



## 2019 Q4 Ezra and Nehemiah: Lesson 11

### Backslidden People

by Tim Jennings (announcements last page)

#### SABBATH

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Read memory text: “And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!” Neh 13:22 NKJV

In Bible symbolism, who do the Levites represent? The priesthood of believers.

What would cleansing themselves represent? The transformation of character and healing of heart when we are washed by the Holy Spirit.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7 NIV84

What do you hear in this passage? What is the washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit?

From *The Remedy*:

But when our God and Savior appeared with the kindness and love of God,<sup>5</sup> he healed us — he procured the Remedy. We could not do it ourselves, neither have we contributed anything to the cure. He did it because of his compassion. He heals us through the work of the Holy Spirit who cleanses our hearts and minds<sup>6</sup> by taking what Christ achieved and generously reproducing it into us,<sup>7</sup> so that — having been regenerated to be right in heart by the Remedy Christ achieved — we actually receive eternal life.

Consider this description of what the Holy Spirit does, from the book *The Desire of Ages*:

The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father **for the exaltation of His people**. The Spirit was to be given as a **regenerating agent**, and **without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail**. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead**, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. **It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.** Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all



hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.  
DA 671.2

Do you see why Satan attacks the idea of the Trinity and puts forth arguments that there is no Holy Spirit?

- Satan opposed the Father in heaven, trying to make it appear the Father was untrustworthy by attacking the position of Jesus. But He failed in His attack against the Father and was cast out of heaven.
- Satan deceived humankind and then tried to obstruct Jesus from coming as our Messiah, and when that didn't work and Jesus was born to Mary Satan worked to try and prevent Jesus from developing a perfect sinless humanity—but that failed.
- Now Satan works to oppose the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit to get people to deny His existence and to prevent the Holy Spirit from applying the victory of Christ into the hearts of humans.

I believe this is one of the great purposes of Islam—its core teaching is to deny the Trinity and thus to misrepresent the character of God as authoritarian and legal, a rules-oriented, work-demanding god that uses his power to inflict punishment on the wicked.

Love is outward moving, other-centered and giving. This is how love functions. The minimum number for truly other-centered love is three. In a two-party relationship one can have self-centered worship and reinforcement of narcissism. But, with three, truly other-centered self-sacrificial love is required.

And we see this in how the Godhead functions. The Father gives His power and authority to Jesus who uses it to reveal love and give all the glory back to the Father and the Spirit works to glorify the work of the Son bringing greater glory to the Father.

The God that Jesus reveals is love. And true Christians are those who love like God loves, we love all people from all cultures and all races. But loving all people means we DON'T collude with their destruction. We speak the truth in love and we make it clear love doesn't change reality.

- Love for a smoker doesn't make smoking healthy—the laws of health are being violated and loving that person doesn't change the damaging results
- Love for a person who has multiple sexual partners doesn't make them mature, their characters develop, or them to avoid the destructive results—the law of love as well as health are being violated and loving them doesn't change the damaging results
- Love for people who worship false gods doesn't make their minds and hearts grow into godliness—the law of worship is being violated and loving them doesn't change the damaging results



So, first point is that the Levites are to cleanse themselves by surrendering to God for the washing of their hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit, which means the truth washing away lies and love washing away selfishness and we partake of the divine nature and character of Christ.

What is it to guard the gates? Gates represent entry points—Jesus is the gate into the sheep pen, the way of life. Guarding the gates represents guarding the truth about God as revealed throughout all history, in Scripture, in science and nature, and in experiences of life. We are to guard the truth, the gates to keep open the way into the city for all who want to enter via Christ.

What does sanctify the Sabbath represent? It is stated in other versions as keeping the Sabbath holy. What does this mean?

Who made the Sabbath holy? Can we change that? Can we do anything to make it more holy? Can we do anything to make it less holy? So does our conduct in relation to the Sabbath do anything to the Sabbath? Does it have any impact on us?

What is the purpose of the Sabbath? It was made for man—for what purpose? Is it related to our holiness, to God making us holy?

“You must **observe** my Sabbaths. This will be a **sign** between me and you for the generations to come, **so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.**” Exodus 31:13 NIV84

And what does it mean to be holy?

Would holiness be purity or unity with God? And would such purity or unity with God mean we are living in harmony with all His laws?

And what kind of laws are God’s laws? Design laws and thus, what is the result of having God’s laws written on our heart and living in harmony with them? Healthiness, mentally, physically, relationally, spiritually.

Is this possible without trust in God? And is trust something we must exercise? Would the Sabbath be a gift from God not only for our rest, our time to decompress, rejuvenate from the stresses of the world, but a time to exercise trust in God—trusting Him with our lives, our work, or businesses etc. while we rest? Would it be a time to celebrate, to give thanks, to rejoice in the Lord?

