECT

5. **Nevertheless, what relationship had Eliashib the high priest (whom one should have been able to trust as the highest spiritual leader) developed with Tobiah, Israel's proven enemy? Nehemiah 13:4.**

“Through intermarriage, a friendship had been brought about between Eliashib the high priest and Tobiah the Ammonite, Israel's bitter enemy.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 669.

6. **During Nehemiah's twelve-year absence from Jerusalem, what had the high priest permitted, and why was this considered so offensive? Nehemiah 13:5.**

“Because of the cruelty and treachery of the Ammonites and Moabites toward Israel, God had declared through Moses that they should be forever shut out from the congregation of His people. See Deuteronomy

23:3-6. In defiance of this word, the high priest had cast out the offerings stored in the chamber of God's house, to make a place for this representative of a proscribed race. Greater contempt for God could not have been shown than to confer such a favor on this enemy of God and His truth.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 669, 670.

7. **What action did Nehemiah immediately take upon his return to Jerusalem? Nehemiah 13:6-9.**

8. **Why did God forbid alliances (marital, political, or commercial) between His people and the heathen (those who do not worship Him in spirit and truth)? 2 Corinthians 6:17.**

“Solomon flattered himself that his wisdom and the power of his example would lead his wives from idolatry to the worship of the true God, and also that the alliances thus formed would draw the nations round about into close touch with Israel. Vain hope! Solomon's mistake in regarding himself as strong enough to resist the influence of heathen associates was fatal. And fatal, too, the deception that led him to hope that notwithstanding a disregard of God's law on his part, others might be led to revere and obey its sacred precepts.” —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 192.

“The alliances made by the Israelites with their heathen neighbors resulted in the loss of their identity as God's peculiar people. They became leavened by the evil practices of those with whom they formed forbidden alliances. Affiliation with worldlings caused them to lose their first love, and their zeal for God's service. The advantages they sold themselves to gain, brought only disappointment, and caused the loss of many souls.” —*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1155.

“Satan is moving with his power from beneath to inspire men to form alliances and confederacies of evil against light and against the Word of God. Infidelity, papacy, and semi-papacy are coming in close and powerful companionship with professed Christianity. The low views of inspiration, the exalting of human ideas from men called wise, are placing human talent above the divine wisdom and forms, and science so-called above the power of vital godliness. These are the signs of the last days. Let every one who believes in Jesus Christ ... use his talent of voice in exalting Jesus and presenting testimonies that will magnify, honor, and adore the Word of God.... The gospel makes itself known in its power in the consis-

tent, holy, pure lives of those who are believers, hearers, and doers of the Word.” —*That I May Know Him*, p. 345.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- What will make my faith strong so I can discern between that which is holy and that which is unholy?
 - How convinced am I that obedience is the road to happiness?
 - Why are unholy alliances formed still today?
 - Why do such alliances make people spiritually blind?
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10

Sabbath, June 8, 2002

Causes and Results of Financial Unfaithfulness

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the relationship between spirituality and financial management
- To encourage faithfulness by financial officers of the church
- To recognize how God’s blessings are dependent on good stewardship

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. In addition to the storage place for the temple treasures, tithes, and offerings being taken over by God’s enemy, what else had happened to the financial resources intended for divine service? Nehemiah 13:10.**
- 2. The management of sacred financial resources is a gauge of faith and spiritual health. What are generally the reasons why tithes and offerings are carelessly handled or used for improper purposes? 1 Timothy 6:8-11.**

“There are dishonest men in our churches, there are licentious men. There is declension in the place of constant advancement to a higher, holier standard. And there is little proper labor done by the ministers in the churches because many do not carry the burden of the souls for whom they labor. The truth has not sanctified their own hearts. O, there is need of most earnest, devoted, self-sacrificing labor—the preaching of the truth, preaching Christ, and living Christ. O that all our workers would be laborers together with God, not trifling with time, not trifling with sacred responsibilities, but representing Christ in all things, watching for souls as they that must give an account; day by day, hour by hour, living in the channel of light: In the churches, and among the people, in cities and villages, diffusing the light received from the Sun of Righteousness. In order to do this, they must devote much time to prayer. Brethren, be instant in prayer.... When the workers are thus connected with God, there will be continual growth in every church.

