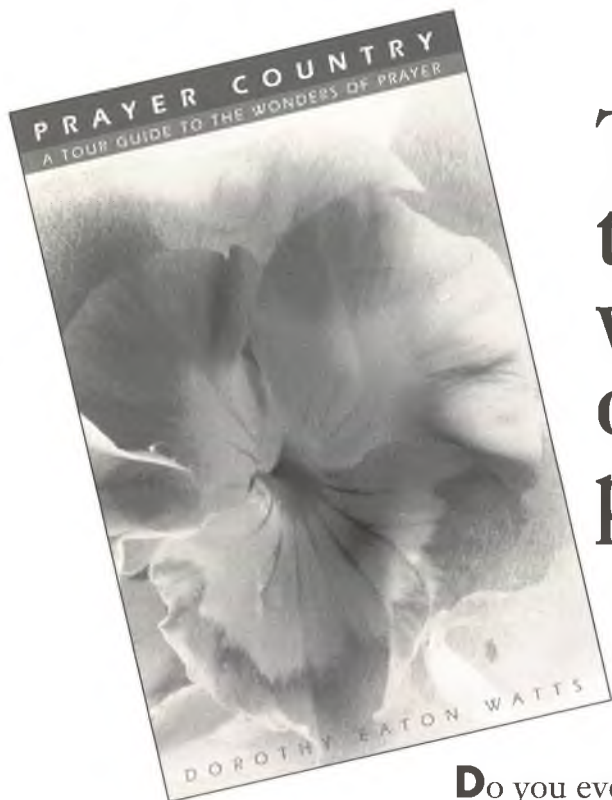


OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1993

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COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

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THE HOMECOMING PARADE

OCTOBER — DECEMBER 1993

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This Quarter's Artist



Twenty-five-year-old Sean Eichelberger, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, is *CQ*'s illustrator for this quarter. An architecture student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, Sean has done design and research work for the Berrien Springs Revitalization Committee and the Andrews University Arboretum Council. He has also done some important work and illustration for the Review & Herald Publishing Company. He enjoys motorcycling and photography as hobbies.

Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than 200 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 35,000.

Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Introduction" (Sunday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

"**Introduction**" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"**Logos**" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

"**Testimony**" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"**Evidence**" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

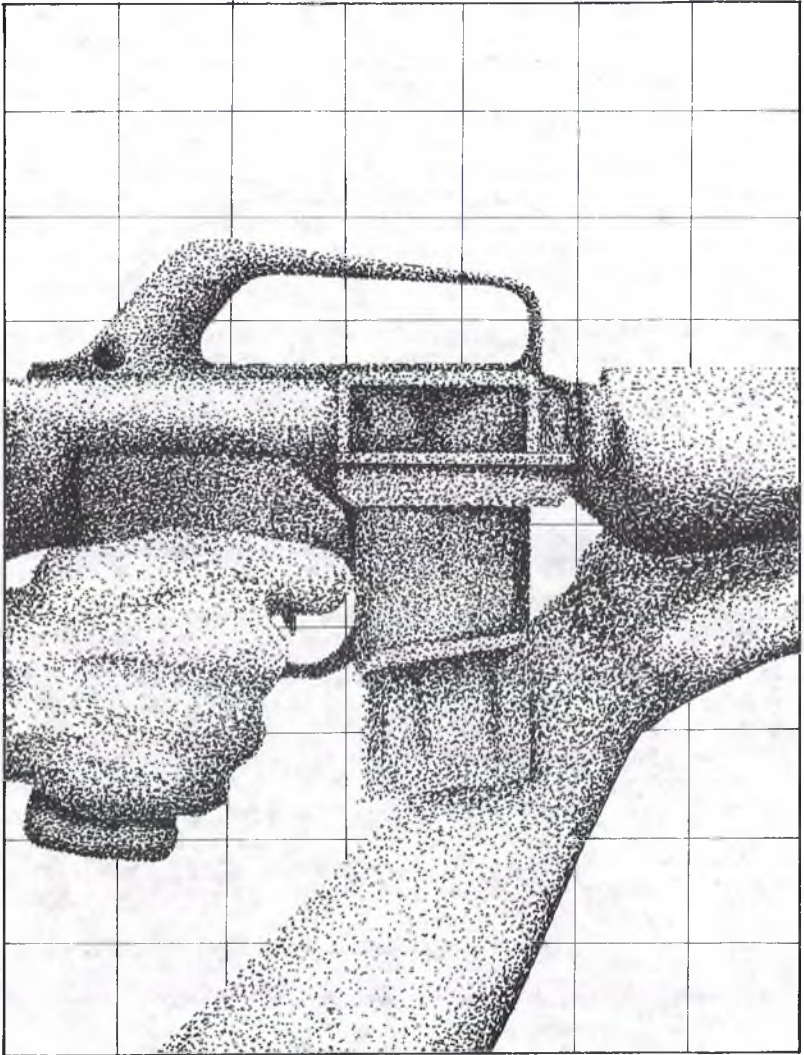
"**How-To**" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"**Opinion**" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

CQ and the Church

CQ is the General Conference–approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

HALL OF HEROES



“I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8).

Folkenberg's Finest Hour?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 6:8

It's August 1990. Iraq invades Kuwait, defeats them with lightning speed, and claims all of Kuwait's territory. Effectively, after a short war, a nation ceases to exist. President Bush is able to mobilize such an allied force that it truly seems to be Iraq against the world. After months of nerve testing and an equally short war, Kuwait is liberated and Iraq defeated. This is President Bush's finest hour.

It's November 1989. On our television screens we see something we can't believe. The entire world looks on as common people tear down the Berlin wall, a barrier that has separated families for years. A wall over which hundreds of people have lost their lives while trying to escape is now coming down at the hands of ordinary people and not a shot is fired to stop them. With the tearing down of the wall, the way is clear to reunify East and West Germany to its pre-World War

Will the crisis that faces the church be Folkenberg's and McClure's finest hour?

II state. Chancellor Kohl of West Germany rises to the occasion and orchestrates reunification faster than anyone thought possible. This is Kohl's finest hour.

It's July 1990. In Indianapolis Elder Robert Folkenberg is, to everyone's surprise, elected president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Many people are impressed that his election is providential and perfect for the time. Also at this same election months of speculation are ended when Alfred McClure is elected North American Division president.

At the start of a new decade the Adventist Church needs to tear down some walls of partition (Eph. 2:14, Gal. 3:28). As the church traverses this last decade of the century, it, like Kuwait, is in danger of being swallowed up by hostile powers. As the Gulf War was for Bush and reunification for Kohl, will the crisis that faces the church be Folkenberg's and McClure's finest hour?

This quarter we are studying the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The lives of Ezra and Nehemiah are like Bush, Kohl, Folkenberg, and McClure all rolled into one. Like Bush, they rescued a small nation from a larger nation. Kohl reunified a nation after a wall was torn down, and Ezra and Nehemiah reunified a nation and built a wall. Finally, like Folkenberg and McClure, they faced the task of holding together a church and reestablishing worship. For us, today it is revitalizing our worship, for them it was rebuilding the temple. It is not difficult to see Ezra and Nehemiah as heroes.

As you study these books, look for similarities between then and now and between their leaders and ours.

By Victor F. Brown, enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

The Making of a Hero

LOGOS

1 Sam. 17:28-36, 49, 50

Unlike the heroes and heroines who were commissioned by God to rebuild the temple during Nehemiah's time, David was drafted unexpectedly to be the great war hero for Israel. The story of David's courage demonstrates very clearly that heroes are not born, but made, as they allow God to use them in His service. Every aspect of David's early life was preparation for that great event when he killed Goliath.

Goliath appeared invincible; to look at him as he bellowed insults and challenges was both fascinating and terrifying to the soldiers of Israel. No wonder no man dared to answer him. God prepares His heroes for the challenges they will face.

David's preparation involved several aspects of his life. First, he was anointed by the Spirit of God. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the spirit of the Lord came upon David" (1 Sam. 16:13). What happened to David happened to Jesus and to each of us at our baptism. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of God before going into battle with Satan (see Matt.

Victories won by God's heroes usually far exceed their expectations.

3:16; Matthew 4). The apostles admonished those listening to "repent, and be baptized . . . and . . . receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Second, David was sent on a mission by his father to the battleground. He was sent from quiet isolation and the comforts of home into the chaos of public conflict. Also "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). Heroes are sent by God. "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. 10:16).

God's hero withstood the criticism of his brothers. David's brother wanted to know why he had come to the site of the battle and with whom he had left the few sheep (see 1 Sam. 17:28). His brothers were afraid to fight, yet they were angry with David. Angry men are more desirous of inflicting pain than of telling the truth. Young David followed the example of Christ in his response. "When He [Christ] was reviled, he reviled not again, . . . but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). Heroes must expect and bear their cross without retaliation. David showed that he was the master of his spirit. "Such a character is not born in a moment. Had he not learned patience with his sheep, he could not have shown patience with his jealous brothers."*

Victories won by God's heroes usually far exceed their expectations. David gained three victories in one day. First, when he was accused falsely, he refused to become angry and was victorious over the spirit of anger. Second, his faith conquered Saul's doubt. Third, his final victory was over Goliath, who symbolized Satan. In this life God's people will always be faced with Satan's temptations. What a wonderful assurance it is to know that the weakest of saints may conquer

giants by exercising faith in God.

REACT

1. In everyday terms how can we learn from David's experience of facing Goliath?
2. What giants am I facing in my life?
3. How can a Christian know what God's will is in facing a giant obstacle in his or her life?
4. Explain what is meant by the expression "Heroes are not born, but made."
5. How can those who are judged as heroes from a worldly viewpoint be evaluated as heroes from a Christian viewpoint?

* *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 539.

By Emerson G. Miller, chairman of the social-work department at Southwestern Adventist College and adjunct professor in the department of religion and theology.

What It Takes

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Zech. 4:6

Godly heroes always look to God instead of to themselves for deliverance from their circumstances. In fact, self is viewed from an entirely different perspective, and there is no room for self-glory. The whole process of evaluating the difficulty then becomes an exercise in faith. "When we are hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of His Spirit. . . . Before the demand of faith, the obstacles placed by Satan across the pathway of the Christian will disappear; for the powers of heaven will come to his aid. 'Nothing shall be impossible for you.' Matthew 17:20."¹

Armed with this kind of faith, Nehemiah was able to respond with conviction to Shemaiah's temptation to hide in the temple for safety. He said, "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to

Godly heroes always look to God for deliverance from their circumstances.

save his life? I will not go in" (Neh. 6:11). This disregard for his personal safety and his concern for the cause of God prompted Ellen White to label him as a hero.

So how do we get this kind of attitude in the face of overwhelming trials and insurmountable difficulties? I think we can find a key in the experience of Paul. "Paul felt the power of the enemy; but though his physical strength was declining, yet faithfully and unflinchingly he declared the gospel of Christ. Clad in the whole armor of God, this hero of the cross pressed forward in the conflict. His voice of cheer proclaimed him triumphant in the combat. Fixing his gaze on the reward of the faithful, he exclaimed in tones of victory, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.'²

Do you want to be a hero for God? Be careful now. It involves courage, self-denial, strength of character, and opposition. Yet what a paltry price when compared with the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

REACT

1. Define *heroism* from a Christian perspective.
2. How has the concept of heroism been corrupted by modern society?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 595.

2. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 332.

By Charles Lewis, student aid and finance officer, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Dare to Be an Enoch

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Gen. 5:24; Matt. 17:20

Although Ezra and Nehemiah contain the common thread of building or rebuilding of the temple or nation, a secondary meaning refers to the ultimate rebuilding or development of God's crowning creation, man. This seems to be an insurmountable task when viewed from man's perspective.

Man was created in God's image. God's purpose was that the longer man lived, the more fully he should reveal his Maker's image. Thus, his faculties were capable of development. By disobedience this growth toward perfection was forfeited, the divine likeness was marred. Yet, he was not left without hope. Through infinite love and mercy God developed a plan to restore His image in man, to bring man back to the perfection in which he was created. One Bible character who demonstrated this ultimate restoration was Enoch.

Through his walk with God, Enoch realized that to progress in the Maker's image, he needed grace, faith, and the correct operation of His will. Through his walk with God, he was made aware that there was enabling power (grace) to keep

God's purpose was that the longer man lived, the more fully he should reveal his Maker's image.

every human from sin. He knew that along with the knowledge of that which is in harmony with God's command for humanity comes the power to obey. Our High Priest provides abundant grace that the believer may be kept free from sin. To ensure this, all of heaven's limitless resources are available. Enoch was keenly aware that the grace of Christ alone could change a heart. For God calls on us to be like Him—pure, holy, and undefiled. This is the divine image. With this knowledge, we can realize that sin is a *choice*, not a necessity.

The human agent grasps the enabling power through faith. Faith is the ability to believe with one's intellect and obey with one's will every word of God. Christ is the author of this faith, and He demands that it be constantly exercised (Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17, Heb. 10:38, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 3:12, 17). This, then, means that humanity receives a continuous supply of grace as we exercise true faith in Christ as a personal saviour. This saving faith comes by hearing and understanding the word of God. Like Enoch, we may not always see why God has required or forbidden something, but faith accepts that which cannot be seen. Therefore, before doing anything we should see what God has said about a matter, and then do as He has said. Such behavior will give us entrance into God's kingdom. For it allows Christ's will to become our will and His way to become our way. Thus, the human agent, like Enoch, will become with heart, mind, and intellect an instrument in the hands of God to work the righteousness of Christ.

By Barbara Crutch Jones, professor of organic and biochemistry at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Hero in a Coonskin Hat

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 1:27-29

We all idolize heroes at one time or another—I was no exception. I recall, as a child, seeing the movie *Davy Crockett*. I was sure that my parents had named me after him. I begged my parents to get me a coonskin hat. I would spend whole afternoons in the woods making campsites and practicing how to walk without making a sound. I hacked down vines and briars, built dams, and made secret hiding places where I would go when I wanted to be alone. I was going to be the next “King of the Wild Frontier”!

What makes a hero? Did wearing a coonskin hat and camping out in the woods make me Davy Crockett? No, I was still little Davy Tucker, no matter how hard I tried. So what attributes does a person need to become a true hero? The answer is found in today’s key text. Let’s analyze it.

1. *“God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.”* Ellen White was a shy young lady with only a third-grade education when God

Did wearing a coonskin hat and camping out in the woods make me Davy Crockett?

called her to become His spokesperson. Yet today scientists are just now confirming things that she knew and wrote about over a hundred years ago.

2. *“God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”* It took a scrawny teenage shepherd boy with only a walking stick and sling to bring Goliath down.

3. *“And the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen.”* Of the most detested people in Jesus’ day, tax collectors topped the list. That is what Matthew was when Jesus called him to be His disciple.

4. *“And things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.”* I can see it now. Those people in Jericho must have really been splitting a gut. Imagine the insults they must have been launching from the top of the wall. Their laughter was short-lived, however. On the seventh day Joshua led the children of Israel around the city walls seven times, and the rest is history.

Why does God seem to use people with such strange characteristics to be His heroes? Verse 29 has the answer. “That no human being might boast in the presence of God” (RSV).

