

Stewardship

Money Talks Series #1 KIDS

Ezra/MALACHI

The background for this lesson is the events covered in the Books of Ezra & Nehemiah. After returning from exile, the Jews had to face opposition from their enemies & their own selfishness in their efforts to rebuild the city & the temple. Once the temple was finished, the city was rebuilt, & the wall was finished, the Jews would be able to worship as God had intended them to do.

TALKING POINT

Timeless lessons from Malachi:

- 1) We disappoint the Lord when we make excuses for our sins.**
- 2) We disappoint the Lord when we compromise with the world.**
- 3) We disappoint the Lord when we act as if God does not care how we live.**

We disappoint the Lord when we: 1) make excuses for our sins; 2) compromise with the world, & 3) act as if God does not care how we live.

Ezra reads the law to the people (Show EN7-1)

In spite of all the opposition, the Jews had completed the temple, finished the wall around Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was safe at last. They knew God had helped them triumph over their enemies. They were thankful to be free from all the troubles their enemies had caused them; now they could give full attention to the things of God. The people requested Ezra, the priest and scribe, to bring the book of God's law and to read to them. The people gathered in Jerusalem. They constructed a wooden platform for Ezra to stand on so everybody could see him as he read. Thirteen helpers stood with Ezra to assist him with the scrolls on which the Scriptures were written, as they were very heavy and must be carefully unrolled & rerolled as Ezra continued to read.

When Ezra in the sight of all the people opened the book of the law, the men and the women stood up to reverence God's Word. When Ezra in the sight of all the people opened the book of the law, the men and the women stood up to reverence God's Word. They listened very attentively as Ezra read God's law from morning until midday. When Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, the people answered, "Amen, amen," lifting up their hands and bowing their heads toward the ground in worship. Because the law of God was written in Hebrew and many of the Jews did not understand Hebrew, the Levites and Nehemiah translated the Hebrew words into Aramaic and explained the meaning of the law to the people. As the people understood the words of the law, they realized how far away they had strayed from God's commands. Then they began to weep, convicted of their sins. Soon all the people were weeping. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites encouraged the people not to weep, saying, "This is a holy day unto your God; this is a time for rejoicing and not for weeping." Ezra told them to go their way and eat the fat and drink the sweet and give to those who had nothing. They were told to celebrate God's goodness by

feasting and sharing their good things with one another and that the joy of the Lord would be their strength. The Levites reminded them again to be joyful and not to grieve as they dismissed them to feast, rejoice, and share their food with the poor Jews. It was indeed a time to rejoice and to celebrate since their sins were forgiven and their fellowship with God was restored. They realized how wonderful it was to be forgiven and to be right with God! And still today it is great to know that when we confess and turn from our sins, God removes our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12a). Of course, all of this revival happened because the Temple had been rebuilt and because the walls of Jerusalem were completed. So in a person's life today, when the Holy Spirit controls a person's life and walls of separation from sin are erected in that life, then God can begin to bring spiritual revival to that person.

On the second day, the chief of the fathers came again to hear Ezra read the word of the law. They listened as Ezra read about the Feast of the Tabernacles, to be observed in the seventh month. During this Feast, the Jews were to make booths out of branches of trees and to live in booths for seven days. This was to remind them of their forefathers coming out of Egypt and wandering through the wilderness for 40 years and God providing all their needs.

The people live in booths (Show EN7-2)

The entire assembly of Jews got excited about preparing booths to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. They went to the hills to gather tree branches to construct their booths. The children helped their parents find branches from olive, myrtle, palm, and other trees to make the booths.

Some families put their booths on the flat roof of their houses; some put them in their yards. Others chose to build their booths in courtyards or public squares. The Feast of Tabernacles became a great, exciting celebration for all the families; it was like a big campout as everyone lived in their booths for seven days. It reminded them of God's faithfulness to their forefathers and also to them as they put aside daily work and listened to Ezra read and explain God's Word to them. On the eighth day, they celebrated a special time of worship. The Jews had not celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles like that since the days of Joshua.

The Israelites repent (Show EN7-1)

Pix of Ezra reading

As the Jewish people listened to God's law for many days, it made them realize how sinful they and their forefathers had been. To show their deep repentance, they dressed in sackcloth and put dirt on their heads. They also fasted (went without food) so that they could concentrate on God's Word and prayer.

For one fourth of the day they listened to the reading of the law, and one fourth of the day they prayed and confessed their sins. The Levites, God's special servants, stood on a platform and prayed aloud. Thus through prayer and God's Word, the people sought God's favor. And all of this came about because the walls were keeping the enemies out, so when the devil is kept out of our lives, God has opportunity to work in our hearts.