“Then the finances will be in a prosperous condition. Now the books of heaven bear the record of robbery toward God in a large degree in tithes and offerings. Men who have been pioneers in the work are becoming disheartened, but they ought not to be. Jesus is their example; of Him it is written, ‘He shall not fail nor be discouraged.’ For all who are disheartened there is but one remedy—faith, work, and prayer. Cease to think gloomy thoughts. Let every member fall on the rock, Christ Jesus, and be broken. Then Jesus will fashion the character after His own likeness.” —*Special Testimonies*, Series A01B, pp. 25, 26.

3. When means given to the treasury are not properly managed, what can happen to the members’ spirituality and generosity? Hosea 4:9, 10.

“Not only had the temple been profaned, but the offerings had been misapplied. This had tended to discourage the liberalities of the people. They had lost their zeal and fervor, and were reluctant to pay their tithes. The treasuries of the Lord’s house were poorly supplied; many of the singers and others employed in the temple service, not receiving sufficient support, had left the work of God to labor elsewhere.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 670.

4. How extensive are the responsibilities of church, field, union, and General Conference treasurers and committees in handling the sacred funds?

“More and more we must come to realize that the means that comes into the conference in the tithes and gifts of our people should be used for the support of the work not only in the American cities, but also in foreign fields. Let the means so zealously collected be unselfishly distributed. Those who realize the needs of mission fields will not be tempted to use the tithe for that which is not necessary. All may be tempted to be selfish in the use of their means, but they will gain strength to resist these temptations as they study the needs of the fields that have little labor given them. My brethren, let your means be freely given, and the Lord will bless your offerings. God is looking for these offerings, and angels of God are impressing the hearts of those for whose sake they are given.”
—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 192.

5. On the other hand, what are the sad results of unfaithfulness in the giving of tithes and offerings? Malachi 3:8, 9.

FAITHFULNESS AND JOY IN GIVING

6. What is experienced by all who systematically trust God and give tithes and offerings, according to the divine plan, as God has blessed them? Malachi 3:10-12. Therefore, what solemn obligation rests upon the church leaders so that the people do not lose Heaven’s blessings? If they neglect their duty, what must the church do?

“Those who hold positions of trust in the church should not be negligent, but they should see that the members are faithful in performing this duty.... Let the elders and officers of the church follow the direction of the Sacred Word, and urge upon their members the necessity of faithfulness in the payment of pledges, tithes, and offerings.” —(*Review and Herald*, December 17, 1889.)

“Let the church appoint pastors or elders who are devoted to the Lord Jesus, and let these men see that officers are chosen who will attend faithfully to the work of gathering in the tithe. If the pastors show that they are not fitted for their charge, if they fail to set before the church the importance of returning to God His own, if they do not see to it that the officers under them are faithful, and that the tithe is brought in, they are in peril. They are neglecting a matter which involves a blessing or a curse to the church. They should be relieved of their responsibility, and other

men should be tested and tried.”—(*Review and Herald*, December 1, 1896) *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 106, 107.

7. How does the giving of tithes and offerings constitute a wonderful partnership between the individual believer and the Creator, as shown in the covenant Jacob made with God? Genesis 28:18-22.

“God has given special direction as to the use to which the tithe should be devoted. He does not design that His work shall be crippled for want of means. That there may be no haphazard work and no error, He has made our duty on all these points very plain. The portion that God has reserved for Himself is not to be diverted to any other purpose than that which He has specified. Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in any emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work. God has shown honor to men in taking them into partnership with Himself in the great work of redemption. He expects His agents to labor, not against Him, but in unison with Him, that His treasury may be supplied.”—*Review and Herald*, November 10, 1896.

8. How did Nehemiah rectify the administrative problems, and how did the believers—“all Judah”—respond when the changes were made? Nehemiah 13:11-13.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- Why is it so important for every believer, without exception, to be conscientious in financial matters?
- The Lord has entrusted me with certain material goods; how exact am I in returning to Him that portion which He claims as His for the advancement of His kingdom on earth?
- What relationship do I see between my own stewardship practices and the blessings the church is or is not receiving?
- How can I and my fellow believers be of assistance to those who may not be faithful in giving tithes and offerings?