REACT

1. What impacts do you think weak people have when they do great things?
2. What can we do to enable the Lord to do great things with us?

By Dave Tucker, senior broadcasting major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Will the Real Hero Please Stand Up?

OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 6:8

Heroes have evolved throughout the ages. There is no longer a single definition for the word *hero*. No longer is he just male, killing dragons and rescuing fair maidens. Today's heroes range from environmentalists trying to save the rain forests to rappers who preach violence against cops. Out with the old image; in with the new.

A hero makes up for what a person lacks in life. The hero complements a person's character. As a result the hero-worshiper feels content because the hero is accomplishing what he or she should be accomplishing in life.

It must be tough for people, especially children, to visualize their concept of what a real hero or heroine today should be. Psychology today points out that the

“How long must we wait for heroes to do what ordinary people can do?”

average person has numerous problems. So which person today could fulfill your problems? Clint Eastwood? James Bond? Ice-T? Wylie Coyote? The qualifications of a hero have ceased to be black and white and have become a gray fuzz. A hero's qualities seem to get more nebulous with time.

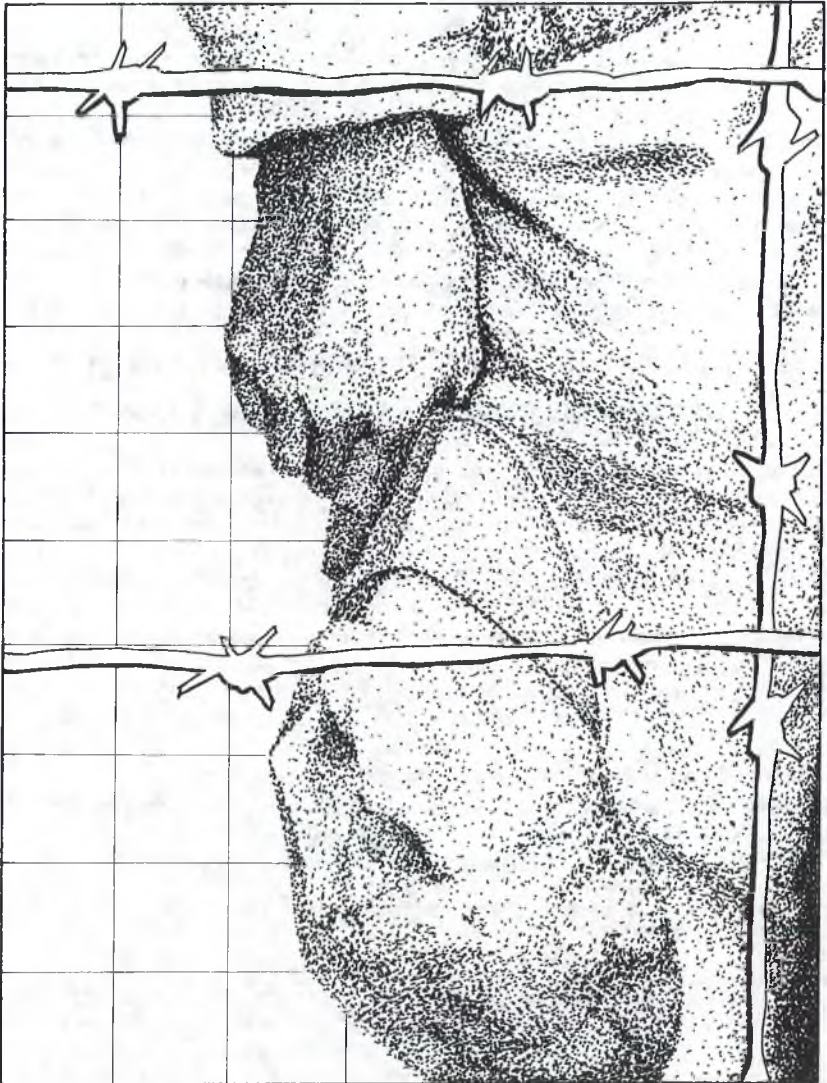
A line from the movie *Batman Returns* bears some thought: “How long must we wait for heroes to do what ordinary people can do?” Margaret Thatcher was a daughter of a grocer; Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin and lost countless times running for the Senate; Booker T. Washington was traded for a run-down racehorse; David was the youngest in his family and was a shepherd. These ordinary people didn't wait for heroes. This is God's challenge for us today.

REACT

1. Is the human need for heroes a strength or a weakness? Explain your answer.
2. How has the need for heroes affected my life personally?
3. Is it desirable for a Christian to strive to be seen as a hero for God?

By Jea Hyun Lee, a senior biology major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

GOING HOME



“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing” (Ps. 126:1, 2).

Refusing Freedom?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 126:1, 2

“We’re free! We are going home! It is so hard to believe. Isn’t it exciting!”

“Well, maybe and maybe not.”

“What do you mean? We have been here in Babylon all our lives. We’ve never even seen our homeland.”

“That’s just the point. We’ve been here all our lives. How do we know we will survive in our grandfather’s homeland? How do we know whether we’ll like the climate? And I hear that we’ll have hostile neighbors. No, I think we’re safer to stay here.”

It’s hard to believe but such a conversation probably took place as word spread that the Jews would be allowed to go back home and rebuild their city and temple. There were many people who had grown so accustomed to Babylon that they

Victims begin to identify with their captors so much that they cease to be held against their will.

chose to stay. This wasn’t the first time in the Bible a group of exiles chose not to go free. When Israel left Egypt, many decided it would be safer to stay with the flesh pots of Egypt as slaves rather than risk the desert. Even those who did go out often complained about how they should have stayed back in Egypt (Exod. 14:10-12). So many of the Israelites in Egypt and the Jews in Babylon had become so used to their exile that even though they were captives and slaves they chose bondage over freedom. Why?

Today psychologists have observed a similar syndrome among some kidnap victims and prisoners of war. It seems that the victims begin to identify with their captors so much that they cease to be held against their will. You may remember the famous kidnapping case involving Patty Hearst. Authorities believe that this is what happened to her.

What are the spiritual implications for us today? Christians often speak of themselves as strangers in a strange land, exiles waiting to go home. We even have a message that calls us out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4). The questions are painfully obvious. How accustomed to this world have we become? How much have we identified with our captors? When the call to go home comes, will we want to go?

As you study this week, consider these questions. Ask them of yourself first. Don’t be so quick to generalize about the church and point fingers. Remember the counsel of Matthew 7:1-5.

By Victor F. Brown, enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

After 70 Years' Wait

LOGOS

Ezra 1:5

The greatest action of God's grace is the redemption of sinful man. From Moses to John, the prophetic message always had a moral purpose, to bring humanity back to a saving relationship with God. Even though Satan has tried to stop God's plans, God is in control and His purposes come to fruition.

Here in Ezra 1 the prophetic word is recalled by God's remnant people. Jeremiah had foretold of God's act to bring His people back to Jerusalem, the land of promise (see Jer. 29:10).

Isaiah spoke not only of this event to come but points out an underlining objective. For in Isaiah 44:28 Cyrus is called His "shepherd" and in 45:1 he is His "anointed." These two terms raise the function of Cyrus and the destiny of God's people. They are not merely going home to a land; they are to receive spiritual freedom and an opportunity to rebuild their relationship with God.

Cyrus is opening a door for Israel to build an experience with God in which the Holy Spirit has moved the heart. (See Jer. 31:31-33.)

Still, Small Voice (Ezra 1:1)

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing" (RSV).

Some 900 years earlier God did mighty works to free Israel from physical bondage of Egypt. Now He does a greater work on the heart of man. Elijah was shown that God is not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in the "still, small voice." And Zechariah spoke to Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of host" (Zech. 4:6).

Opportunity (Ezra 1:5)

"Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."

Thankfully there are those who answer God's call. Here are the remnant of God. They seek opportunities to do the Lord's will with infectious enthusiasm, and others are stirred to action.

Yet it is with sadness one reads the list of the tribes of Israel. All that remains is the house of Judah, Benjamin, and some Levites. Israel's shortsightedness, mixed marriages with nonbelievers, and worship of gods of stone cast a woeful eternal shadow. Opportunities were lost, but the future was still open for the remnant.

The faithful went into exile with the faithless. For 70 years they were kept from the homeland of their heritage. Longingly looking and patiently waiting, they anticipated going home. Leaving the comfort and security of Babylon, they went by faith to the land of promise.

Free Will (Ezra 1:4, 6; 2:69)

“Besides freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem” (verse 4). “According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work” (2:69).

A freewill offering is a practical example of the character of God’s kingdom. No coercion there. The Creator of all does not ask us to be mere spectators of His grace. We are called to respond as participants, first for the benefit of others who, seeing our experience, are encouraged and act for God. Then the giver is taught to shun selfishness.

Upon arriving at Jerusalem, another freewill offering was given for recons-

The remnant of God seek opportunities to do the Lord’s will with infectious enthusiasm.

truction. This giving was oriented to a task to be done, not to the amount of gifts to be given. The amount to be given was simply “according to their ability” (verse 69).

He Stirs the Heart (Ezra 2:1, 59)

God’s grace in action stirs the heart. The door is open wide for Israel. The question is Who will respond? There is no sea of people moving to fill up the vacant homeland. The membership of God’s kingdom is one of faith in Jesus (see Rom. 9:6). Many Jews stayed in exile, content with life in a foreign land, happy there with friends to raise their families. What keeps people today from responding to Jesus?

REACT

1. If God can move the heart of a heathen king, how might He work in my life so I can hear the Holy Spirit?
2. What evidence can you cite from a modern setting in which God has moved political leaders to make decisions in favor of God’s work?
3. What excuses do I make for not being ready for Jesus’ second coming?
4. In what ways have Christians become used to their exile here on earth?
5. What are the proper motivations for the giving of freewill offerings?
6. How do I personally respond to freewill offerings today?

**Prophets and Kings, pp. 571.*

By Wallace Sullivan, youth pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Keene, Texas.

Ho-Hum Homecoming?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 21:34-36

Having grown up in the church, I sometimes find myself longing for a new era, a new spirit, a new fire within me. Why is it that a lot of us lack that intense desire to go home? “The second coming of the Son of man is to be the wonderful theme kept before the people. Here is a subject that should not be left out of our discourses. Eternal realities must be kept before the mind’s eye, and the attractions of the world will appear as they are, altogether profitless as vanity. What are we to do with the world’s vanities, its praises, its riches, its honors, or its enjoyments?”¹

When I think of the exiles returning home, I can imagine the thrill that filled them when they were given permission to return to Jerusalem. Yet we all know that not all of them returned. They had created too many ties to their exile home. Have

I can imagine the thrill that filled them when they were given permission to return to Jerusalem.

we done the same? “We must never forget the warnings of Christ, ‘Watch unto prayer,’ ‘Watch, . . . and pray always.’ A connection with the divine agency every moment is essential to our progress. We may have had a measure of the Spirit of God, but by prayer and faith we are continually to seek more of the Spirit. It will never do to cease our efforts. If we do not progress, if we do not place ourselves in an attitude to receive both the former and the latter rain, we shall lose our souls, and the responsibility will lie at our own door.”²

We have got to start falling to our knees in earnest prayer! “The darkness of the evil one encloses those who neglect to pray. The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin; and it is all because they do not make use of the privileges that God has given them in the divine appointment of prayer.”³ It is my great desire that the church will unite together in prayer, that God will stir our hearts and fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we may accomplish great things for Him.

REACT

How can one go about recapturing a sense of the imminence of Jesus’ second coming?

1. *Evangelism*, p. 220.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 508.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 94.

By Charles Lewis, student-aid and financial officer, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Not Just Flimsy Evidence

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezra 1:2-4

At first glance, the first two chapters of Ezra look like a real bore! But when you look at these chapters closely, they come alive with possibility. That's what got me going. These chapters contain a proclamation that if authenticated by an archaeologist would substantiate Ezra's quote.

Sure enough, a solid clay cylinder that had cuneiform characters impressed into it was found.* When translated, the characters made up a proclamation of Cyrus similar to that Ezra referred to in chapter 6:3-5. The Hebrew translation of this is what chapter 1:2-4 is all about.

I can't help believing that Ezra, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote these two chapters and specifically the proclamation to allow historians and

At first glance, the first two chapters of Ezra look like a real bore!

archaeologists to correlate facts and come to the conclusion that the Bible is true! It's not just a book of tribal lore.

To illustrate: We believe scientists when they give us flimsy evidence of a possible cure for a dreaded disease. We believe people may be helped because of this claim. On little evidence our government will spend millions of dollars to prove the claim true or false. Yet time after time we find strong evidence of the Bible's authenticity, and we still don't believe it. Faced with all the archaeological evidence that we have, we as Christians should have complete confidence in God's Bible; but there are people who today are trying to undermine the creditability of the Bible. Educated, well-meaning Christians are falling into the trap that the Bible is "possibly" not true. Can there really be a Second Coming? Based on the proclamation of Ezra 1:2-4, the Bible once again stands up and defends itself.

The Cyrus proclamation showed up in the Persian government archives 20 years after it had been written, and it freed the Jews. Now that archaeologists have found it once again, maybe it can free us to believe in the promises of the Bible that Christ is coming back soon! If we believe as Ezra believed in rebuilding the temple, our work here will be over soon!

REACT

How do faith and belief relate to acceptance of the Bible as a historical record?

* William S. La Sor, *Old Testament Survey* (Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1982), p. 640.

By Terry Johnson, a 1992 theology graduate, and Kimberly Clayton Johnson, a 1993 communication graduate, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Bottom-Line Prayer

HOW-TO

Key Text: Dan. 9:16-24

As the Babylonian Empire collapsed, Daniel fell to his knees to plead for God's forgiveness and the fulfillment of His promise to restore the nation. Sometimes we don't see answers. Is prayer worthwhile?

Daniel's prayer had several effective elements:

1. *It was specific.* I learned a great deal about effective prayer on a trip to England, where I attended evensong services in several cathedrals. Each day, members of the Church of England pray for a specific career group, the work of the church in a specific country, and a specific church worker. Our family came home and made a list too. I love telling friends and family members we've prayed for them that day. I hope the Israelites knew that Daniel had prayed for them.

One of my all-time favorite prayers was that of a student in an Oklahoma church. His pastoral prayer included a request that God help the wheat farmers in

My friend prayed for 27 years that her husband would accept the Lord Jesus into his life.

northern Oklahoma to receive good prices for their crop. That was not just a nebulous missionaries-and-colporteurs kind of prayer!

2. *It was not full of excuses.* Daniel did not try to explain away the reasons for Israel's spiritual failures. He simply listed where they had gone wrong and he asked the Lord's forgiveness. God listens to our excuses, but He doesn't need them. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14).

Mature people don't make many excuses. They say, "I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I want to make things right."

3. *It recognized that righteousness comes by faith, not works.* God doesn't bargain salvation for our good works. How many prayers have begun, "Lord, if you'll just get me off this roller coaster . . . off with just a warning ticket . . . through this State-board exam . . . I'll always be good"?

Daniel's prayer acknowledges where our hope should be: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies" (Dan. 9:18).

