

Great Leaders Enforce Obedience to God

International Bible Lesson

Nehemiah 13:10-22

Sunday, August 25, 2013

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“And 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—KJV).

“And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love” (Nehemiah 13:22—NRSV).

As governor of Judah, Nehemiah had to travel almost 1000 miles from Jerusalem to report to the king of Persia. Upon his return, Nehemiah discovered to his dismay that the wealthy political leaders of Jerusalem and Judah had opened the city’s gates for business and trade throughout the Sabbath, the day God had appointed for worship and rest in behalf of His people (see Mark 2:27). He remonstrated these leaders for desecrating the Sabbath and misleading the people. He reminded them that for this reason God had punished their ancestors and brought disaster upon the city. But just as their ancestors ignored and killed some of God’s prophets, these influential leaders ignored the commandments of God. Therefore, Nehemiah had to order his own servants to close and guard the city’s gates as the Sabbath began and keep them shut until the Sabbath ended. He warned the foreign traders that if they persisted in coming to the city gates on the Sabbath that he would punish them, so they obeyed him. After Nehemiah enforced obedience to God in the city, he commanded the Levites, who had permitted the desecration of Sabbath, to purify themselves, close and guard the city gates on the Sabbath, and keep the Sabbath day holy. Nehemiah’s actions to uphold and enforce the Law of God made him many influential enemies; therefore, he prayed and asked God to remember his deeds and protect him from the city’s leaders “according to the greatness of your steadfast love.”

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Thinking Further

1. What happened when the Israelites stopped paying their tithes?
2. What did the political leaders do while Nehemiah was away reporting to the King of Persia?
3. What criteria or standard did Nehemiah use when he chose treasurers?
4. How many people today could honestly pray as Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 13:14? What do they need to do to be able to honestly pray as Nehemiah did?
5. Who was responsible for profaning the Sabbath? What did Nehemiah need to do to stop them from profaning the Sabbath?