Restoring Sabbath Sacredness

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the importance of the holy Sabbath
- To obtain a new sense of our mission in relation to God's holy day
- To resolve to work with sinners and unbelievers in a firm but kind, loving, helpful manner

OPEN TRANSGRESSION OF GOD'S LAW AND ITS CAUSE

- 1. What sacred obligation did Nehemiah see was not being kept by many Jews in Jerusalem? What was the primary cause of this transgression? Exodus 20:8-11; Nehemiah 13:15.**

"Another result of intercourse with idolaters was a disregard of the Sabbath, the sign distinguishing the Israelites from all other nations as worshipers of the true God. Nehemiah found that heathen merchants and traders from the surrounding country, coming to Jerusalem, had induced many among the Israelites to engage in traffic on the Sabbath. There were some who could not be persuaded to sacrifice principle, but others transgressed and joined with the heathen in their efforts to overcome the scruples of the more conscientious. Many dared openly to violate the Sabbath....

"This state of things might have been prevented had the rulers exercised their authority; but a desire to advance their own interests had led them to favor the ungodly." *—Prophets and Kings*, p. 671.

- 2. What was another side to this difficulty? Nehemiah 13:16.**

- 3. How did Nehemiah reason with the believers concerning the violation of the holy Sabbath? Nehemiah 13:17, 18.**

- 4. How carefully are ministers to work with sinners? 2 Kings 17:13; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19.**

“Ministers of present truth, while they bear a pointed testimony, reproving individual wrongs and seeking to tear away the idols from the camp of Israel, should manifest forbearance. They should preach the truth in its solemnity and importance, and if this finds its way to the heart it will accomplish that for the receiver which nothing else can. But if the truth spoken in the demonstration of the Spirit does not cut away the idols, it will be of no avail to denounce and bear down upon the individual. It may appear that some are joined to their idols, yet I saw that we should be very reluctant to give up the poor, deceived ones. We should ever bear in mind that we are all erring mortals, and that Christ exercises much pity for our weakness, and loves us although we err.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 383.

FIRM, DECISIVE ACTION

- 5. What additional measures did Nehemiah take to make sure that the believers would not be constantly placed under temptation to violate the Sabbath? Nehemiah 13:19-22.**

- 6. Even though we may not be physically engaged in commerce on the holy Sabbath day, how may we violate the fourth commandment today just as openly as did the Jews in Nehemiah’s time? Isaiah 58:13, 14.**

“God requires not only that we refrain from physical labor upon the Sabbath, but that the mind be disciplined to dwell upon sacred themes.

The Fourth Commandment is virtually transgressed by conversing upon worldly things or by engaging in light and trifling conversation. Talking upon anything or everything which may come into the mind is speaking our own words. Every deviation from right brings us into bondage and condemnation.”—*Child Guidance*, pp. 529, 530.

“Christians are elevated in their conversation; and although they believe it to be sin to condescend to foolish flattery, they are courteous, kind and benevolent. Their words are those of sincerity and truth. They are faithful in their deal with their brethren and with the world. In their dress they avoid superfluity and display; but their clothing will be neat, not gaudy, modest, and arranged upon the person with order and taste. Especial care will be taken to dress in a manner that will show a sacred regard for the holy Sabbath and the worship of God.”—*Messages to Young People*, p. 349.

PRESERVING A SENSE OF THE SACRED

- 7. How will the Holy Spirit make us overcomers if we love God, demonstrated by our willingness to sacrifice our own self-interest to honor Him and maintain a sense of that which is sacred? Isaiah 30:21; John 10:27.**

- 8. In our ministry to unbelievers, how careful should we be to preserve the importance of the Sabbath? Isaiah 56:2. What other principles are also very important?**

“Let our people beware of belittling the importance of the Sabbath, in order to link up with unbelievers. Let them beware of departing from the principles of our faith, making it appear that it is not wrong to conform to the world. Let them be afraid of heeding the counsel of any man, whatever his position may be, who works counter to that which God has wrought in order to keep His people separate from the world.