My friend prayed for 27 years that her husband would accept the Lord Jesus into his life. She never missed a day. Five years before he died, he found the Lord. Prayers *do* become answered—immediately, gradually, or ultimately.

REACT

How do you know when or how your prayer has been answered?

By Sharon Hardwick Leach, advancement vice-president, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Going Home

OPINION

Key Texts: John 15:5; 16:63

Consider an ordinary orange seed. It's nothing but a dried, shriveled-up object that looks dead. If we put it in the ground, it shows neither sign nor promise of life. It isn't till that little orange seed is watered that it begins to grow and bloom.

The children of Israel at the time of their Babylonian captivity were like that orange seed: spiritually desiccated and dead. Seen strictly from our limited viewpoint, their situation seemed hopeless; they were an insignificant and captive people with a reputation for sedition and repeated treason. How did it come to pass that the ruler of the greatest empire then in existence not only freed them but aided them in their return, giving them their lost treasures and new bounties?

The only plausible answer that I found was that the Holy Spirit had been at work. John 6:63 states, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

How did it come to pass that the ruler of the greatest empire then in existence not only freed them but aided them in their return?

The Holy Spirit worked on the mind of Cyrus to release the captives, and He worked on the hearts of the captives, inspiring them with the desire to return home. The captives could no more have brought about their deliverance through all the ordinary means of effecting change, such as use of force or political intrigue, than the orange seed could grow without water.

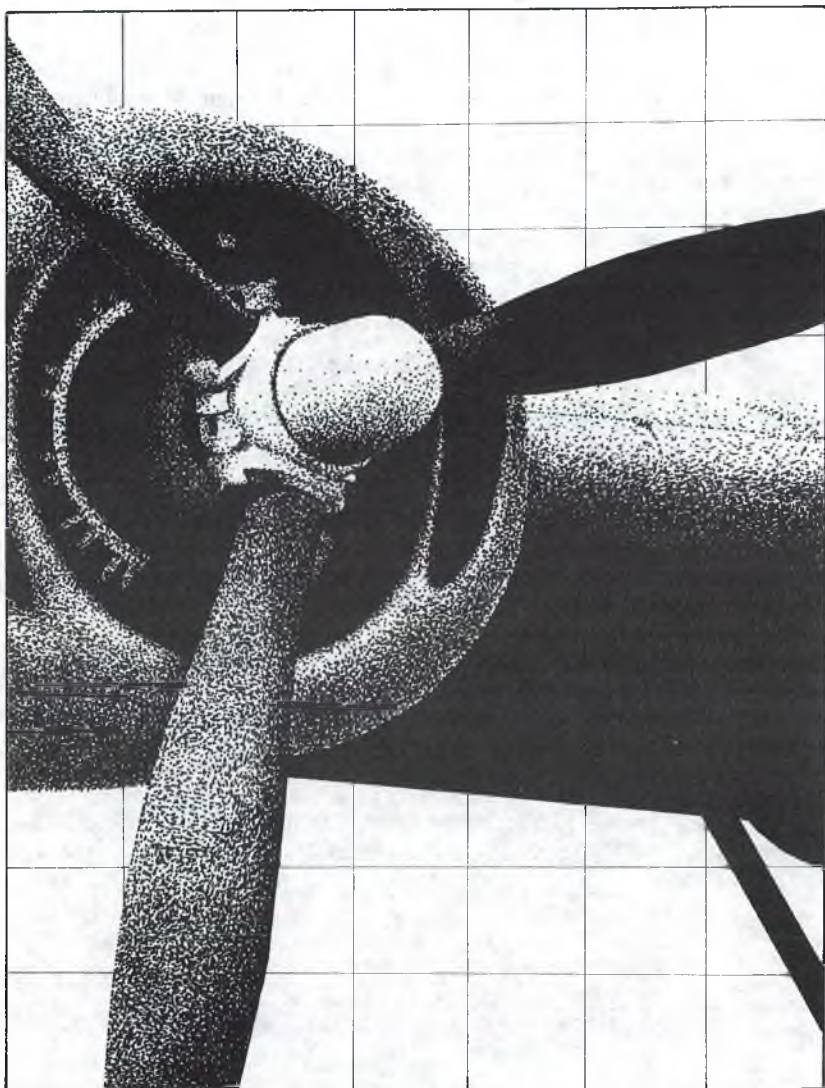
The same principle still applies today. Our lives may be shriveled and dry. We may want to change certain habits in our lives, or we may want a deeper, closer relationship with Christ. We can strain all we want until we are blue in the face, but without the working of the Holy Spirit all our efforts will be in vain. In and of ourselves, we don't have the ability to work these changes—even as the Jews had no power to restore themselves to their heritage or the orange seed has no power to grow without water. We need the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need the water to help us realize the full potential of life in the Spirit.

REACT

1. What can we as individuals do to receive the Holy Spirit in a greater measure than we have now?
2. What emphasis should the church place on the work and nature of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the other members of the Trinity?

By Glenn Guarin, sophomore med-tech/premed major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

WHO'S THE BOSS



“And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel” (Ezra 3:11).

Deciphering the Devil's Code

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 46:9, 10

During the dark days immediately following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—when it seemed that Japan was dominating the moves—the American military intelligence achieved a breakthrough that helped to turn the tables. They deciphered the Japanese military code used to send their signals. This meant that the American forces were able to know in advance what moves the Japanese were planning, and thus how best to counteract and ultimately to defeat them.

It was this foreknowledge that enabled American forces to intercept and defeat Japanese forces in the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway, and to shoot down Admiral Yamamoto over Bougainville Island, in which action he was killed. (He was the man who masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbor.)

We too are in a great battle, a spiritual one, known as “the great controversy.” Satan is the enemy, and he does all he can to disrupt God’s program, which is geared to saving men and women.

God has been good to us in that He has revealed to us what Satan’s strategies are, so that we can know beforehand what to expect in the battle. As Isaiah 46:9,

**God has been good to us in that He has revealed
to us what Satan’s strategies are.**

10 tells us, God is able to declare the end from the beginning, and He has done this through Bible prophecy, telling us in advance what Satan will plan to do. The visions recorded in the writings of Ellen G. White also give us advance knowledge of Satan’s plans. Then there is another way God has helped us. In the Bible are recorded many stories of how Satan has tried to disrupt God’s work. Whenever God’s people rally to do His will, whenever there is a revival, we see how Satan has worked to try to thwart them.

In this week’s lesson we read how God’s people, who had just returned from Babylonian captivity, began to conduct the morning and the evening sacrifices, the most important of all the daily rituals in the sanctuary services. These sacrifices were begun even before the foundations of the new temple were laid. We see how Satan immediately stirred up trouble and tried to stop the work. This story gives us an insight into the way our enemy works. In this attempt he was in part successful, for the work of rebuilding the temple was held up for approximately 20 years.

Since we today know so much about the ways in which Satan works, may this week’s lesson help us to be aware of our spiritual needs and to use our foreknowledge of his plans to make sure he does not defeat us in the part of the great controversy in which we are involved.

By L. P. Tolhurst, chairman of the theology department, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

First Things First

LOGOS

Exod. 29:38-42

When the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., the sacrifices offered there virtually ceased. Soon afterward the people left in the land fled to Egypt. Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruins until the Jews began the work of reconstruction.

The rebuilding of the temple was first begun about 536 B.C., but was later abandoned as the people first turned their efforts to the building of their own houses. The renewal of the work on the temple took place in the second year of Darius the Great. The temple was completed and dedicated in 515 B.C. Thus it was some 21 years before the temple was rebuilt and its services were fully restored.

It is interesting, however, to note that according to Ezra 3:1-6 the morning and evening sacrifices were renewed *before* the foundations of the new temple were laid in 536 or 535 B.C. Perhaps this action on the part of the people under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua tells us something of theological importance. To understand fully their actions, we need to review the sacrifices God instructed the Israelites to perform daily.

1. *The morning and evening sacrifices (Exod. 29:38-42)*. A lamb was offered each morning and each evening. It was for all the people and was called a continual offering. No individual could claim it was his offering, for it is understood to have been provided by payment with temple funds. Thus it signified God's provision of the sacrifice for sins through Jesus. This is the essence of the gospel—the sacrifice was God's provision.

2. *The sin offerings (Lev. 4:1-35)*. These offerings were of two kinds:

a. For a priest or the whole congregation. A young bullock or bull was offered. The blood was sprinkled seven times before the veil and on the horns of the altar of incense. The fat was burned on the altar of burnt offering and the rest of the carcass was burned outside the camp.

b. For a ruler (male kid) and for a common person (a female kid). Here the blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar of burnt offering only, and the priest was to eat a portion of the flesh in the courtyard. This represented Jesus taking the sins of the people upon Himself. The disposal of the carcass was the same as that of the offering for a priest or the whole congregation. Note that these sin offerings were for *sins of ignorance* (see Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27, etc.). That is for unintentional sins. Leviticus 4:28 says "If his sin . . . come to his knowledge," so these offerings were not for deliberate sins.

c. Trespass offering (Lev. 6:1-7). These offerings seem to be the only ones provided for certain sins that were premeditated and seem to be for sins of fraud, deceit, and lying.

It seems that God was trying to tell the people that they could not put a price on sin, so that the rich could afford the sacrifice while the poor could not. We all know the words of the Negro spiritual that says: "If religion was a thing that money could buy, the rich would live and the poor would die." With the exception of those sins covered by the trespass offerings, in which restoration was also required, God did not put a price on forgiveness.

In our past history Seventh-day Adventists have stressed the services of the sin

offerings without pointing out that these rituals were for sins of ignorance, for unintentional sins. Perhaps we have been remiss in not stressing more the morning and the evening sacrifices, under which forgiveness was freely available to all the people all the time—continually.

For example, when Nathan reproved David for his sins (2 Sam. 12:7-13) David acknowledged that he had sinned, and Nathan immediately replied, “The Lord also hath put away thy sin.” David had not offered an offering to obtain God’s forgiveness. It was immediate and possible only because of the continual morning and evening sacrifice, which was God’s provision for all the people. In fact, in Psalm 51 David says in verses 16 and 17, “For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

These sins of David’s were certainly not sins of ignorance, and it seems the only provision for his forgiveness was to repent and trust on God’s mercy. The morning and evening sacrifice counted for him.

If we look at the practical logistics involved with a nation of, say, 2 or 3 million people, all seeking to find forgiveness for their sins of ignorance, we could imagine

People would not be able to journey to Jerusalem each time they had failed.

a queue stretching for many miles. Another problem would be that people living in remote areas would not be able to journey to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice each time they realized they had failed or disappointed God. If they were sorry for their sins, surely they were forgiven, as was David. If they died before they could make the journey to Jerusalem, surely no one would suggest that they were still unforgiven, and that they would be lost. Suppose they did make the journey to the temple and offered a personal sacrifice; they could very easily have done something wrong, unintentionally, on the way home, and would have to turn around and head back to Jerusalem and offer another sacrifice—if they were required to do so for every sin.

This all highlights for us the importance of the morning and evening sacrifices. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have not placed enough emphasis on these sacrifices, for in this provision made by God we can see a beautiful picture of the gospel, the teaching of righteousness by faith. Thus it is significant that Zerubbabel and Jeshua set up God’s altar and began the morning and evening sacrifices before the temple was rebuilt and the other sin and trespass offerings were revived.

No wonder, then, that the devil stirred up those under his control to try to stop the returned exiles from their work in rebuilding the temple and the city. Whenever the gospel and the beauty of the doctrine of righteousness by faith is presented, Satan will do all in his power to disrupt and hinder the work. Just as God raised up men during the difficult times of restoration from Babylonian captivity, so will He continue to lead His church in these closing days of earth’s history.

God’s forgiveness is just as available to us today, whether for deliberate or unintentional sins, as it was for His people back in Old Testament times. May God help us to appreciate His grace at all times, and may He help us to share it.

By L. P. Tolhurst, chairman of the theology department, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

A Confidence Trick That Failed

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezra 4:3

As the exiles returned to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans tried unsuccessfully to join them in their work. Their profession of loyalty to the true God was not genuine, and Jewish leaders saw through their confidence trick and refused to allow them to infiltrate their ranks. Some passages from Ellen G. White not only throw light on the situation of that time but contain sound counsel for us today.

“Close by the Israelites who had set themselves to the task of rebuilding the temple, dwelt the Samaritans, a mixed race that had sprung up through the intermarriage of heathen colonists from the provinces of Assyria with the remnant of the ten tribes which had been left in Samaria and Galilee.”¹

“During the period of the restoration, these Samaritans came to be known as ‘the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.’ Hearing that ‘the children of the captivity

“There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with worldlings, they must to a certain extent conform to the world.”

built the temple unto the Lord God of Israel,’ ‘they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers,’ and expressed a desire to unite with them in its erection. ‘Let us build with you,’ they proposed; ‘for we seek your God, as ye do.’”²

“Regarding the relation that Israel should sustain to surrounding peoples, the Lord had declared through Moses: ‘Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them; . . . for they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.’”³

“There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with worldlings, they must to a certain extent conform to the world. But though such a course may appear to afford great advantages, it always ends in spiritual loss.”⁴

REACT

To what extent should Christians cooperate with nonbelievers in so-called worthy causes?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 567.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 567, 568.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 568.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 570.

By L. P. Tolhurst, chairman of the theology department, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

When the Picture Changes

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezra 3:11

Wearied from the journey to their old homeland, the former exiles faced a desolate country and a city reduced to rubble. But this did not dampen their enthusiasm for the rebuilding of the nation and religion of Judah. Their commitment was exceptional—they offered sacrifices with care, celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, and appointed priests. Within a few months of their return, they had rebuilt the altar. Their dream of rebuilding the temple seemed to be coming true.

But celebrations for the dedication of the new temple foundations were marred by a noise that “was heard afar off” (Ezra 3:13). Younger people shouted with excitement while older ones wept, realizing that this building could not compare with the splendor of Solomon’s temple. Then the picture changed. Ezra 4:4, 5 says it all.

And the problems did not end there. Political opposition continued to dominate their lives until the end of the reign of Artaxerxes approximately 90 years later.

God’s people will often face opposition, even when they are doing right.

During this time letters of accusation were sent to the Persian kings. Even though the temple had been rebuilt, these accusations effectively stopped the rebuilding of the city for some time.

The account of these tribulations in Ezra 4 is not presented in chronological order. His message is that God’s people will often face opposition even when they are doing right, and that even during these crises, God is still firmly in control.

These theological certainties are underlined by the fact that the account of the opposition to Israel (4:6-12) is framed by two distinct references to King Darius—the Persian king who facilitated the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 6). Jewish readers would almost certainly link the mention of Darius with God’s leading. Thus the fact of God’s intervention is woven into the account of the troubles of His people.

The events of Ezra 3 and 4 occurred many years ago, yet the message is relevant to us today. Out of loyalty and obedience to our God, we dedicate our hearts as altars to Him and seek to construct our lives as temples for Him. But forces more powerful than Samaritans or Persian kings are seeking to thwart our plans. How fortunate that for us, as with the Israelites, the God who is in control is always available.

REACT

In what specific ways is Satan seeking to thwart the church’s plans today?