Is the Sabbath also evidence of God’s character of love, how He is Creator who built all things to operate upon design law—He presents truth, in love and leaves us free? And if we are true Sabbath keepers do we live God’s principles only one day in seven or all week long?

So, those who are the priesthood of believers are to be cleansed in heart and mind by the Holy Spirit, guard the avenues or gates of truth leading people back to the knowledge of God as revealed by Jesus, and keep themselves holy by trusting God with their entire lives, resting in Him on Sabbath and living out the principles which the Sabbath embodies (truth, love and freedom) all week long.



## SUNDAY

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Read first paragraph, “Nehemiah 13 begins with concern...” This is an excellent point and needs to be emphasized—God is not a racist nor does he give preference to people based on race, color of skin, or genetics—it is all about character. It is all about reality—separating lies from truth, destructive elements from healing elements, disease from health. Therefore, any person from any genetic background who would embrace the truth about God and is willing to be converted in heart to live God’s principles is welcomed into God’s kingdom and was welcomed into ancient Israel.

But those who refused God and instead chose to keep their own systems and rules and methods and gods were not welcomed into Israel and are not welcomed into God’s kingdom—why not. Because God’s kingdom is built on design law and those who refuse it cannot live there.

The lesson describes corruption in leadership and how the High Priest allowed one of the enemies of Israel to have a room in the Temple as permanent residence.

What is the object lesson for us today?

What is the core difference between God’s government and the governments of the world? God’s law and what type of law is God’s law? Design law but the laws of human governments are imposed rules.

What might it look like to let the leaders of the world into the church? Might it look like accepting the view that God’s laws work like human laws and the church begins to present God as the source of inflicted pain, suffering and death?

The lesson just pointed out that the Israelites were to separate from idolaters—what makes one an idolater?

One of the founders of the SDA church wrote:

**Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal.** Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His Word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place? God is a God of truth. Justice and mercy are the attributes of His throne. He is a God of love, of pity and tender compassion. Thus He is represented in His Son, our Saviour. He is a God of patience and long-suffering. If such is the being whom we adore and to whose character we are seeking to assimilate, we are worshipping the true God. {FLB 59.8}

Could Christianity be suffering because many of its leaders have accepted false attributes of God and are leading people to worship a concept of God that is no different than Baal?

And we are to be the Levites of God today, who are cleansed in heart and mind from the lies about God and the fear-driven self-centered motives, build the walls of protection by reestablishing the truth



about God's design laws, guard the gates of truth of God's character as revealed by Jesus, and promote the truth about the Sabbath as a gift from God to assist in His restoring us to holiness.

Read bottom pink section, "Why do God's people..." Why do so many allow themselves to be led into false belief systems?

- Could we have a problem with people not thinking for themselves?
- Could we have a problem with people being indoctrinated into systems of belief, but without knowing why they are to believe it?
- Could we have a problem with people trusting others to do their thinking for them?
- Could we have a problem with fear motivating beliefs?
- Could we have a problem with authoritarianism—believing people in positions of authority have the right to tell us what to believe?
- Could we have a problem with group-think, going along with the crowd?

What is the solution? Romans 14:5 "let every person be fully persuaded in their own mind." Heb 5:14 the mature are those who have developed by practice the ability to discern right from wrong.

## **MONDAY**

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The lesson points out that people stopped giving tithes and offerings to support the Temple. Why?

Read second paragraph, "Not only had the temple..." What is the reason cited here that the people stopped giving tithes and offerings?

Was it because the people didn't want to support God's cause?

Was it because those who received the money were misusing it and not applying it to God's cause?

Were the people wrong for not giving their money to those who would misuse it?

What about today? Should people blindly give their tithes and offerings or should they consider to whom they are giving it and how it is being used?

Read the third paragraph, "It is fascinating..." What is the object lesson application? Could it suggest that Christians might find themselves in churches in which leadership has joined with the teachings of the world, accepting the lie that God's law is like human law, and thereby teaching lies about God and obstructing God's plan to cleanse the true Temple, the Spirit temple from sinfulness?

And could it mean that from the membership people will need to arise and follow God and not wait for their church leaders to embrace the truth because many of them have rejected the truth?

## **TUESDAY**

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Read the third paragraph, "When God calls..." Is it wrong to return the tithe to the Lord? Absolutely not!



But could the reason we return the tithe to the Lord have a different impact upon us?

If we return tithe to the Lord because He has commanded it and if we don't He will punish us—what level of development is this and what impact does it have upon us?

Does God want us to function like mindless slaves, God commanded it we do it without thinking or out of fear of punishment?

Is the tithe a heavenly tax, no different than how human governments work?

No! God does not *need* our money. He is Creator, Jesus had Peter get money out of a fish's mouth.

Then, why does God claim a tenth of our increase? What is going on?