“The Lord is testing His people to see who will be loyal to the principles of His truth. Our work is to proclaim to the world the first, second, and third angels’ messages. In the discharge of our duties we are neither to despise nor to fear our enemies. To bind ourselves up by contracts with those not of our faith is not in the order of God. We are to treat with kindness and courtesy those who refuse to be loyal to God, but we are never, never to unite with them in counsel regarding the vital interests of His

work. Putting our trust in God, we are to move steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, in humble dependence upon Him, committing to His providence ourselves and all that concerns our present and future, holding the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end, remembering that we receive the blessings of Heaven, not because of our worthiness, but because of Christ's worthiness and our acceptance, through faith in Him, of God's abounding grace." *—Counsels on Health*, pp. 237, 238.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- Why is a commitment to keeping the Sabbath day holy critical to our salvation?
 - Christians should have a deep sense of caring about one another's souls; how does our example in preserving Sabbath sacredness show that we love one other?
 - What areas of Sabbath observance do I need to improve?
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12

Sabbath, June 22, 2002

More Unholy Alliances

OBJECTIVES

- To realize the terrible consequences for the church caused by marriage with unbelievers
- To understand that God's warnings are meant to safeguard His people
- To encourage reformation wherever it is necessary

HEATHEN INFLUENCES AND CHURCH PROBLEMS

- 1. With what additional area of difficulty was Nehemiah confronted? Nehemiah 13:23.**

- 2. What was generally the result of marriage between believers and unbelievers? Judges 3:6, 7.**
- 3. In this case, what had resulted for the children of such marriages? Nehemiah 13:24.**
- 4. What measures did Nehemiah take to correct the situation? Nehemiah 13:25.**

“These unlawful alliances were causing great confusion in Israel; for some who entered into them were men in high position, rulers to whom the people had a right to look for counsel and a safe example. Foreseeing the ruin before the nation if this evil were allowed to continue, Nehemiah reasoned earnestly with the wrongdoers.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 673.

- 5. Why were these intermarriages with the heathen considered such a serious offense? Nehemiah 13:26, 27.**

“Pointing to the case of Solomon, he reminded them that among all the nations there had risen no king like this man, to whom God had given great wisdom; yet idolatrous women had turned his heart from God, and his example had corrupted Israel.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 673.

DECIDED REFORMATION, BUT REMAINING HINDRANCES

- 6. As had occurred under Ezra (Ezra 10:17), what reformation were the people ready to implement?**

“As he set before them God's commands and threatenings, and the fearful judgments visited on Israel in the past for this very sin, their consciences were aroused, and a work of reformation was begun that turned away God's threatened anger and brought His approval and blessings.

“There were some in sacred office who pleaded for their heathen wives, declaring that they could not bring themselves to separate from

them. But no distinction was made; no respect was shown for rank or position. Whoever among the priests or rulers refused to sever his connection with idolaters was immediately separated from the service of the Lord. A grandson of the high priest, having married a daughter of the notorious Sanballat, was not only removed from office, but promptly banished from Israel.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 673, 674.

7. Nevertheless, what influence continued to be a hindrance for Israel in succeeding generations?

“Many who had married idolaters chose to go with them into exile, and these, with those who had been expelled from the congregation, joined the Samaritans. Hither some who had occupied high positions in the work of God found their way and after a time cast in their lot fully with them. Desiring to strengthen this alliance, the Samaritans promised to adopt more fully the Jewish faith and customs, and the apostates, determined to outdo their former brethren, erected a temple on Mount Gerizim in opposition to the house of God at Jerusalem. Their religion continued to be a mixture of Judaism and heathenism, and their claim to be the people of God was the source of schism, emulation, and enmity between the two nations, from generation to generation.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 674, 675.