By G. W. Stanley, theology lecturer, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Loaded With Lessons

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Rom. 15:4; Ezra 4:1-4

Writing to the Romans, Paul says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4, NIV). According to inspiration the past is loaded with lessons for us today.

First, as Israel carried out the plan of God in the rebuilding of the temple, they faced hardships and opposition from their enemies (Ezra 4:4, 5). This reminds Christians today that we will also face hardships and difficulties, even when we are doing the will of God (2 Tim. 3:10-12). It is not that God loves to see His children suffer hardships and difficulties, but, rather, we are on the battlefield, the war zone, and thus we receive the attention and the darts of the archenemy.

Second, it appears that opposition does at times put a stop to the progress of God’s purposes, as was seen in the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:24). But such

We are on the battlefield, and, thus, we receive the attention and the darts of the archenemy.

setbacks are usually only temporary, for the work of rebuilding the temple was soon completed. Likewise, today we may face opposition for being Christians. This opposition may come from various sources—our family, community, or nation. Yet one day the gospel, in God’s plan and time, will finally triumph like the rebuilding of the second temple in the days of Ezra.

Third, the Lord permits trials to come to His children, not as a curse, but as a blessing (Matt. 5:10-12). Those persecuted will have a reward in heaven. Thus, persecution and hardship prepare us for the kingdom. Therefore, they are blessings in disguise. “If indeed we share in his sufferings . . . we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:17). This means accepting Jesus as our Saviour. It also means accepting His way of life as ours. This is what Christianity is all about. Living as He lived, suffering as He suffered, we will one day reign with Him in glory. Therefore as we face hardships every day, let us see them as tools in the hands of a loving God to accomplish His will in our lives.

REACT

1. In what ways should a Christian see trials in a positive light?
2. Why should a Christian not seek out tribulation?
3. How are conditions facing God’s church today similar to those facing the rebuilders of Jerusalem?
4. Since God has knowledge of the future, why does He reveal some things that will happen and not other things?

By Aaron M. Lopa, lecturer, theology department, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Foretelling the Future

OPINION

Key Texts: Amos 3:7; Isa. 46:9-11

The Bible frequently speaks about God's foreknowledge.

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth His secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:9-11). See also Isa. 45:21 and Ps. 25:14.

God has not promised to reveal everything that is going to happen in the future, but He has chosen to reveal to us what He will do in saving humanity—what He plans to do to finish the sin problem and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Prophecy was not given to make us wise beforehand about what is going to happen in the political or economic world, but to inform us about God's activity

Prophecy was not given to make us wise beforehand about what is going to happen in the political or economic world.

in saving us. Here is where many in the past have made mistakes. They have tried to use unfulfilled Bible prophecies to predict political events—to interpret the prophecies by using the news headlines—only to be embarrassed when the events did not take place. They have often had to change their interpretations as often as the headlines have changed. Prophecies should always be church-centered—focused on the great plan of salvation.

The Christian is to live by faith, trusting in God that He controls the future, including our own futures. To know everything in advance would tend to undermine faith, and we would subsequently suffer spiritually as a result.

To know in advance all the good things that will happen to us might be considered desirable, but to know in advance all the bad things would doubtless be very depressing, and would also discourage us and, for many if not all, adversely affect our faith and trust in God.

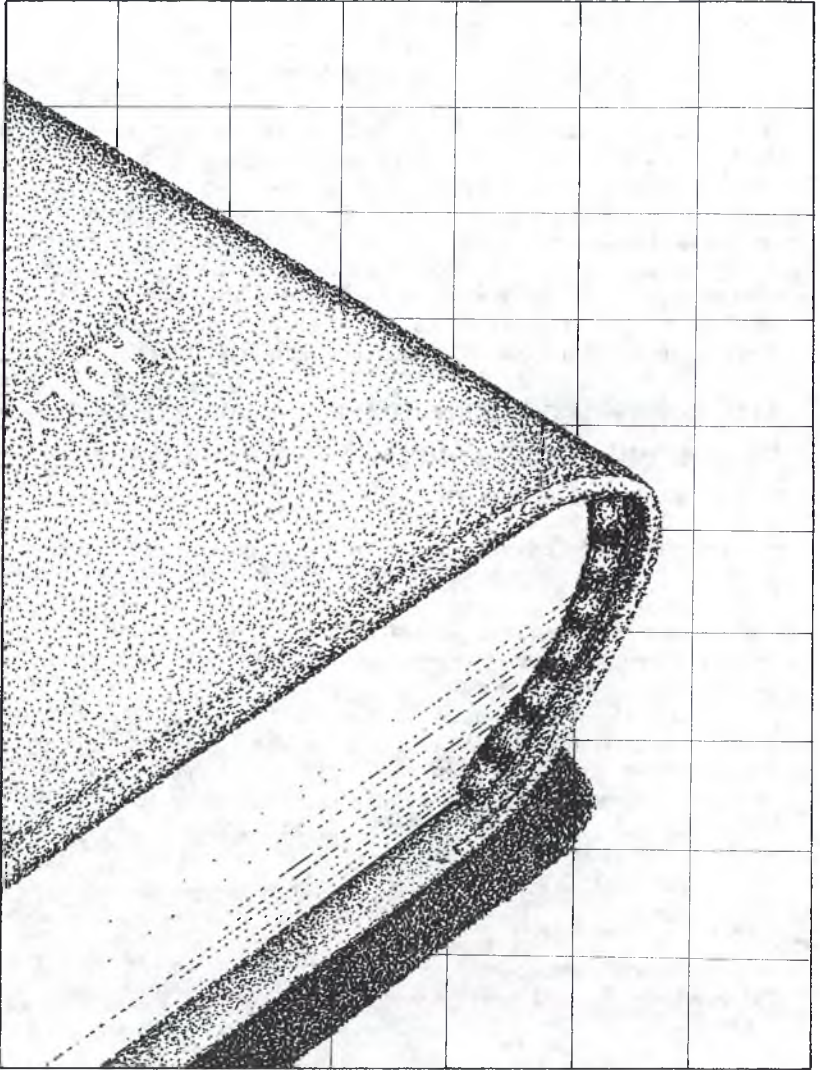
REACT

1. If God chooses to reveal only some future things, on what basis does He decide what to reveal to the prophets, and what not to reveal?

2. Why has God not revealed to us personal details of our future lives here on earth?

By L. P. Tolhurst, chairman of the theology department, Pacific Adventist College, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

SECOND WIND



**“Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper”
(2 Chron. 20:20).**

Watching Her Die

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezra 5:11-13; 6:7, 8

He cried that morning as he watched her die—not tears of pain, but tears of joy!

He thought back to the first time they met. How beautiful she was then, and how quickly they fell in love. The first few years their relationship remained as strong as it was the day they took their vows. As time progressed, however, things began to change.

Ever since he was a child, he had sensed a need in his life for something more than daily living. He had watched his father and mother work themselves literally to death in order to provide him and his brothers with the basic necessities of life. When he married, he promised himself, as well as his new bride, that things would never be that way for them. Unfortunately, no matter what position he held at the

He cried that morning as he watched her die— not tears of pain, but tears of joy!

company, no matter how well they were getting along in their relationship, there was still an emptiness inside.

That is when *they* were introduced and his life was never to be the same. Somehow this new love filled that hollow space inside; somehow he was able to find the answers to all of his questions.

Of course, she did not like it. Who was this stranger and how dare this person enter into his life and distract the attention she was so used to receiving? She was not about to allow him to be taken away.

They stayed together, though each of them grew progressively more unhappy, day by day. As he stood there and watched her pass to her watery grave, 20 years later, his heart melted with joy!

It was time for the pastor to pray; within a few minutes it would all be over and the mean and spiteful woman she had become would be gone—forever!

He opened his eyes, the floodgate broke, and the tears streamed down his face as he heard those words: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

As she came out of the water, he threw his arms around her. Twenty years of hatred, anger, and jealousy had just died, and now they could worship her newly found love, Jesus Christ, together.

The key for this couple, as well as for the Jews, was perseverance and trust in God. For this couple it meant the salvation of their marriage as well as their lives. For the Jews it meant the rebuilding of the temple—a symbol of the fact that the God of heaven was indeed their God and that He would be faithful as long as they trusted Him and allowed Him to be.

By Merrideth Wile, a junior psychology/theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

The Eyes of God Were Watching Over Them

LOGOS

Ezra 5:8

Following their return from captivity, the Jews made attempts to build the temple of God. At one stage the work was suspended because of their apparent insensitivity and the resultant conspiracy of their neighbors. The Samaritans offered to help them rebuild the temple, but they refused, and so, feeling slighted, the Samaritans succeeded in having Xerxes halt the rebuilding process.

Were the Samaritans' gestures of friendship genuine or were they a trap? Do I sometimes face similar situations, and how do I respond to them? Do we at times alienate other Christians by spurning their overtures of friendship and cooperation by our exclusivism? Are these reactions negative or positive? How should we understand the notion that we must be in the world but not of it?

The rebuilding program was halted, and the edifice remained unfinished for two years. At this juncture, however, the people were challenged to tend to the task of rebuilding the temple. Thus, the work was restarted. Of significance, however, is the fact that while the work stoppage was by imperial edict, the resumption was not by an official mandate. They saw that the king was preoccupied with internal problems, and they took advantage of the opportunity. They succeeded in this venture until a Persian official and his officers challenged the legality of the project. The Jewish leaders were undaunted, however, because they felt the eyes of their God were watching over them. This conviction gave them power and strength to meet the challenges of the times. Knowledge of the watchful eyes of God gave them courage, stamina, fortitude, and protection.

We too face dilemmas and hurdles that harass us and try our souls. Daily, as young adults, we face such issues: a disparaging remark from a professor or friend, a hostile paragraph in a book, the consent to the appeal of sin, even for a moment, and faith could be mortally wounded. We too need to confront the enemy of souls with resolution and firm conviction. To do so, we must set our gaze on Christ and have the firm assurance that His eyes are watching us.

Who are some of the individuals in my church today (local and international) who inspire the people of God to do exploits for Him? How can we be alert and knowledgeable about the times so we can capitalize on opportunities for the cause of God? What modern examples of God's intervention in human affairs can I personally cite?

The imperial authorities visited Jerusalem in quest of the building permit that authorized the reconstruction efforts that were in progress, as well as the names of the leaders who were behind the project. The Jewish elders were not intimidated, however, and their forthright response can be viewed from the point of view of the dispatch the officials sent to the king. The report apparently had three sections. The first told of their visit to Jerusalem and their discovery of the clandestine building operations. The second part of the report delineates their

request for the building permits and the names of the coconspirators, and the third outlines the response of the Jewish authorities.

This account deserves our studied attention. Its candor and detailed description of the reply are intriguing. Its reference to Yahweh as “the great God” and the temple as His house is remarkable. Significant too is the fact that the people’s confidence in the watchful eyes of God proved not to have been misplaced. The report seems to state their case fairly and concludes with a request for the king to research the accuracy of their claim. This suggests that if God is on our side there is nothing to fear. Besides, it says that wrong may triumph for a while, but it will not last forever.

Do I recognize God as the source of my strength and the architect of my success?

Even the king’s research into the royal archives proved to be to the advantage of the Jews. Not only was Cyrus’ building authorization found and enforced, but

Even the king’s research into the royal archives proved to be to the advantage of the Jews.

it was discovered that the state was obligated to provide financial sponsorship for the building project, as well as animals for sacrifices. The authorization had decreed the size of the temple and had even mandated that the sacred objects that had been removed from the temple and taken to Babylon should be returned. I like the response of Darius to his find. It provides further proof of the watchful eye of God. It reads:

“Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site” (Ezra 6:6, 7, NIV). He even went beyond this and mandated what they should do to be supportive of the project. “May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence” (6:12). Certainly this statement made this edict enforceable and preempted any further attempts to stymie the reconstruction efforts. It carries his full weight and his appeal to Yahweh’s help to prevent work stoppage.

With this official backing the builders continued their task with determination. The temple was completed and dedicated about 515 B.C. and a Passover celebration was held. I am sure the people were happy that despite an absence of some 70 years, Yahweh was now being worshiped in His sanctuary again.

What have I learned from this lesson that has strengthened my faith in God and His promises?

By Bertram Melbourne, chairman of the religion department at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Set Free From Sin to Serve

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Zech. 3:8, 9

To me Revelation 1:5, 6 expresses the entire history of God's people. That makes this text very relevant to our lesson.

God's love for Adam and Eve prompted Him to promise to send the Redeemer to suffer the fate that the human race deserved because of their disobedience. This same love would look down upon the children of Israel in bondage and speak words of redemption through the mouth of Moses to Pharaoh, "Let my people go."

The words "freed us" (verse 5, NIV) smack of the liberation of the Exodus, of deliverance, for those who were in bondage. But these words are more than history. Just turn on the tube or pick up a newspaper. God is actively at work setting the captives free.

What is it He has ultimately freed us from? The text is clear; it says, "from our sins." The only true God, the God of the cross, has freed us from our sins—all of

Like the exiles from Babylon, we have been freed and called upon to enter into service for our God.

them, past, present, and future—by His act of deliverance on a hill called Calvary. For all who come to the foot of the cross the Lord says, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you" (Zech. 3:4).

Like the exiles from Babylon, we have been freed and called upon to enter into service for our God (Rev. 1:6). Just as Zerubbabel and Jeshua were called upon to build the temple of God, we too have been called. For we know that we are living stones, being built into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5).

We must not be fearful as we share the gospel with others. Ellen White says, "Though the conflict is a ceaseless one, none are left to struggle alone. Angels help and protect those who walk humbly before God. Never will our Lord betray one who trusts in Him. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says, for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands."^{*}

The cross is the standard that Christ lifts up against the enemy. It should be the standard we lift high as we build God's temple.

REACT

1. In what sense, if any, do I feel that I am a part of "history in the making"?
2. To what extent am I fearful of sharing the gospel with others?

^{*}*Prophets and Kings*, p. 571.

By Michael Bernoi, a senior theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland, and part-time pastor at New Hope Church in Laurel, Maryland.

A Return to Old Ways

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezra 6:7

The sanctuary had always been the center of Jewish life. From the time of Moses a Jew's life revolved around sacrifices, weekly rituals, and monthly and yearly celebrations of repentance and thankfulness to Yahweh.

The temple of Solomon was destroyed in two stages during the siege of Babylon. In 597 B.C. the temple was looted during Nebuchadnezzar's takeover of Jerusalem. Eleven years later it was completely destroyed.¹

In 538 B.C. Cyrus signed the decree to rebuild the holy city. He invited the Jews to return to Palestine. Those few who took up his offer began the rebuilding effort by setting up an altar and clearing away the rubble, but not until Darius the Great sat upon the throne was the temple of Yahweh once again a central part of life in Jerusalem.²

God inspired His prophet Haggai to deliver a series of sermons to get the Jews moving on the temple project. This effort lasted several months, with Zechariah

God inspired His prophet Haggai to deliver a series of sermons to get the Jews moving.

joining him after the first message. The Holy Spirit once again resided in the hearts of the Jews, and the rebuilding commenced.