It is for our relationship with God, our trust in Him, an opportunity not to give thanks—that is a thank offering—it is an opportunity for each of us to exercise our integrity, loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness in returning to God what is God's and not keeping it for ourselves.

What happens within us when we are honest, loyal, faithful? Conversely, what happens within us when we lie, cheat, steal or defraud?

If you are in a business with someone who you agreed receives 10% of the profits, what happens within you when you don't give them their 10%?

Is giving them their 10% the same as giving them a gift?

Something different happens when giving tithe, which is returning to God that which is His than when we give offerings.

Thus, God has provided a means for our active participation not only in supporting the work of spreading the gospel, but simultaneously in cooperating with Him for healing our hearts and maturing our characters.

When we give thank offerings our sense of our dependence upon God, our gratitude, our appreciation, admiration and love for God all grow as we exercise our thanks in giving freely to Him

But when we return the tithe we exercise our loyalty, our integrity, our honesty and we grow more faithful in character and more honest in heart.

For what is the tithe to be used? For the work of God—some would say in spreading the gospel.

One of the founders of the SDA church wrote:



“There are ministers' wives--Sisters Starr, Haskell, Wilson, and Robinson--who have been devoted, earnest, whole-souled workers, giving Bible readings and praying with families, helping along by personal efforts just as successfully as their husbands. These women give their whole time, and are told that they receive nothing for their labors because their husbands receive wages. I tell them to go forward and all such decisions will be revised. The Word says, "The labourer is worthy of his hire." Luke 10:7. **When any such decision as this is made, I will, in the name of the Lord, protest. I will feel it my duty to create a fund from my tithe money to pay these women who are accomplishing just as essential work as the ministers are doing, and this tithe I will reserve for work in the same line as that of the ministers, hunting for souls, fishing for souls.**{DG 106.1}

Read last paragraph, “Moreover, we give tithe...” Are we to trust God? Absolutely!

Does God want us to trust without evidence? No, but what is the evidence about that establishes our trust? It is about God, His existence, His goodness, His trustworthiness. God has provided abundant evidence that He is trustworthy, so our trust in God is not without evidence, but upon it.

However, could there be specific times or circumstances where we don't fully understand a situation, yet we trust God in applying His methods and living out His purposes? Yes!

Does this mean God doesn't want us to understand and we should inquire for reasons? No! We should constantly be seeking to understand all of God's instructions and directions. God wants us to understand. He does not want us to live like unthinking slaves or children who have no comprehension of reality.

But while we are growing up into the full stature of children of God, there will be times we are to trust God without fully understanding why.

But, I believe there is enough truth revealed for us to understand at least some of the reasons why God established tithing so that we don't merely do this because of a rule or merely because God said so.

What about the idea that God is in control?

What do you say to a victim of a crime, or a person molested as a child, when someone tells them “God is in control”?

Of what is God in control?

The key to understanding the saying “God is in control,” as well as essentially all theological questions, is how one understands God's law. If one views God's law functioning like the laws that humans make up — imposed rules requiring the ruling authority to impose punishments — then people view God as making everything happen, which inevitably leads them to form wrong theology. A variety of different errors are formed, such as the teaching that when tragedies occur, it is God who



is bringing the pain — such as God controlling the molester who abuses people, or God directing the hurricanes, earthquakes, or God hardening the hearts of certain people.

The truth is realized when we accept that God is Creator and His laws are the protocols upon which reality is built to operate, such as the laws of physics, law of love, truth, worship, liberty, exertion, laws of health, the moral laws, and so many more. It is how reality works.

Thus, **God is in control of what God controls — and God controls Himself and all His laws.** He sustains reality; He keeps the universe running upon the protocols and laws He established. And one of those laws is the law of liberty, which grants real freedom to sentient beings. Why? Because love only exists in an atmosphere of freedom.

This is how God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3) yet Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15, 32). How did God harden Pharaoh's heart? By presenting the truth and leaving Pharaoh free to accept or reject it. The accepting or rejecting causes the end result — healing or hardening. The act of choosing to accept or reject truth; to embrace love or embrace selfishness; to steal, lie, cheat, or be honest, truthful and loyal, changes the person who makes the choice. Without the truth presented and the freedom to reject it, Pharaoh's heart would not have become as hardened. Thus, God hardened Pharaoh's heart through the laws of truth and freedom; He presented truth and left the ruler free. God controlled His laws, but Pharaoh exercised his own will and controlled his own choice, and in choosing to reject the truth, he hardened his own heart. This is how reality works and how God is in control.

## WEDNESDAY

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Read first paragraph, "It is not easy..." Do you agree or disagree?

First I agree it is often difficult to stand up for truth when one is in the minority. But what about the idea that "no one was to do any work" on the Sabbath?

What about what Jesus said in Matthew 12:5:

Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? NIV84

Is it true all work is forbidden on Sabbath?