8. How do similar difficulties threaten God’s church today, just as in the days of Joshua and Nehemiah? Joshua 23:11-13.

“One of the greatest dangers that besets the people of God today, is that of association with the ungodly; especially in uniting themselves in marriage with unbelievers. With many, the love for the human eclipses the love for the divine. They take the first step in backsliding by venturing to disregard the Lord’s express command; and complete apostasy is too often the result. It has ever proved a dangerous thing for men to carry out their own will in opposition to the requirements of God. Yet it is a hard lesson for men to learn that God means what He says.

“As a rule, those who choose for their friends and companions, persons who reject Christ and trample upon God’s law, eventually become of the same mind and spirit. We should ever feel a deep interest in the salvation of the impenitent, and should manifest toward them a spirit of kindness and courtesy; but we can safely choose for our friends only those who are the friends of God.”—(*Signs of the Times*, May 19, 1881) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1000.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- What type of influence do I exert within my circle of acquaintances?
 - Do the relationships I have chosen and formed lead me closer to God or further from Him?
 - The relationship between Christ and the church is described as a marriage. Why?
 - Why does keeping God in first place in my life include helping others and leading to Christ those who do not know Him?
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*Please read the Missionary Report from India
on page 51*

13

Sabbath, June 29, 2002

Reformation and Restoration

OBJECTIVES

- To understand that the individual, the local church, and the entire organization need to be in a constant process of reforming
- To encourage, inspire, and help one another in spiritual growth
- To help each individual participate in advancing God's kingdom and thus share in the Saviour's eternal joy

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR HIS PEOPLE

- 1. When both Ezra and Nehemiah were ministering to the people who had returned to their homeland from captivity in Babylon, what was their constant aim? Jeremiah 27:22; Ezra 1:2, 3, 5; Nehemiah 2:5.**

2. What was God's purpose in establishing Israel as a nation? Genesis 26:4, 5; Psalm 36:5-9; Galatians 3:8, 16; Philippians 2:15.

"Through the chosen nation, God had purposed to bring blessing to all mankind. 'The vineyard of the Lord of hosts,' the prophet declared, 'is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant.' Isaiah 5:7.

"To this people were committed the oracles of God. They were hedged about by the precepts of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience to these principles was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices. And as the tower in the vineyard, God placed in the midst of the land His holy temple....

"It was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live. All who, like Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 17-19.

3. But human nature being what it is, and with the wicked one constantly enticing, forcing, and deceiving people, what did God have to say about Israel? Isaiah 5:1, 2.

4. What grief was often suffered by those who sacrificed personal interest and devoted every effort to withstand the attacks of open enemies and draw the people back from a course which would end in their perdition? Nehemiah 4:4; 5:19; 13:14, 22, 29.

"How much anguish of soul this needed severity cost the faithful worker for God the judgment alone will reveal. There was a constant struggle with opposing elements, and only by fasting, humiliation, and prayer was advancement made."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 674.

5. What call should constantly sound in our ears? Ezekiel 18:30-32.

“The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth's history. The remnant of Israel were a feeble people, exposed to the ravages of their enemies; but through them God purposed to preserve in the earth a knowledge of Himself and of His law. They were the guardians of the true worship, the keepers of the holy oracles. Varied were the experiences that came to them as they rebuilt the temple and the wall of Jerusalem; strong was the opposition that they had to meet. Heavy were the burdens borne by the leaders in this work; but these men moved forward in unwavering confidence, in humility of spirit, and in firm reliance upon God, believing that He would cause His truth to triumph.” *—Prophets and Kings*, p. 677.

6. How are reformation and restoration brought about? Exodus 34:6, 7; 1 John 1:9.

“In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, nor shrink from vindicating the honor of God. Those upon whom rests the burden of this work will not hold their peace when wrong is done, neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. They will remember that God is no respecter of persons, and that severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed.” *—Prophets and Kings*, p. 675.

7. What has always made and will always continue to make the work of reformation especially difficult? Nehemiah 13:29.

“That which made their work most difficult was not the open hostility of the heathen, but the secret opposition of pretended friends, who, by

lending their influence to the service of evil, increased tenfold the burden God's servants. These traitors furnished the Lord's enemies with material to use in their warfare upon His people. Their evil passions and rebellious wills were ever at war with the plain requirements of God."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 675.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

8. How do reformers see themselves in relation to the people? Daniel 9:5, 6.

"In their work, Ezra and Nehemiah humbled themselves before God, confessing their sins and the sins of their people, and entreating pardon as if they themselves were the offenders."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 675.