The early years of Darius the Great were tenuous. Local governors kept their eyes open for signs of fortification and rebellion. Thus when the Jews began gathering building materials, the local magistrate came to investigate. The letter that he wrote to Darius gives the Jews plenty of room to justify their actions.³ And the Jews did just that.

Ezra 5:1-17 articulates the Jewish defense. Notice that the Jews first declared their dedication to God and to rebuilding His temple. They explained why the temple was destroyed and how the current building project came about. They suggested that Darius look in the archives for the decree and then settle the matter. The decree was found, and King Darius sent back a command to uphold it. Further, he told Tattenai to pay for the expenses of the men working on the project and to buy whatever was needed to offer sacrifices to the "God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons" (6:10, NIV). Thus the temple was completed, and the exiled Jews once again had a home in Jerusalem.

1. André Parrot, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (New York: The Philosophical Library Inc., 1955), pp. 59, 60.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70.

3. D. J. Clines, *The New Century Bible Commentary, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 84, 85.

By Angie Holdsworth, a freelance writer who lives in Adelphi, Maryland.

Doing the Right Thing!

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Chron. 20:20

A simple gospel is not enhanced by simplistic reading and doing. As we reflect on our individual and collective responses to prophetic counsel, consider the following factors:

1. *Behind the obvious there is a principle.* It is all too common to read counsel from Scripture or the writings of Ellen White and not ask such appropriate questions as: To whom was this written? Why was this written? What was the social, theological, ecclesiastic context? Without asking these questions it is possible to apply the correct answer to the wrong question or issue. An example would be the purpose behind Paul's counsel regarding women keeping their heads covered during worship. What was the principle behind his counsel?

2. *What would the result of this counsel look like in 1993?* The world we live in is very different from the worlds of Isaiah, Paul, or even Ellen White. The way

Paul's counsel to the Corinthians on dealing with sexual immorality differed from that of Jesus.

counsel might be carried out in these different historical contexts may look very different. How did obedience to Paul's counsel on public worship (1 Cor. 14:26-40) look in A.D. 65? How might it look in A.D. 1993?

3. *How does obedience to specific prophetic counsel interface with the broad plan?* It is very important to keep the larger picture in mind. Would obedience to a specific prophetic counsel mesh with the gracious picture of God that we see in the person of Jesus? Might it supplant that picture or distort it? Paul's counsel to the Corinthians on dealing with sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-8:9) seemed to differ from that of Jesus (John 8:1-11). Why was each appropriate to its immediate context?

4. *How does obedience to specific prophetic counsel interface with God's mission to the unsaved world?* In the time of Jesus and the apostles, the Jewish people were so eager to be obedient that they erected barriers between themselves and a world that needed to hear about their God. It is possible for our obedience to specific counsel to separate us from our neighbors and prevent us from obedience to greater, more important counsel.

REACT

1. How does one reconcile seemingly contradictory points of view from the Bible?

2. To what extent should a biblical student take social and historical context into account in interpreting biblical counsel?

By Bruce Campbell Moyer, urban-ministry teacher at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

That Undeniable Faith

OPINION

Key Text: Josh. 1:6

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Josh. 1:6, NIV).

Faith in God may be something we say we have or think we have. It does not lie dormant, waiting to be awakened in times of crisis. It is an ever-present trait that is demonstrated by Christians. Jesus said if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, even to the point of moving mountains, nothing will be impossible (Matt. 17:20). Believing in God is much easier because His promises are real and sincere. It is different from hearing the president say the economy will improve.

The prophets of the Lord, Haggai and Zechariah, prophesied to the Jews, instructing them to resume work on the temple. These men were more than just cheerleaders sent to motivate a crowd. These prophets were given the truth, and

Faith does not lie dormant, waiting to be awakened in times of crisis.

they delivered it. A true prophet of God cannot be suppressed. His or her messages are the seeds that are sown to bear more fruit. When the word is heard, it sustains us and renews our faith to, as with the seed, continue growing. It may be trampled, it may be hurt, but God lifts it up to its proper setting.

When the work on the temple came to a standstill, the Jews had neglected to put God first. One of Zechariah’s first messages was one of assurance. The Jews then continued to work for months by faith. They knew the temple had to be completed despite the governor’s wanting to shut their project down.

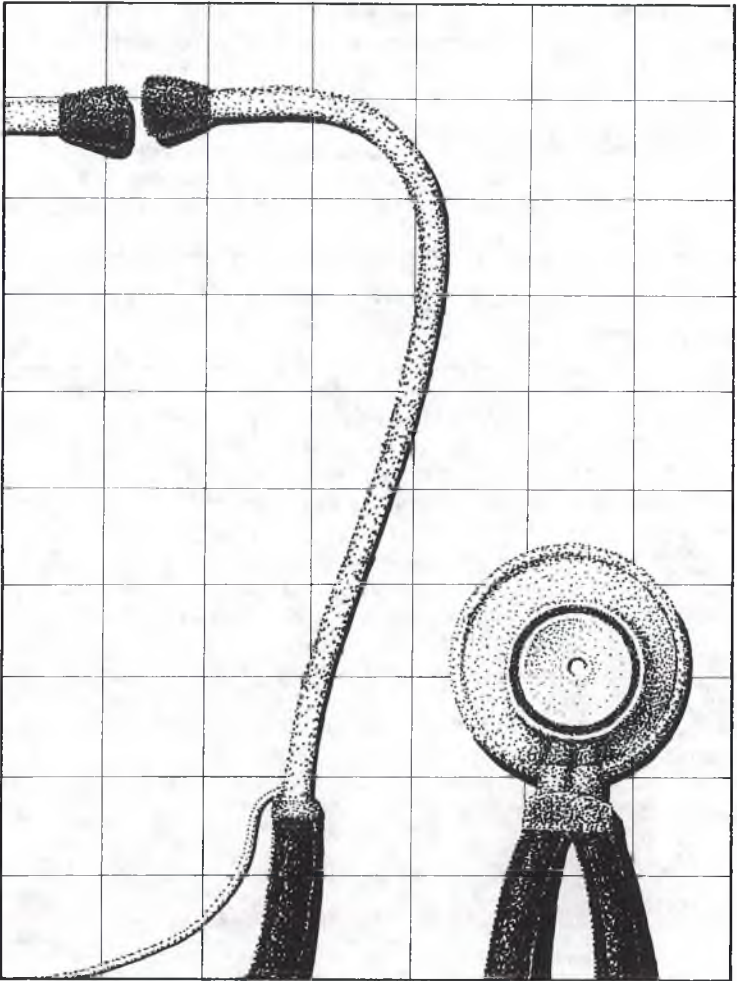
Many times when we pray we ask for God’s presence to be with us. We may fail to realize the role of the Holy Spirit and why Jesus had to leave so He can be with us always, even to the end of time (Matt. 28:20). For some people it is hard to believe in something you can’t see or feel, but God is real and *is* with us. In this day and age we put our faith into many things we can’t visualize or touch. Faith in God is the best investment of a lifetime.

REACT

1. How has my faith in God been challenged in life?
2. What assures me that God cares for me?

By Ricardo S. Castillo, a senior history and English-education major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

TREATMENT AT THE RIGHT TIME



“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).

OK . . . Now!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezra 7:10

Achondroplasia is a genetic mutation that expresses itself within a few months after birth. As its victims grow older, the bones in their arms and legs do not develop at the normal rate, resulting in shorter-than-normal stature. Mark has this disease. Although it is incurable, there is a way to overcome the physical defect.

It is a relatively new procedure in the United States, and his is one of the first cases to be treated. This process takes approximately three years and involves breaking both of his legs in two places and both of his arms. A pin is placed on both sides of the fracture, joined by a jackscrew apparatus that is turned once a day,

This process takes approximately three years and involves breaking both of his legs in two places and both of his arms.

causing the pins to separate one millimeter. This small movement allows the skin, ligaments, muscles, tendons, and—more important—nerves and blood vessels to stretch gradually to the desired length. While the repair process occurs, the pins (which are continually spreading out) prevent the fractured ends of the bone from fusing until the time is right.

Just as there comes a point in the treatment of achondroplasia where the bone is ready to form, there was a specific time allotted for the return and coming together of Israel as a nation. God chose Ezra to lead His people to Jerusalem to begin anew. Israel was finally ready. Now was the right time for them to return to their land and rebuild their temple and their nation.

By Angela Maria Fals, a senior premed student at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida.

Spiritual Leadership With a Vision

LOGOS

Ezra 7:10

The year 457 B.C. marks an important date for us as Seventh-day Adventists because it is the starting point of the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14. This period extends from 467 B.C. to A.D. 1844. It begins not only with two men chosen by God to rebuild edifices and walls but with the faith and spirituality of His people.

“Nehemiah, one of the Hebrew exiles, occupied a position of influence and honor in the Persian court. . . . Through this man, prepared by his residence in the Persian court for the work to which he was to be called, God purposed to bring blessing to His people in the land of their fathers.”¹ “God chose Ezra to be an instrument of good to Israel . . . Ezra developed into a man of extraordinary learning and became ‘a ready scribe in the law of Moses.’ Verse 6.”² Ezra also “had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm.”³ A great movement of rebuilding lives requires the best leaders. Ezra was ready for the job. He had the skills needed. He was a leader. Let’s take a look at his leadership.

Ezra Was in Touch With His World (Ezra 7:27, 28)

Ezra was a man in touch with his world, society, culture, and customs. His workplace was the king’s palace. He was not isolated from the mainstream of society. He had developed relationships with people in the arts, in the intellectual and political arena—people including the CEO of the Medo-Persian court, the king himself. Ezra thanked God for the opportunity to be part of the lives of these people. He said, “Praise be to the Lord, . . . who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king’s powerful officials” (verses 27, 28, NIV).

Ezra Was in Touch With God (verse 10)

It is important to be in touch with the world where we live and work. But equally important is to be in touch with God. Ezra sought God and His Word with all his heart. He “had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (verse 10, NKJV). This text shows that Ezra had his priorities in the proper order. As a spiritual leader Ezra “prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord.” He found in God’s Word spiritual fulfillment. He gained a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose for his life. Spiritual leaders must have the right kind of heart relationship with God.

Ezra Practiced What He Preached (verse 10)

Ezra made up his mind not only to learn from the Word of God but to put it into practice. He practiced what he preached. He was a good role model. “Being a role model means paying attention to what you believe is important. It means showing others through your behavior that you live your values.”⁴ Ezra “became a man of piety and zeal. He was the Lord’s witness to the world of the power of Bible truth to ennoble the daily life.”⁵

Ezra Taught With a Vision (verse 7)

Ezra articulated God's law to the people with a transforming relevancy. The two chapters under study this week mention eight references about Ezra's being a "teacher," "well versed," "devoted to study," "to teaching," "a man learned," "possessed [of] God's wisdom." Ezra communicated God's message with wisdom, passion, vision, and power. When he gathered the people by the river Ahava, he introduced his vision and message. He led the people through a fast to experience repentance, a heart preparation at its best. Ezra inspired a vision in the people—a sign of a successful leader. Successful leaders "breathe life into what are the hopes and dreams of others and enable [them] to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds. . . . Only through an intimate knowledge of their dreams, their hopes, their aspirations, their visions, their values is the leader able to enlist their support."⁶ Ezra did precisely that. This is seen when he sent a message to leaders and men of understanding to make a last and urgent appeal to the Levites

Ezra had developed relationships with people in the arts, in the intellectual and political arena.

for participation on the return journey. These men caught that vision and communicated it to the Levites. The Levites in return responded and also caught the vision of a new beginning back in Jerusalem. At the end of the fast the people were ready to start the journey. God led and protected them.

It is only through a man like Ezra, who caught God's vision and made it his, that great changes can be made and movements started. Throughout the 2300 years of prophetic time there were many men and women who continued exercising Ezra's kind of leadership and ministry. In 1844, when this prophecy concluded, God also raised again men and women with the qualities Ezra had in his life to build His kingdom through the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This time the mission is to prepare the *world* for the heavenly Jerusalem.

REACT

1. How in touch am I with my world, society, culture? How important is it to be in touch?
2. What are the essential qualifications for a spiritual leader in the 1990s?
3. Should church leaders develop high profile relationships with worldly influential people? Explain your answer.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 628.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 609.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 608.

4. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991), p. 12.

5. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 609.

6. Kouzes and Posner, *ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

By Sergio Torres, associate church-ministries director for youth and young adult ministries in the Florida Conference, Miami, Florida.

Are You Hungry?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 4:4

You haven't eaten all day, and you hurriedly run to the cafeteria, where you order a large, juicy vegeburger. This immediately becomes the fuel that energizes you for the rest of the day. Just as we revitalize our physical bodies, we should also look to the Scriptures as the daily nourishment of our spiritual bodies.

In the Scriptures, Ezra found the life-giving nourishment he needed to fulfill God's will. "As our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the word of God. And every soul is to receive life from God's word for himself. As we must eat for ourselves in order to receive nourishment, so we must receive the word for ourselves."¹

Searching the Scriptures brings great rewards into our daily and eternal lives. In our daily lives, an increase in spiritual knowledge has a direct effect on genuine

"Through a correct faith, divine knowledge will become human knowledge."

human knowledge. The Spirit of Prophecy says, "Through a correct faith, divine knowledge will become human knowledge. No one can search the Scriptures in the spirit of Christ without being rewarded."² In our eternal lives, "our salvation depends on a knowledge of the truth contained in the Scriptures. It is God's will that we should possess this."³ "This is the knowledge which is obtained by searching the word of God. And this treasure may be found by every soul who will give all to obtain it."⁴ "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5).

REACT

1. How does spiritual knowledge affect the knowledge we use in the classroom or at work?
2. How should people search the Scriptures in order to obtain correct understanding?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 390.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 113, 114.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

By Eugenia Vega, a senior English and education major, and Carlos Martinez, a senior premed student at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida.

The Ultimate Transplant

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ezek. 36:26

Anissa Ayala was the happiest person on earth. The operation had lasted five hours, and a woman who only a few days earlier had given up in her struggle to survive looked to a healthy future. Only one thing had made it possible—her sister's bone marrow.

Anissa had leukemia, creating a need for a marrow transplant. Donor and recipient must have similar marrows, and it is very difficult to find the ideal match. Anissa's parents at the ages of 48 and 45 attempted to beat tremendous odds when they decided to conceive a child who would provide the needed match. On June 4, 1991, Anissa received the perfect gift from her baby sister Marissa.

Anissa's situation is similar to the Christian's spiritual life. Cancerous thoughts invade the mind and, if they are not replaced by the Word of God, can quickly

As with cancerous cells, impure thoughts will not leave the mind unless positive ones replace them.

multiply until they become undesirable habits, which can then lead to a sinful way of life. As with the cancerous cells, the impure thoughts will not leave the mind unless positive ones replace them.

This is why the Bible is so important in our daily walk with God. In it we find His will for our lives, including the very thoughts that we should dwell on. When the Bible talks about considering the ant and its ways (Prov. 6:6), or not worrying about tomorrow (Matt. 6:34), or thinking only about pure and noble things (Phil. 4:8), it is giving us direct guidelines on what our thought processes should be. The daily reading of the Bible results in a continuous transplant of pure thoughts for impure ones, uplifting ideas for depressing ones, eternal concepts for fleeting ones.