The people praised God for His majesty and power as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. They remembered Israel's history, reciting all of God's wonderful acts to their nation as well as remembering their own failures to God. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites led the people in confessing their sin to God and entering into a new covenant with God.

The Jews promised God three things that they would not give their daughters to marry heathens nor take the daughters of the heathen for their sons; that they would keep the Sabbath holy and not buy or sell on the Sabbath; that they would support the Temple with their tithes and offerings. By casting lots, one tenth of the population were chosen to move into the city of Jerusalem. This was necessary since Jerusalem was sparsely settled with only a few people. Others volunteered to move to Jerusalem. The people blessed the men who willingly offered to move to Jerusalem for their patriotism, knowing they would have to leave their farms in the countryside. Now that the Israelites confessed their sin and made spiritual walls around their lives, everything became orderly and right and all the Jews were very happy. We can also have our lives orderly, right and happy as we put God first in our lives and obey Him.

Dedication of the wall (Show EN7-3)

Now that the Jews were wholeheartedly yielded to the Lord, it was time to dedicate the wall that God had so wondrously enabled them to build. All the people joyfully gathered together in the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the occasion with thanksgiving by singing with cymbals, psaltries, and harps. The Levites dedicated themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall to the Lord in a ceremony of purification. Then on top of the wall the leaders made a procession like two great choirs, one group following Nehemiah and the other group following Ezra. As they spread out along the wall, praising God, the trumpets and cymbals sounded, and the people sang songs of thanksgiving. The priests offered great thank-offerings upon the altar, and everyone rejoiced with great joy. The people made such a great noise and sang so loud that the joy of Jerusalem was heard for miles.

The people give to God's work (Show EN7-4)

With their hearts right and pure before God, the people showed their thankfulness to the Lord by giving their tithes and offerings to the priests and Levites. As they praised God for what He had given to them, they gladly gave their offering in the Temple.

When you give your offering at church, you are showing your love and dedication to God. With your tithe and offerings you are helping to pay your church's expenses and your pastor's salary and to meet the needs of those who work full time for God. You also help support missionaries who tell people in foreign countries about Jesus. A part of our service to God is giving a tithe, which is ten percent of what we earn.

Some do not keep their promises (Show EN7-5)

Nehemiah, the governor, was recalled to Babylon by King Artaxerxes. Though the people had made three basic promises to God:

They would not intermarry with the heathen.

They would keep the Sabbath.

They would support the Temple with their offerings. They did not keep their promises They went back to their old sins. Though the physical walls surrounded Jerusalem, many of the people had removed the spiritual walls of obedience to God. While Nehemiah was gone, Eliashib, the priest, took advantage of Nehemiah's absence to allow Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews who had tried so hard to hinder the Jews from building the wall, to occupy one of the rooms in the Temple where the offerings were stored. Eliashib did this because he was related by marriage to Tobiah; this was an example of intermarriage with the ungodly producing problems, as it always does.

While Nehemiah was gone to Babylon, things did not go very well in Jerusalem. In the three areas that the people had promised to obey God, they fell back into their old sins. It reminds us of the old saying: "While the cat's away, the mice will play." Have you ever done things you shouldn't have while your parents were gone? Perhaps you watched a forbidden television program or visited somebody of whom your parents did not approve. Well, eventually sin finds us out. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he found what

Eliashib had done, and Nehemiah became very grieved and angry. He threw Tobiah's things out of the Temple and gave orders for the room to be cleansed and for the proper articles to be returned to their place. Then Nehemiah, the governor, heard more disturbing news regarding the Temple. The people had not been giving their tithes to the Levites and to the singers so they could care for the duties of the Temple. These servants of God had been forced to go out into the fields to work in order to get food, and this hindered about Jesus. A part of our service to God is giving a tithe, which is ten percent of what we earn.

Some do not keep their promises (Show EN7-5)

Nehemiah, the governor, was recalled to Babylon by King Artaxerxes. Though the people had made three basic promises to God:

They would not intermarry with the heathen.

They would keep the Sabbath.

They would support the Temple with their offerings. They did not keep their promises They went back to their old sins. Though the physical walls surrounded Jerusalem, many of the people had removed the spiritual walls of obedience to God.

