

Sabbath Reforms

Key Verse: *“I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.”*
—**Nehemiah 13:22**

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 13:15-22

allowed Tobiah, an Ammonite, to have a dwelling place inside the Temple courts. Tobiah previously had attempted to thwart Nehemiah’s work in rebuilding the wall around the city. Nehemiah rectified the situation by removing Tobiah’s goods and ceremonially cleansing the rooms he had occupied so that they could be properly put to use as storerooms for the sacred items of the Temple.—vss. 4-9

Additionally, Nehemiah rebuked the people for neglecting the Levites, who had to abandon their spiritual

UPON READING FROM THE

Law of Moses it was discovered that the Ammonites and Moabites were prohibited from participating in the spiritual life and worship of the people of Israel. (Deut. 23:3,4) Accordingly, as foreigners who had not entered into a covenant relationship with God, they were excluded from recognition as part of the Jewish community.—Neh. 13:1-3

Sometime after the remarkable spiritual revival cited in our previous lesson, Nehemiah returned to his duties in the Persian court. Later, however, he returned to Jerusalem and found that Eliashib the priest

services associated with the Temple in order to provide for their own temporal needs. As a result of Nehemiah's actions, the practice of tithing was reinstated to support the Levites, so that they could once again minister to the spiritual needs of the Israelites.—vss. 10-13

Nehemiah also observed that the Sabbath was being violated. Foreign merchants were selling goods, and the Jews were also engaged in commercial activities on that sacred day. (vss. 15-21) Our Key Verse underscores Nehemiah's corrective action in this matter by commanding the Levites to cleanse themselves and secure the city gates against those alien merchants in order to put an end to profaning the Sabbath.

Beginning at the time of his First Advent, Christ magnified the Law and made clear God's true intent in providing the Sabbath ordinance. Jesus was offering more than just a day of rest from physical toil for his followers. He was proposing a rest of faith to those burdened with the weight of the Law and of the sin inherited from Adam. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) Each true follower of Christ, in proportion to his or her knowledge and faith, will have rest. The perfect Sabbath rest comes when, as believers, we consecrate our all to God, accepting joyfully his promised guidance through a "narrow way" which leads to kingdom honors and blessings. Thus we rest from our own works and efforts to justify ourselves. We acknowledge ourselves to be imperfect, in need of divine grace, and gratefully accept God's mercy extended toward us through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a blessing it will be for all who have ever lived to realize the depth and benefits of God's provision for Sabbath-keeping, now by faithful believers, and during the Millennial kingdom by all who shall come to know and love our sovereign Creator. ■