Just as Ezra had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, . . . and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10), the people of God in the last days will return to the Bible as never before. They will experience a true revival as they witness a series of events culminating in their seeing the Son of God coming in the clouds, instantly giving His people immortal minds and bodies. That will truly be the ultimate transplant!

REACT

1. How essential is the reading of the Bible for salvation?
2. Is someone's righteous behavior proof of his or her conversion? What are the signs of a true spiritual "transplant"?

By George E. Aristide, a second-year medical student at the University of Miami Medical School, Miami, Florida.

You Can Become Rich

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezra 7:10

As an 11-year-old with an insatiable desire to learn electronics, I had just connected an electronic device to a power source. Unfortunately what I had thought was an electronic device turned out to be a dynamite blasting cap. The ensuing explosion left all of the fingers on my right hand amputated.

It is natural to feel dependence on God when things aren't going your way, but what about all the good times? Do you need to feel dread and desperation before you pick up the Word of God and read it?

Here are a few points to consider:

1. *Don't wait until tragedy strikes.* Unfortunately many seek God and begin to study the Scriptures only after a major catastrophe has struck. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to belittle the importance of our reliance on God in times of tragedy. Nonetheless, you will enjoy a richer, deeper Christian experience and a

What I had thought was an electronic device turned out to be a dynamite blasting cap.

greater understanding of the many facets of God's character by relying on God's Word for strength and knowledge in both good times and bad.

2. *Make a conscious choice to study the Scriptures.* My best friend, Jose Fuentes, fell in love and moved to California to establish a home and to continue his studies as a premed student at Loma Linda University. As time has gone on, we each have had to contend with busy schedules. We have had to *make* time for writing and calling each other when there didn't seem to be any.

Your relationship with God really isn't much different from a relationship with a friend who lives far away. To gain a deeper understanding that *leads* to a closer bond, you will have to make the time to study His Word. Review your schedule and dedicate a specific time slot each day to study the Scriptures. This investment of time will pay off in many different ways.

3. *Be open to God's guidance and share the truths you discover with friends.* As your relationship develops and you learn more about God, approach His guidance with a humble spirit. Just as Ezra through his diligent study of the Scriptures came to discover and enjoy a deeper understanding of God and His will for His nation, you too will discover God's will for your life.

Ezra not only gained a deeper understanding of God's Word, but he shared it with others. His relationship with God filled his life until it overflowed and influenced everyone around him. Fortunately in 1993 we don't need to make a five-month journey before coming in contact with a copy of the Scriptures as Ezra had to do. The Word is at arm's length. Reach out and grab hold of it!

By Osvaldo Coto, a freelance software engineer in Miami Lakes, Florida, who specializes in video games and graphics-oriented programming languages.

Reconstruction. It's Happening!

OPINION

Key Text: Ezra 6:12

How can I benefit from the experiences described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah? First, we would have to find out what experiences Ezra and Nehemiah had. Unfortunately, like many of my friends, I have always focused only on the beautiful aspect of spirituality in Jesus Christ, namely the New Testament. The Old Testament doesn't seem either applicable or relevant to life today. However, as you are about to see, the Bible is always applicable, and when you spend some quality time with the Holy Spirit and God's written Word, relevance is bound to surface.

There are two areas on which I would like to concentrate. First, are we as Seventh-day Adventists coming out of exile, or are we hiding, as the Jewish nation

Will we, as individuals, be part of the revival of God's church? Christianity has been in exile.

did? Today our church is facing a major identity crisis. We are happy with the way we are, traditional, passive. Second, will we, as individuals, be part of the revival of God's church? I am convinced that Christianity has been in exile. You may have noticed that it wasn't real cool, while we were going through school, to be associated with religion. For some time now Christians have been in the closet. That is, we readily admitted our faith to fellow believers, but not so freely to nonbelievers. Why? I think it was, and it is, because our society promotes independence, freedom. It is "you and nobody else."

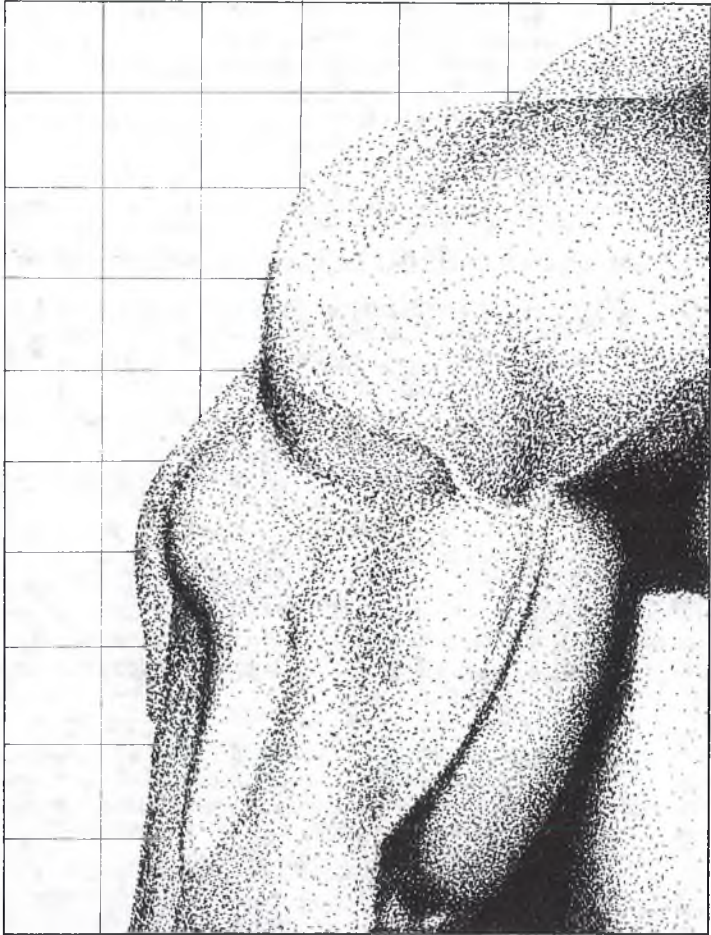
But more and more people like you and me are realizing that life is meaningless without hope for a better way of life. And that hope is in Jesus Christ and His church. Once God decides to rejuvenate or rebuild His church, there is no stopping Him. Well, it is happening before your eyes. Though many forces are working against God's will, the church will be revived. More and more Christians of all types are responding to the call to rebuild. What is happening around you that may be part of the reconstruction? I am constantly reading and hearing about exciting things that young people are doing to make a difference. New, more contemporary services and activities are popping up all over the place. Why? Because God is alive today, here and now! Are you going to watch the reconstruction of God's final work on this earth or are you going to become involved?

REACT

1. In what ways is Christianity in exile today?
2. How is this exile affecting my life in everyday terms?
3. What can I do about it?

By J. Brian Soto, a management consultant in Miami, Florida.

MATTERS OF THE HEART



“Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away” (Mal. 2:15, 16).

What a Waste!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Mal. 2:15, 16; 2 Cor. 6:14; Judg. 14:3

He was every parent's dream. The ideal son. Young couples wished silently to have a boy like him. Parents asked their sons, "Why can't you be more like him?" Here was a man who was the pride of the church and his family. More than that, he was everybody's hero.

How every young woman in the community silently wished to become his bride. Each had secretly dreamed of a single sympathetic look in her direction. "Oh, how my heart would be satisfied if he would greet me just once!" But all those hopes and wishes melted away as the news of his wedding circulated like wildfire.

Great things were expected of this wedding. All looked forward eagerly to find out whom he had chosen as his bride. Soon anticipation turned to disgust. "What a waste!" No one could understand his choice. He was marrying a woman

Here was a man who was the pride of the church and his family. He was everybody's hero.

of different culture and religion—a woman from a country that was one of their country's bitterest enemies.

Self-willed Samson. How could he do this to his parents, to his country, to his church, and to his God? As a community leader, in fact a national leader, how could he betray the trust of his people? How could he even consider such a mixed marriage? Would it end their old-time battles or ignite more difficult ones?

He must have considered what it would cost him to take a wife who did not belong to his own faith. Would he be able to win her to his religion and his God or would it cost him his spirituality? Would it be a marriage for the better or for the worse?

Surely, had he thought about the welfare of his expected children, the question of their religion would have been raised. Which church would his children attend? What kind of people did he want them to be? Maybe he was attempting to unite Israel and the Philistines. But, in fact, his marriage to this foreigner would drive the two nations farther apart.

His thought of happiness with this beautiful woman was soon dashed as Samson lost his young bride before their honeymoon was over. His entanglement with foreign women would eventually cost him his life.

Was the thrill of marrying a beautiful-but-foreign wife worth the risk? Or was it just a waste of time, energy, dignity, and all that makes a life worthwhile?

By Mario S. Asumen, a religion student at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

A Matter of the Heart

LOGOS

2 Cor. 6:14-18

One question often asked by college students is about dating and/or marrying non-Adventist partners. The problem is not a new one. It became the center of discussion in the time of Ezra some 400 years before Christ. The principles found in this week's text still remain relevant to us.

The Holy-Hearted Remnant

"They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them" (Ezra 9:2, NIV).

The word *holy* here is used in the sense of something that is dedicated to good and preserved from evil. Its combination with the word *race* indicates that the exiles were the holy children of God who received the promise of restoration to the land (Isa. 6:13).

Their reentry into the land was a "second Exodus," another chance to prove that they could be faithful to God. They were to be marked off from other peoples by their belief in Him. The term *holy race* demonstrates the potential and status of God's people. No matter how severely God had punished His people, these were the people with whom He had made His covenant. Intermarriage with foreigners was a denial of their special position before God.

How does my understanding of the remnant of God affect what I do, especially in regard to considering marriage?

Halfhearted Commitment

"Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes'" (Rev. 18:4, 5).

The Old Testament repeatedly warns the Israelites not to marry foreigners, because this would lead to religious apostasy (Exod. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4). The people, however, did not keep themselves free from entanglements with the native inhabitants of the land, but had by marrying these foreigners placed themselves where they were endangering their spiritual condition. The Bible teaches elsewhere that for a believer to enter into a marriage with an unbeliever is likely to imperil both the faith of the believer and the marriage, since the two partners cannot share the things that they personally hold most dear (see 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Intermingling with the foreigners and adopting their ways had caused the Israelites' commitment to true religion to diminish. Consequently, they lost their religious identity. Compromise naturally followed. Ezra was concerned with this compromise and its effects on the purity of religion. The unique identity of God's people was being lost because they could not be clearly distinguished from the rest of the inhabitants of the land.

This situation is similar to that which will prevail in the last days of earth's

history. Revelation 18:1-5 tells us that another angel will call out with a loud voice for God's people to take their stand and distinguish themselves from the world. God's people must be distinct or they cannot demonstrate that He makes a difference in their lives.

How could dating/marrying a nonbeliever lead me to compromise my faith and values?

Wholehearted Consecration

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. . . . What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? . . . As God has said: . . . 'I will be their God, and they will be my people.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

As we have already seen, the underlying issue in Ezra 9 and 10 is the purity of religion. Intermixing with other peoples brought a confusion of the true religion

Ezra encouraged the Israelites to divorce their foreign spouses.

with false religions. The very existence of God's unique and holy people was jeopardized. The sad part is that the religious leaders and state officials who were supposed to remind the Israelites by word and example that they were God's special people had been foremost in leading out in this crime.

The times called for drastic measures. Ezra published a list of the offenders and encouraged the Israelites to divorce their foreign spouses in order to separate themselves from the surrounding people (Ezra 10:11, 18-44). His reaction to intermarriage, as strong as it was, was right for the situation. Israel could not hope to fulfill her mission of witnessing on God's behalf if she merged her identity with the surrounding nations.

The issue that Ezra raises for the church today is its faithfulness to its heritage. God's people should be devoted to the things that really count rather than to an *adequate* religion, which is convenient in its demands but scarcely open to the voice of God. Faithfulness to the church's heritage is simply faithfulness and commitment to Christ. There can never be a *mere* respect for the past. We have to be open to the future as we apply the demands of the Lordship of Christ to our own lives. The church needs men and women who, like Daniel, make a conscious decision to follow God no matter what the cost (Dan. 1:8), men and women whose consciences are "as true to duty as the needle to the pole, . . . who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."*

REACT

Where do I stand in regard to dating and/or marrying nonbelievers? What steps am I willing to take or commitment to make to keep from compromising my faith in this matter? What is meant by "faithfulness to the church's heritage"?

**Education*, p. 57.

By Bruce Norman, an assistant professor of theology and Christian ethics at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

Unequally Yoked

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ezra 10:10

“We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land” (Ezra 10:2). God condemned mixed marriage as sin. Ezra called for repentance from such sin and asked the people to “put away all the wives, and such as are born of them” (verse 3). Paul knew the evils of mixed marriages and hence he said, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14).

Perhaps you may think that you will be able to convert your partner after marriage. But remember, “It is a dangerous thing to form a worldly alliance. Satan well knows that the hour that witnesses the marriage of many young men and women closes the history of their religious experience and usefulness. They are lost

“The marriage of many young men and women closes the history of their religious experience.”

to Christ. They may for a time make an effort to live a Christian life, but all their strivings are made against a steady influence in the opposite direction. . . . As a result, faith in the precious truth dies out of the heart.”¹

Intermarriage between fellow believers of different races is also not ideal. “There is an objection to the marriage of the white race with the black. . . . The children of these mixed marriages have a feeling of bitterness toward the parents.”² This principle is applicable not only for the black and white alone, but for other forms of interracial marriages.

Notice the results of mixed marriages in the Bible. Ahab’s marriage with an idolatrous woman led himself and the nation “far from the living God and corrupted their ways before Him.”³ “Abraham’s early teachings had not been without effect upon Ishmael, but the influence of his wives resulted in establishing idolatry in his family.”⁴ “It is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed.”⁵

REACT

Why does God disapprove of mixed marriage?

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 66.
2. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 343.
3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 115.
4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 174.
5. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 358.

By Selmon Dio, a graduate student in religion at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

From Child of Light to Child of Darkness

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 6:14

Since marriage serves as a picture of the relationship between God and His people (Jer. 3; Ezek. 16; Hos. 1-3), God wants His people to keep their purity by not marrying nonbelievers (Exod. 34:15, 16; Deut. 7:3, 4; Josh. 23:11-14). In Jewish history, however, time and again God's people were condemned for destroying their religious purity by engaging in mixed marriage with pagans in the land. Ezra mentions not only the Israelites but also, and more important, the Levites and the priests who were guilty of the practice.

The Hebrew word translated in RSV as "mixed" (Ezra 9:2) means "exchanged pledges," "to have fellowship with," or "share in."¹ The use of this word indicates that the Israelites were not only practicing mixed marriages, but also accepting their

Indonesia prohibits mixed marriages between Muslim believers and Christians.

spouses' religious practices, even though the law strictly prohibited such (Deut. 23:17, 18).