While Nehemiah was gone, Eliashib, the priest, took advantage of Nehemiah's absence to allow Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews who had tried so hard to hinder the Jews from building the wall, to occupy one of the rooms in the Temple where the offerings were stored. Eliashib did this because he was related by marriage to Tobiah; this was an example of intermarriage with the ungodly producing problems, as it always does. While Nehemiah was gone to Babylon, things did not go very well in Jerusalem. In the three areas that the people had promised to obey God, they fell back into their old sins. It reminds us of the old saying: "While the cat's away, the mice will play." Have you ever done things you shouldn't have while your parents were gone? Perhaps you watched a forbidden television program or visited somebody of whom your parents did not approve. Well, eventually sin finds us out. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he found what Eliashib had done, and Nehemiah became very grieved and angry. He threw Tobiah's things out of the Temple and gave orders for the room to be cleansed and for the proper articles to be returned to their place.

Then Nehemiah, the governor, heard more disturbing news regarding the Temple. The people had not been giving their tithes to the Levites and to the singers so they could care for the duties of the Temple. These servants of God had been forced to go out into the fields to work in order to get food, and this hindered to regularly give offerings to God's work. These are things that God expects from His people in any age.

The book of Nehemiah shows us how God's people continually had a personal battle with sin and how they needed spiritual walls to keep sin out of their lives. We may ask: do God's people always have to fail and get into trouble like the Jews of Nehemiah's day? No, not at all. If a Christian obeys God's Word, he will have strong spiritual walls in his life and thus be a fruitful, happy Christian, not necessarily free from trouble, but free from the power of sin and its tragic results. When we fail, however, we do not have to be discouraged and give up. But rather we can confess our sin to God and ask Him to help us to start all over again. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That is good news for all of us.

For a time the people kept their promises to God. But as the years passed, there were many changes. Ezra died. Nehemiah died. The prophets HAGGAI and ZECHARIAH died. The Jews forgot God. They ignored His commands They began to marry the heathen people around them. They neglected God's temple. (See Malachi 1:13.) They did not even want to worship God! Instead of bringing perfect sacrifices to God (as He had commanded), the priests offered diseased and crippled animals. (See Malachi 1:8, 13-14.)

The Lord was displeased with His people, the Jews (Malachi 1:10). They ignored Him They disobeyed Him. And they were not sorry. God could have destroyed His people. But He still loved them (Malachi 1:2). So He sent another prophet, named MALACHI, to warn them of His punishment. MALACHI spoke severely to the Jews, saying: "You are doing everything God hates. You marry the heathen. Then you divorce them. And God hates divorce." (See Malachi 2:16.)

MALACHI continued, "You wonder why your gardens dry up. Here is the reason: You are stealing from God. You do not bring your offerings to Him. You keep everything for yourselves. (See Malachi 3:8-11.) And God is punishing you." The Israelites asked, "Why should we serve God? What will we get from serving Him?" (See Malachi 3:14.)

MALACHI, God's prophet, answered, "Come back to God's house! Return to studying His Word. Start doing His work." (See Malachi 2:7; 3:7, 10.) "If you turn to God, He will bless you greatly." Some of the Jews listened to MALACHI. To one another, they said, "MALACHI is right. We have disobeyed the Lord. Let us turn to God, fear Him, and obey Him." (See Malachi 3:16.) Imagine that!

About 500 years after MALACHI, God gave His own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. All who truly trust in Him will be born into God's family and they will be with Him in heaven forever and ever. Will you be there? (*Teacher: Explain clearly how to be born in to the family of God.*)

From these lessons we have learned that

1. Our SOVEREIGN GOD moved the hearts of heathen kings. He used those kings to accomplish His plans for: Rebuilding the temple and Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.
2. God caused certain leaders (Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah) to return to Jerusalem to do His work

3. God prompted some of the Jews to go with the leaders. Others gave money and supplies.
4. God gave the people a determination to work.
5. God defeated Satan's efforts to stop His work.
6. God never turned away from His people even when they disobeyed Him He loved them. When they repented, He forgave them. He is the same to us today. (See 1 John 1:9.) We have the Bible to teach us how to obey and please God.
7. God is sovereign in our lives today. He placed us right where we are. He has given each one certain abilities. He gives us opportunities to use these abilities.
8. God is in control of all the world right now. He is accomplishing His plans for His whole universe.
9. Jesus Christ will come again to judge the wicked (all those who have turned away from Him). And when He comes, He will bless those who have turned to Him.