Or is it work for self, work for gain, rather than merely work? For instance, work for benefit of others without advancing self is that okay on Sabbath?

How is the Sabbath understood as design law? First, it was made or constructed as a day of rest, not legislated as a day of rest, so it represents God's design laws, methods, principles.





Second, Sabbath rest is healthy for people, it is time for the mind to decompress, to unwind, to let go of the cares of the world. It is opportunity to exercise trust in God, which strengthens our trust in God. It is opportunity to change the focus from the cares and problems of the world to the larger realities, which keeps a person in balance, guards against:

- burnout
- discouragement
- deception
- self-centeredness and pride
- confusion
- doubt

but only if Sabbath is not practiced from a human law perspective, i.e. not done from threat of punishment. The Sabbath must be a delight, which means a day of freedom.

If it is kept as a mere obligation, a day of restriction, a day of fear of punishment, then it incites rebellion in the heart and destroys individuality. Such an approach is infecting the Sabbath with Satan's lie about God's law.

So, is it primarily about the activity on Sabbath or the reason for doing the activity?

What about hiring others on Sabbath?

EGW one of the founders of the SDA church, wrote:

Yesterday (Sabbath) morning, Willie spoke to the church in Ashfield. At 3 p.m. we hired a horse and carriage to take me to Newtown, four miles from Ashfield. We met in a small hall upstairs where a goodly number were assembled. I spoke to them on the prayer of Daniel, his contrition of soul, and his deep sorrow as he witnessed the desolation of Jerusalem. {18MR 14.2}

## THURSDAY

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The lesson points out that Nehemiah reminded them that their forefathers broke trust with God and it quotes "Did not our God bring all this evil upon us?"

What does this mean? Does God bring evil?

There is a debate amongst Christians as to whether God uses His power to bring the first death upon some, the sleep death, or whether all such accounts are merely the Bible writers attributing to God what Satan or evil people do.

This is a false argument because it is not an either or, it is both. This is where one must move away from claims, statements, proclamations to actual historical evidence.



- Sometimes in Scripture Satan acts to cause harm or first death and it is attributed to God: “The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!” Job 1:16 NIV84
- Sometimes evil people do the act and it is attributed to God: “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.” 1Chron 10:13,14 NIV84
- Sometimes God acted and it was rightly attributed to God: Platoons that came to arrest Elijah:

Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

<sup>11</sup> At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says, ‘Come down at once!’ ”

<sup>12</sup> “If I am a man of God,” Elijah replied, “may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

<sup>13</sup> So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. “Man of God,” he begged, “please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants! <sup>14</sup> See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!”

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king. (2Kings 1:10-15)

- And then other times it was God removing His protection and allowing nature or natural results of others to take their course, such as the scorpions and snakes in the desert, or when the Babylonians took them captive.

Which situation would apply to Nehemiah’s reference to their sins caused God to bring the evil upon them?

In the story of Ezra and Nehemiah, what is the overriding theme or background?

It is the plan of salvation—humanity is in sin, God promised the Messiah, Satan is working to obstruct the plan of God, God is working to keep open avenue for Messiah.

## FRIDAY

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Read and discuss questions



## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**Questions:** If you have questions please email them either at [requests@comeandreason.com](mailto:requests@comeandreason.com) or [topics@comeandreason.com](mailto:topics@comeandreason.com). If you post on Facebook it is likely they will not be answered as I often miss questions posted on Facebook.

**The New Paradigm about the Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment Has been Changed:** Thanks to your feedback I have rewritten portions of this document making it friendlier and less likely to cause offense. The new title is *The Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment for the Modern World*. It has a new cover, new introduction, the call to action section has been removed and other edits to clarify potential misunderstandings have been made throughout. It is already up on our website and print versions will be available November 14. **Please throw away any of the first edition you may still have in your possession and use this version going forward.**

**PODCAST: Come and Reason with Dr. Tim Jennings** weekly Podcast is now broadcasting, please follow us.

*The Remedy Psalms* is complete and online and will soon be updated to the free app.

**REASONETTES:** Recently I began drawing cartoons and have started a new section on our website entitled *Reasonettes*. They are illustrations designed to make a point inviting you to think and reason about an idea or issue. Be sure to visit our website or Facebook page each Tuesday for a new cartoon. I hope you enjoy them.

**January 17-19, 2020:** The Power of Love Training and Equipping Course. If you would like to be prepared to more effectively share this message then come to this course. More details will be forthcoming shortly. Allen Texas (30 miles north of DFW airport). See [events.comeandreason.com](http://events.comeandreason.com) for more details and to sign up.

**March 27,28, 2020:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at an AACC River Conference at Plano, TX. More info at <http://theriverconference.com/>

**April 17,18, 2020:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at the Lakewood SDA church in Lakewood OH.