God's ideal for marriage should be an important factor affecting the choice of a life partner and is still to be applied today. One should choose his or her partner from among the community of believers in order to preserve the purity of God's chosen people. Approximately one-third of marriages in the United States are interfaith marriages.² "Interfaith marriages tend to have about 10 percent higher divorce rate than marriages within the same faith."³

The prohibition of mixed marriages is mentioned not only in Scripture. The Islamic government in Indonesia, for example, in Marriage Laws Number 1, 1974, prohibits mixed marriages between Muslim believers and Christians. This was to preserve the oneness of faith in the family and to avoid the possibility of religious confusion caused by mixed marriages. Even secular governments recognized the difficulties of interfaith marriages.

REACT

To what degree do mixed marriages affect the individual members of the family?

1. Terry A. Armstrong, Douglas L. Bushby, and Cyril F. Carr, *A Reader's Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 632.

2. Brent Barlow, *The Family Coordinator*, 26 (April 1977), pp. 143-150.

3. Larry Bumpass and James Sweet, "Differentials in Marital Stability," *Sociological Review*, 37 (1972), pp. 754-766.

By Steven J. Rantung, a graduate student in religion at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

The Treasure of the Heart

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 1:1, 2

It is easy to succumb to our own desires, especially in regard to choosing a life partner. But the Lord has promised us guidance in this decision. He will help us make the right choice of a spouse if we will seek His advice:

1. *Make Jesus your personal friend.* “Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:16, 17).

Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life for us. He calls us His friends because He has revealed to us the will of His Father. We are His friends, and when we ask anything according to His will, the Father will give it to us (see John 15:13-16; 1 John 5:14, 15), including the wisdom to choose a suitable partner.

2. *Participate in group activities with the friends of Jesus.* “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the

The company of the friends of Jesus is the right place to find life partners.

Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). The company of the friends of Jesus is the right place to find life partners. We find them in social interactions such as parties and picnics conducted in a Christian manner; in religious meetings, such as church services, prayer meetings, camp meetings, youth meetings, and music festivals; and in Christian educational activities, such as group discussions and study tours.

3. *Fill the mind with good thoughts.* “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matt. 12:35).

If the books we read, the movies we watch, the songs we listen to, and the conversations we engage in, arouse unsanctified passion in us, we can be sure that we will be affected and disposed toward choosing nonbelievers or nominal believers for our life partner. Why not study the Bible and other educational books instead of reading fiction and pornography; watch films on nature and on the gospel mission work instead of watching scenes on murder and impure love; listen to spiritually edifying songs instead of pop, jazz, and rock music; and talk of Jesus and His second coming? We need pure thoughts to make the right choice of a life partner.

REACT

1. What specific things in my community tend to draw me away from Jesus and His friends?
2. How can I counteract these evil influences in my particular situation?

By Lameck Miyayo, a graduate student of theology at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

Do Not Play With Marriage

OPINION

Key Text: Ezra 10:4

Civilization and high technology have brought to us an *instant lifestyle*. But this has also produced a loss of consideration of some of the deeper things in life.

“I do what I want to do when I want to.” This kind of approach to life indicates a lack of maturity. Every generation has experienced, at times, this lack of maturity. Yesterday’s best answers become today’s worn-out philosophy.

It is hoped that all human beings can learn from their mistakes. This method of trial and error is a useful and natural way to learn. But oftentimes the pain from which we suffer because of our own mistakes is too severe to handle. It brings us to the point that we feel as though no hope is left. How often we experience this hopelessness.

Prevention costs very little but offers many possibilities. Curative medicine requires special attention. Sometimes it creates a heavy burden of expense. In many

You consider all factors when purchasing a car you will have for only a few years.

cases the medicine fails and the person is subjected to a long duration of pain and sorrow. Death and continuous tragedy follow.

Somebody said, “Life is short anyway, so let’s enjoy it.” However, life is too valuable to use it worthlessly. Marriage is not common play or a game. It is God’s holy plan for the happiness of all. Problems and unhappy events in your marriage may indicate that something could be very wrong.

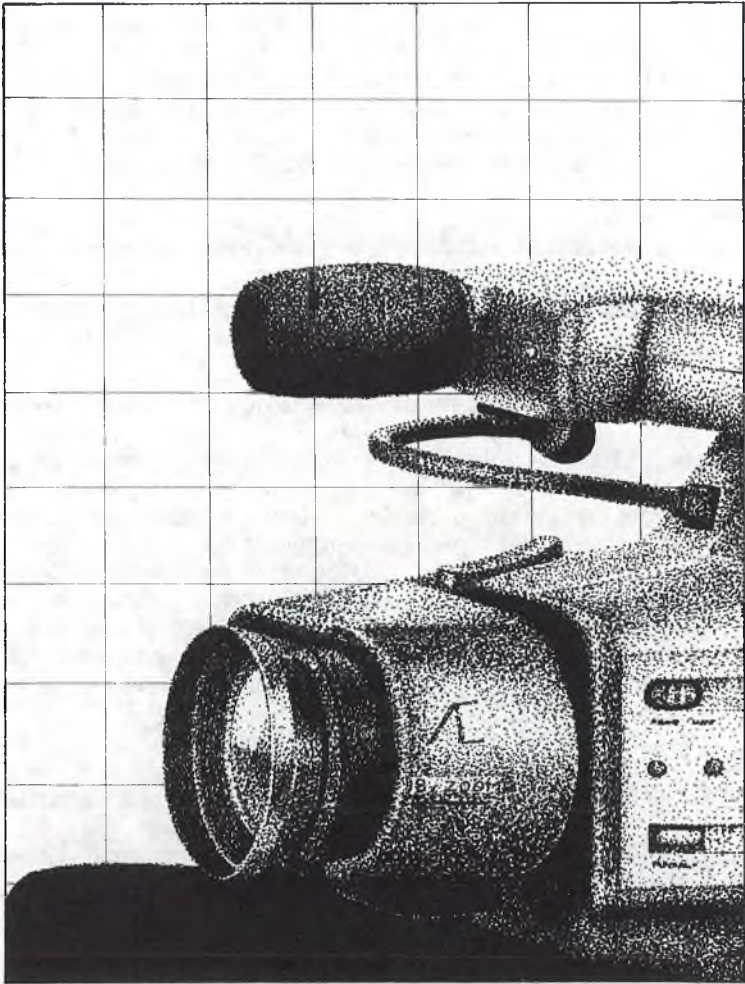
You take great care to buy proper food that lasts for only a few days. You consider all factors when purchasing a car you will have for only a few years. Should you not weigh carefully a decision that will affect the rest of your life—your decision to marry? The seriousness of the decision should drive you to see the wisdom of God when choosing a partner, wisdom God is more than happy to give you (James 1:5-8).

REACT

1. Should intermarriage with someone of another Christian denomination be considered as serious as with a non-Christian? Explain your answer.
2. What can the church do to encourage less religious intermarriage among its membership?
3. What Christian principles, if any, apply to the subject of interracial marriage?
4. What counsel does the Bible have for someone who is already married to an unbeliever?

By Shin Dong Hee, a graduate student of theology at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, Philippines.

A PATRIOT'S DREAM



“Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:12).

“I Have a Dream”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 127:1

“I Have a Dream,” “Your Honor, we find the defendants not guilty.” “Welcome to the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather. Tonight there is rioting in the streets of Los Angeles. People are outraged at the not-guilty verdict given in the Rodney King case. People feel there is conclusive evidence via the home video tape to convict the policemen of the beating of Rodney King, a Black man.”

Everyone is familiar with the long history of social unrest between the Whites and Blacks in the U.S. It wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s that people really began to address the issue of racial inequality. Most of us are familiar with the “I Have a Dream” speech given by Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a Black man with a dream of building a bridge to bring equality and harmony between Whites and Blacks. From his tireless efforts the Civil Rights Act was born. We thought all of our

We thought all of our problems were solved. We thought wrong.

problems were solved. We thought wrong. The Rodney King case proved that racial equality still hasn't been achieved.

As a prophet of God, Nehemiah faced some of the same social unrest we are facing today. God gave Nehemiah a dream for his people, the children of Israel. God wanted Nehemiah to build, and I emphasize the word *build*, his holy city and bring stability and equality back to his people. So Nehemiah undertook the mission God gave him and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple of God. He helped establish harmony among the people of God.

We are all God's children on this earth, yet we still fail to recognize the fact that we are all equal. We need to follow in the steps of Nehemiah and rebuild equality among the peoples of the earth. God created all of us in His image. He intended for us to be one in Him. We need to celebrate our differences, yet focus our time and effort on building up the common ground we share. We need to realize that God is our cornerstone, and we need to build our unity around God our Saviour. When we finally realize that in God's sight no one person on this earth is better than anyone else, it is then that we can eliminate the Rodney King cases and focus on achieving God's dream for us.

By Martin R. O'Dell, a senior accounting and business administration major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Dreams of Home

LOGOS

Neh. 1:1–2:18

Nehemiah must have been homesick. At least he displayed the same signs of homesickness we all experience at one time or another. He wept. He experienced several days of depression. He was off his food. And he spent considerable time in prayer for the folks back home.

It is a particularly unusual kind of homesickness, however, as Nehemiah had never lived at this “home” when it was in its original glory. Jerusalem had long been destroyed. In fact, it had been nearly one hundred years since its rebuilding had commenced. Nehemiah was in a position of high responsibility serving King Artaxerxes, and so far as the record indicates, he had never lived in Jerusalem.

His homesickness is for the land of his fathers. It is as he states, “the city where my fathers are buried” (Neh. 2:3, NIV). There is a certain tribal response to civilization in this comment that is somewhat lost on us today. True, we do give a nod to this thought in songs such as “My Country ’Tis of Thee” and “Faith of Our Fathers.” We sing “Land where my fathers died,” but generally don’t know much of the genealogy beyond our grandparents, or great-grandparents at the most.

For Nehemiah, genealogy was vital. Not only did it relate to the land of tribal ancestry, it also related to religion. The power and authority of one’s God was at stake in the question of whose armies were triumphant. We are looking here at the validity of Nehemiah’s faith. So he prays earnestly for restoration.

There had been hope of restoration with the beginning of reconstruction on both the wall of Jerusalem and the temple within the city. But the current news was depressing. One can only imagine the unreliability of news in Nehemiah’s day. Distance and travel time were major inhibitors to communication of factual information. One need only observe the wildness of rumors in today’s society to guess at the unreliability of information available to Nehemiah. If we can’t get things straight with the immediacy of electronic media and the plethora of publications available to us, just picture what it must have been for him.

But now a reliable source had come. His brother had just returned with an eyewitness account of the situation in Jerusalem. Not only had progress on rebuilding come to a halt, but attacks from other tribes in the area had torn down the wall and burned the gates. With the city thus open to any marauders who came along, it certainly was not possible to restore the city in general and the temple in particular.

So Nehemiah engages in fervent prayer. One might think he would complain to God that He had not supported His people the way He should have. After all, if God wanted to look good in the eyes of the pagans, wouldn’t He be well advised to make His people look better?

But Nehemiah is not drawn off in this accusative form of reasoning. In fact, his prayer attests that God did keep His covenant. Nehemiah points out that God’s covenant promised not only to establish His people when they kept their part of the bargain, but to scatter them among the nations if they did not.

Nehemiah was not only homesick. Apparently he was also a good actor. It is interesting to note that four months had passed between the report from his brother

and his audience with the king. It is hard to imagine that he pouted for that long. Surely someone would have noticed between December 5 and April 2—the actual time that elapsed—that something was bothering him if he had not been able to put up a good front.

There is no indication in the narrative as to why he waited so long to address the king. Perhaps he was not on duty for a time. Or perhaps the king was away. Shushan was the southern palace, and the king may have been holding court in one of his other residences, returning to Shushan for the winter.

Whatever the reason, Nehemiah presented a rather obvious face of despair before the king. This was particularly noticeable in his position as cupbearer. The king watched these staff persons closely, as it was the cupbearer's responsibility not only to assure the purity of the king's food and drink but to taste it in order to demonstrate that it had not been poisoned. Any change in the appearance and countenance of the cupbearer was noted with significant alarm by the king.

And the king did notice. "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill?" (Neh. 2:2) he asked. Then he observed, "This can be nothing but sadness of heart."

Nehemiah was not only homesick. Apparently he was also a good actor.

Yes, Nehemiah was a good actor. But he is not acting sad. He really is sad. The real acting had been the appearance of happiness through all the days and months and, yes, even years of service in a foreign court as cupbearer to the king.

Now the truth is out, and the heart of the king is touched by his loyal servant. Nehemiah spills the story with a tide of dammed-up emotion. And the king is deeply moved. "What is it you want?" he asks. Nehemiah seems unprepared for the generosity of the king's response and offers up a mid-sentence prayer. And the rest is history. Nehemiah is sent to Jerusalem as the king's special envoy. He is made the governor, with supplies and authority to do as he sees fit in the restoration of the city. But he does not forget how it all came about. The credit goes not to himself or to the king, but to the God of heaven, to whom he prayed. As he states, "because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my request" (verse 8). Credit goes where credit is due. It may take time. We may not see around all the twists and turns of the path of life. But in the end truth will triumph no matter what evil may be thrown in the path.

REACT

1. How important should genealogy be to the Christian today?
2. To what extent, if any, is the condition of God's people a reflection of God's power and authority?
3. What is the role, if any, of public relations in the church?
4. How can a Christian be consistent in assuring that "credit goes where credit is due"?

By Gary B. Patterson, administrative assistant to the president, North American Division, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Arise and Build

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Neh. 2:17, 18

Israel was a wasted nation during this period of its history. For years the walls of Jerusalem could not be broken, for God had graciously protected them. Yet, within the walls of that beautiful city was Israel's worst enemy. Although Israel hated the heathen nations around them, they followed their customs and sought their gods. The result was the neglect of their own community—themselves. They abused their land and neglected the needs of one another. They sacrificed their children to gods that could not help them. They ignored the poor, fatherless, and widows. All these appalling behaviors were the direct result of depending on God for what they wanted, but not for what they needed most. They enjoyed protection from captivity by other nations, but protection from captivity to self was refused.

How like our brothers and sisters of old we are. We are not as advanced and progressive as we flatter ourselves to think we are. We still offer our children to the

We still offer our children to the fire of Molech. Satan worship is in our church today.

fire of Molech. Satan worship is in our church today and has been all along. If we think not, we should think again. Looking at our own lives reveals we worship television, the refrigerator, our jobs, and other people. We physically beat and rape our children. Verbally we abuse our families and friends. When someone in our church family comes to us with a need, we refuse them, or begrudgingly help them. Selfish desire is the root of all our sins. Sin has separated us from God, our only security, and the result is insecurity. We turn to other things or other people instead of God. Or we pretend to turn to God, and in our pretense and dependence on wrong things we erect weak walls that inevitably crumble and lie waste.

Let us arise and build the broken walls of our lives, and of our church. Let us arise and turn to the Master Builder—Jesus. He alone can rebuild that which self has destroyed. “The Lord will more than fulfill the highest expectations of those who put their trust in Him. He will give them the wisdom their varied necessities demand.”¹ “Take advantage . . . arise and build.”²

REACT

1. Am I willing to trust Jesus with the broken walls of my life?
2. What is meant by the expression “captivity to self”?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 387.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 638.