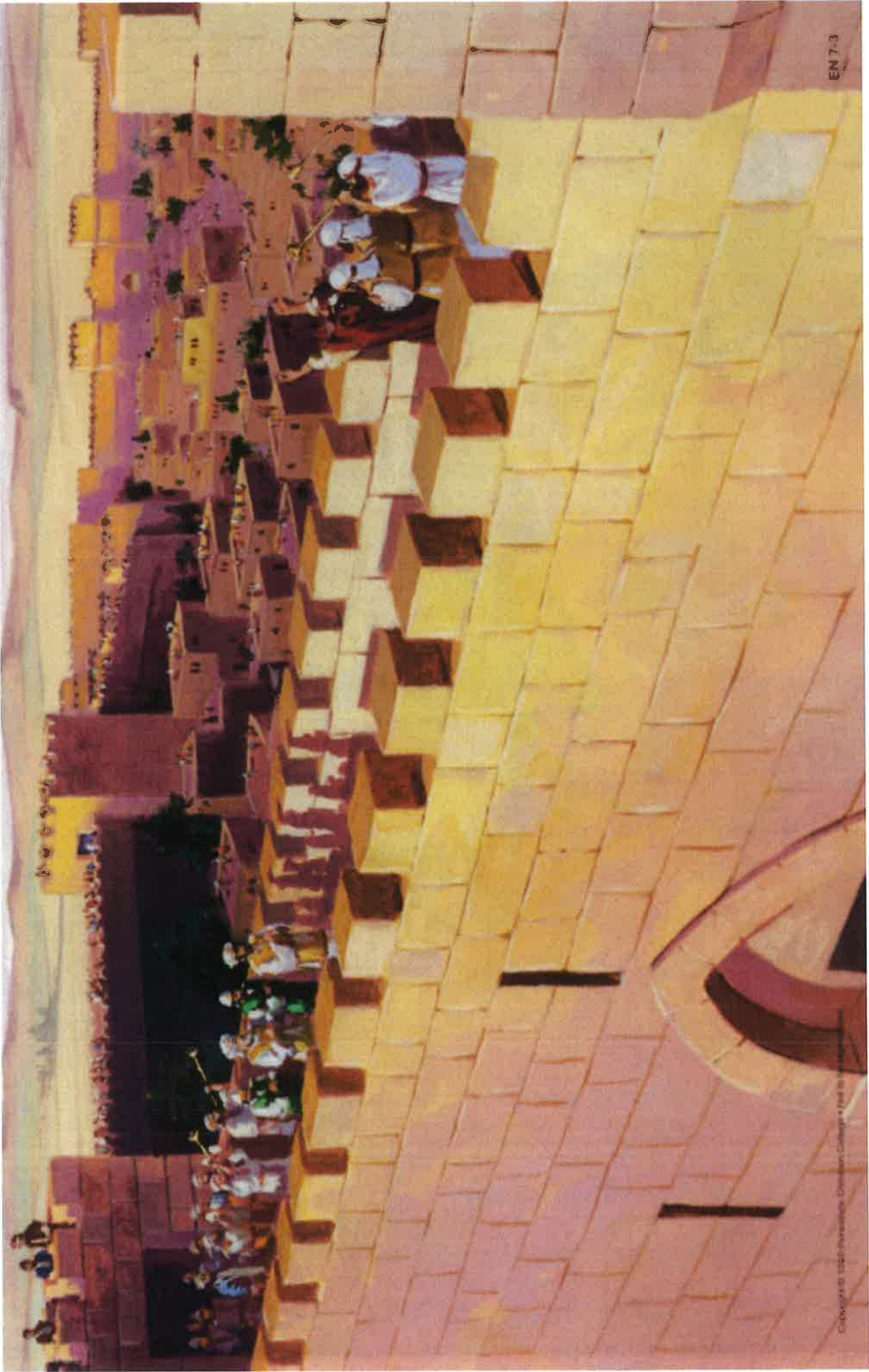
Will you (like Ezra and Nehemiah) choose to serve God? He can cause even the heathen to accomplish His purposes. But if you are His child, you may *choose* to be His servant

Teacher: For the unsaved in your group, clearly explain the plan of salvation. See next column.)

Ezra and the Jews made an agreement with God. Have you made an agreement with Him? Have you promised to read His Word daily and memorize Scripture? Have you agreed to pray?...to obey those in authority over you?...to be kind to others?...to attend God's house?

Will you write your agreement this week and sign it? Place it where it will be safe. Read it often. Ask God to help you to keep your promises. Pray that you will be a useful servant of our sovereign Lord.





EN 7-3

Copyright © 1992, International Commission on Large Dams, Inc. All rights reserved.



ISRAEL'S PROMISE

1. Not marry heathens
2. Keep the Sabbath
3. Give offerings to Temple