9. What is the secret of success for every child of God—every reformer? Ephesians 6:18.

"Patiently they toiled and prayed and suffered....

"The success attending Nehemiah's efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish....

"God's remnant people, standing before the world as reformers, are to show that the law of God is the foundation of all enduring reform and that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is to stand as a memorial of creation, a constant reminder of the power of God. In clear, distinct lines they are to present the necessity of obedience to all the precepts of the Decalogue. Constrained by the love of Christ, they are to cooperate with Him in building up the waste places."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 675, 678.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- The church carries the name "Reform Movement"; do I constantly, conscientiously accept the responsibility for reforming myself—or, said another way, for my growth in grace?
 - In what ways am I or am I not supporting those who are laboring to bring about reformation?
 - When will the time come that reformation is no longer needed?
 - How are a close walk with Jesus and reformation connected?
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Missionary Report from India

To be read Sabbath, June 29, 2002

**The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, July 6, 2002**

India is a large country in southern Asia, bordering Pakistan on the west, China, Nepal and Bhutan on the north, and Myanmar and Bangladesh on the east. Its population is now almost one billion, second to China. The population density is 805 people per square mile. Hindu [Hindi?] is the official language, and English is the second official language. However, there are actually 845 different languages and major dialects in the country, 14 of which are important enough to be mentioned in the national constitution. The chief religions are Hinduism (80%) and Islam (14%). Christians constitute some 15-20 million people, most of them Roman Catholic. India has one of the oldest civilizations in the world. It became a self-governing member of the British Commonwealth in 1947 and a democratic republic in January 1950.

Christianity was introduced into India by the apostle Thomas, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. According to a South Indian tradition, he founded Christian churches in Malabar (on the southwest coast) and then crossed to Mylapur, which is today a suburb of Madras; he is supposed to have suffered martyrdom and been buried in southern India. In 1547, a memorial to his martyrdom was rebuilt by the Portuguese and now stands on Mount Saint Thomas.

Early Christian missions were established by the Portuguese, who sent Catholic missionaries to India in the sixteenth century; and in the seventeenth century, Denmark sent Protestant missionaries there. In the early eighteenth century, two missionaries from Germany succeeded in learning the Tamil language and translated the entire New Testament and part of the Old Testament into Tamil. This was the first translation of the Bible into one of the many Indian languages.

The best-known missionary in southern India in the eighteenth century was Christian Frederick Schwartz. During a period of 34 years, a Baptist missionary from England, William Carey, worked with his helpers to translate the Bible into 40 Indian languages and dialects.

The Seventh-day Adventist message first reached this populous country in 1890, and a mission was established despite strong opposition from Hindus and Muslims. The message of the International Missionary Society entered India in 1974 and has spread primarily throughout the southern part of the country. According to the report of May 29, 2001, there are 25 organized churches with 417 members (some are isolated souls).

Quite a number of dedicated missionaries have made great sacrifices to help spread the gospel in various parts of this large country. Most of the churches and members are in the south. There are also some young brothers who wish to attend a missionary school to prepare for service. There are places in the north that have not yet been evangelized by the workers of the Reform Movement.

Both older and younger members enjoy studying the Sabbath School Lessons and read our periodicals and religious literature to learn about the truth for this time, in harmony with all the believers all over the world. Ministers and Bible workers have also been supplied with the 3-volume Spirit of Prophecy sets, containing the books of Sister Ellen G. White.

The greatest need in this field has always been to erect places for worship, to establish their own headquarters, and to support the missionary work. It is not possible for them to accomplish this with their own means because of the extreme poverty. Therefore, we appeal to the members around the world to donate generously for the Special Sabbath School for the Indian Field. May the Spirit of God move the hearts of all the believers to support this work.

—Branko Cholich
General Conference Regional Representative