By P. Jeannie Guzak, *sophomore theology major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.*

Driven by a Dream

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Neh. 2:12

As a soldier John Bell Hood, a general in the army of the Confederate States of America, simply did not accept defeat. And of the thousands who served in America's terrible Civil War, he was certainly one who could have been expected to give up.

General Hood lost his left arm in the battle at Gettysburg and his right leg at Chickamauga. Then, trying vainly to defend Atlanta, he had lost 35,000 men under his command. At any of these tremendous setbacks, General Hood could have allowed someone else to assume his role as a leader in the Confederate army.

But General Hood was driven by a dream. He still maintained command of his troops in the Siege of Allatoona, where his 46,000 Confederates had completely

Tied to his horse, General Hood tried unsuccessfully to capture the garrison.

surrounded 5,000 Union soldiers. Known as "the hardest hitter in the Confederacy," he personally led the offensive on the Union garrison. Tied to his horse and with a sabre in his remaining hand, General Hood tried unsuccessfully to capture the garrison. He had to face yet another defeat.

Nehemiah too must have certainly faced setbacks and discouragements. Leaving behind a secure position as cupbearer to the king, he felt called to restore the walls of Jerusalem. "For 12 years he labored without pay. One hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides visiting dignitaries, ate at his table. In addition, he made a large donation to the project. It was much cheaper to be a cupbearer!

"And his job was politically crushing. He had to oppose people and they didn't like it. He had to cancel foreign alliances and prohibit mixed marriages—both unpopular measures. Cupbearing made fewer enemies!"*

We, too, could make fewer enemies if we were not Christians. Like General Hood we experience pain and disappointment and loss. But we know that if we continue prayerfully to strive toward what God has put in our hearts "to do at Jerusalem," we can look forward to victory. We must keep the dream alive.

REACT

1. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of comparing the Christian way of life to a military way of life?

2. How can we know with certainty what God has put in our hearts "to do at Jerusalem"?

* Norval F. Pease, *Think on These Things* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1969), p. 163.

By Gary B. Swanson, editor of CQ and Cornerstone Connections in the General Conference Department of Church Ministries.

Honest Enthusiasm

HOW-TO

Key Text: Neh. 2:3

Have you ever worked fervently to accomplish a task? When you reached your goal were you satisfied? Perhaps the objective was to get an A in a class or to repair a friendship. In order to achieve each of these goals with the best possible outcome, there must be an emotional commitment. Often people do things because they are forced to. When this happens, the result will usually be superficial. Quality achievements require effort and demand a significant portion of valued time.

Ultimately, our objective should be a consummate relationship with God. For us to continue building upon our foundational alliance, we must strengthen our emotional connection. There are several things that can be done to keep our hearts impassioned for the Lord.

1. *Communicate with God.* For any union to remain alive there must be communication. By talking to God, we will realize that He is someone we can rely on.

For any union to remain alive there must be communication.

Spending time conversing with God will strengthen our dependence upon Him.

2. *Remember how God has blessed.* By reflecting upon God's goodness in our lives, we will see that we are serving a God who wants the best for us. This will keep us in touch with His side of the relationship. We will see that He is an active part of our existence and He can be a wonderful friend.

3. *Learn about God's character.* When we want to get to know someone, a major item of interest is the quality of his or her personality. By going to church, reading the Bible, and reading Ellen White's writings and other theological literature, we can discover what to expect from God and what He expects from us. It will also give us insight as to what others have experienced in their relationship with Him. God has things He wants to share with us, and by dedicating quality time to Him, we will receive a better understanding of His character.

Remaining emotionally revived toward any task is the key to the success of the goal. This holds true in every aspect of our lives. Our career, school, family, and especially our divine relationship with our Creator, will work only with honest enthusiasm behind it.

REACT

1. Considering typical newspaper headlines, why is it often difficult to dwell on how God has blessed humanity?

2. Why is God's character so important to human study?

By Vivianne Holmes, a 1992 graduate of Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Prayer—a Priority

OPINION

Key Text: Eph. 6:18, 19

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:18, 19, NKJV).

For most Christians the first prayer often heard is for repentance. There are many other prayers as well. You have the prayer for healing, thanksgiving, sorrow, and a variety of other things, also.

Prayer is meant to bring us closer to God. It seems, though, that the only time we pray is when we need something. Some people tend to put God on a shelf and dust Him off only when they need Him. Being a college student, I find my schedule quite hectic at times, and I have found it hard even to find five minutes in my day

Some people tend to put God on a shelf and dust Him off only when they need Him.

to take time to pray to my heavenly Father. Then I realized that you can pray no matter where you are. I usually pray while I am walking to class or at my job.

Prayer is very important in the New Testament as well as the Old. In the New Testament we find that Christ is always praying. He was usually praying for the sick, and hardly ever for Himself. In Luke 22:46 Christ is saying to the disciples, “Pray, lest you enter into temptation.”

Prayer is important in the church as well. “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15).

In the Old Testament, prayer is vital. It shows that if you are faithful to God in all things, prayer included, God will take care of you. Look at Daniel. He prayed three times a day, even with the threat of death over his head. Daniel didn’t care—he was going to be faithful to God. It didn’t matter what the cost. When he was thrown into the lions’ den, his life was protected by God.

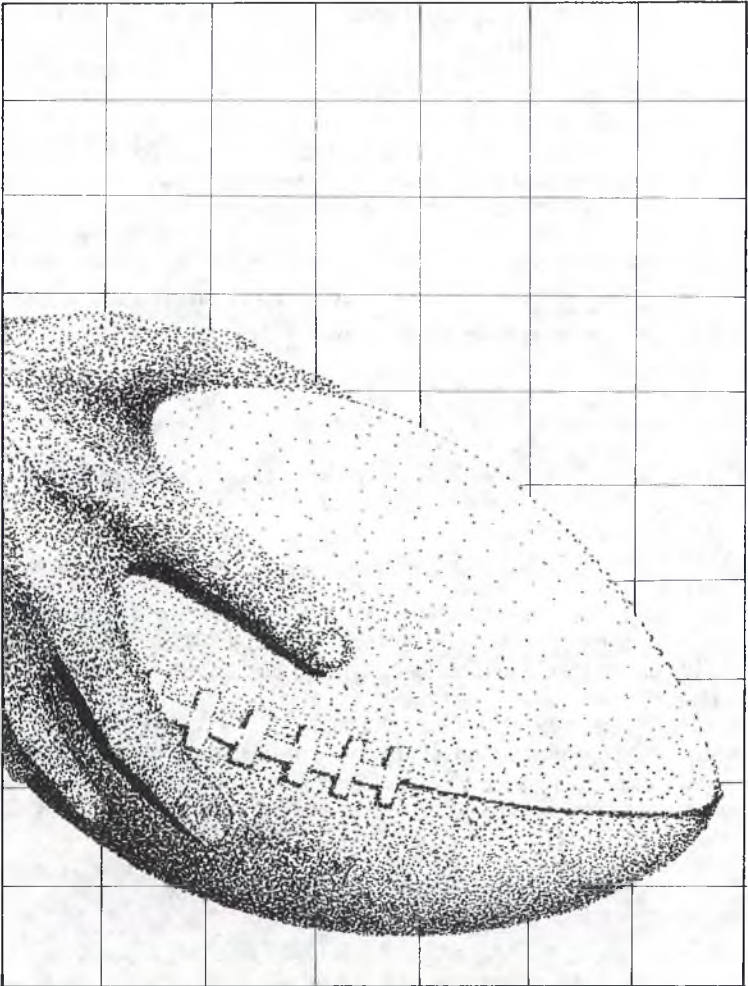
Remember to pray daily—make time to do it. It will give you the strength you will need to make it through the days just before Jesus’ coming.

REACT

In your own words define the word *prayer*.

By Richard Heacock, a sophomore theology major, Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE



“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Neh. 6:3).

Each Unto His Own Ability

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Neh. 3:1

It was my first quarter in sign-language class. A couple members of the deaf community had volunteered to help the teacher and give the students some insights into the deaf culture. One young man stepped forward and began to sign—very matter-of-factly, at first.

“When my mother was pregnant with me,” he signed, “she was in a car accident. After I was born, it wasn’t long until they knew that something was wrong. They took me to the doctor. He said that I was deaf. He said that there was nothing they could do to help me hear.”

As his story went on, both anguish and anger were evident. He signed faster, forgetting that we were first-quarter students. His face became more expressive. None of us could keep up with his signing, but the teacher kept interpreting.

“As I grew up, I learned what happened. At first I was very angry with my

At first I was very angry with my mother. “How could you have let this happen to me?”

mother. ‘How could you have let this happen to me? You knew you were pregnant! Why weren’t you more careful?’ But I knew the anger and the questions were hopeless. It would not help me hear.”

His anger was replaced by sorrow. “I was angry for most of my life. Some of my family—uncles and grandparents—refused to learn to sign. ‘We’re too old to learn a whole new language,’ they would say. ‘He should learn to read lips and use his voice. He’s young; he can learn.’ I felt like an outcast in my own family.”

He looked at his deaf friend and much of the sorrow faded. “My parents sent me to a school for the deaf when I was old enough. I met lots of people there who were just like me—angry. And I met people who had gotten over some of the anger. Now I’m going to school here, with people who can hear, and I’m on the football team. All of my friends helped me see past my anger and rebuild my life.” He looked at his friend again and smiled.

Some of us stayed after class to get to know them a little. As it turned out, they attended one of the local Adventist churches. I began to visit their church often with a friend from the class. To learn religious signs, we would watch the interpreter sign the service. I learned that God had helped them rebuild more than once.

We’ve all played some part in rebuilding—in our own lives and others’ lives—every one of us to his or her own capabilities. How often has God worked through you to use your particular abilities to help lay the foundation for something new and better? Was it in your own life or someone else’s? Did He help you find abilities and strengths that you never thought you had?

By Jerri White, a business-administration graduate from the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

Perseverance: The Price of Productivity

LOGOS

Rom. 8:28

“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate” (Neh. 3:1, NIV).

The little guys. The faceless ones in the crowd. The ones who toil in obscurity. So often in our society the common person is forgotten. Yet here we have a detailed record of who did what and where they did it. People like Meremoth and Meshullam, Zaccur and Ezer are recorded for doing their part. And what was their part? They struggled repairing gates and walls.

Yes, it was for a good cause. Jerusalem had been destroyed, the walls smashed, the gates shattered. And common people helped to put the pieces back together again. Today we can read about their efforts.

People like Hanun and the residents of Zanoah are remembered. Their job was to rebuild the Valley Gate. They did their job, and then some. Five hundred yards of wall became their contribution to the restoration of Jerusalem (verse 13). Another individual, Baruch the son of Zabbai, is noted for being zealous (verse 20).

To devote a whole chapter to the deeds of obscure people says something about the worth of the individual. God notices. He is aware of our actions and records the energy we expend in His service.

Others Notice

“But when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and in a great rage, and ridiculed the Jews” (Neh. 4:1, AMP).

There is one guarantee in life, when we begin to do something for the glory of God, we will be battered, bruised, slandered, criticized. Makes us want to jump up and go right to work for God, doesn't it?

When you read through Nehemiah 4, a pattern of opposition appears. Sanballat was the unofficial leader of the region. He had the most to lose from a restored Jerusalem, and he noticed the developments. Yet we can learn from his actions.

First, he ridiculed (verses 1, 2). No one likes to look foolish, and that is the best place for opposition to begin. The sly sarcasm, the subtle sneer, especially the overt mockery, can cause us to call it quits, to abandon a worthwhile pursuit. Instead of quitting, Nehemiah prayed that the insults of his enemies would be turned back on their own heads.

When Sanballat realized that mere ridicule would not work, he began to plot. Whenever we do something great for God, we can expect people to devise ways to frustrate our efforts. Nehemiah was confronted with two schemes aimed at him personally: one was a call to come out and discuss things with Sanballat; the other was the insinuation of an assassination. Yet these also failed to deter the project.

When ridicule and plots fail, there is only one avenue left—intimidation—and Sanballat used that also. He fed and spread a rumor that Nehemiah was planning to become king and that continuing to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem would be proof of Nehemiah's intentions. But still Nehemiah refused to be deterred.

Give Notice

“From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me” (Neh. 4:16-18, NIV).

In spite of all the opposition, Nehemiah took the initiative. He gave a signal that he was prepared to continue. He would not be deterred by useless meetings or idle threats. Instead, he put a sword in every hand and confidence in every heart of the people helping to build the wall. In essence, he took the fight to Sanballat. Nehemiah was going on the offensive.

Nehemiah never doubted that he was doing a great work, and he did not hesitate to empower the workers to do their tasks. If they needed equipment, that was fine and the equipment would be provided. If they needed weapons for defense, that also was fine. Nehemiah served notice that he would not quit, and was prepared for whatever the opposition might throw his way. His contagious attitude infected

No one likes to look foolish, and that is the best place for opposition to begin.

those around him. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem for one reason: to build the wall. He let no distraction cause him to lose his focus.

Take Notice

“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (Neh. 6:15, 16).

What did Nehemiah accomplish? Simply building a wall? Yes, a wall was built, but is that the whole story?

There had been plenty of people all along to do the work. There had been plenty of years to accomplish the task. Yet it had not happened. Ezra had tried to get the wall built, yet the project had foundered. Why was Nehemiah able to do what no one else had been able to do?

Nehemiah knew that he was a workman for God. He never doubted that God had given him a task to do, and he could inspire others with his story. In Nehemiah 2:17, 18, we find his marching orders. The gracious hand of God was upon him, the king of Persia believed in the project, and Jerusalem was in disgrace.

God had opened doors to accomplish a great task, and Nehemiah would not be deterred by any mere mortal in Palestine. As a result, in 52 days the wall was restored, and all of the surrounding nations had to take notice “for they saw that this work had been done by our God” (Neh. 6:16, AMP).

By Mark R. Weir, associate pastor of the Green Lake SDA Church in Seattle, Washington.

Prayer and Persistence

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:17

Nehemiah was indeed a man of prayer. Over and over again we find him, either on his knees or in his mind, pleading for divine wisdom and intervention. It is recorded that "Nehemiah had often poured out his soul in behalf of his people."¹ During one of these seasons of prayer, a plan formed in his mind, yet the plans of one man seemed minuscule compared to the enormous task of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. For four months Nehemiah waited for an opportunity to share his dreams and concerns, and when Artaxerxes asked about his distress, Nehemiah shared the yearnings of his heart. From the time of that encounter with the king, Nehemiah added punch to his prayers. He became a man of action, as well as a man of prayer.

"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

For four months Nehemiah waited for an opportunity to share his dreams.

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."²

REACT

1. How can one know when he or she is being prompted to do something for God?
2. On what should a Christian base his or her "wise forethought and resolute action"?
3. What mission or missions face the church today that are similar to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 629.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 633, 634.

By Mark R. Weir, associate pastor of the Green Lake SDA Church in Seattle, Washington.

Too Good to Work

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Neh. 3:5

The story of Nehemiah 3, 4, and 6 seems like the kind of rousing feel-good story that one might see on an old episode of “Bonanza,” where Ben and the Cartwright boys not only drill a well for the Smith family but set up a windmill to pump out the water, all in an hour. Here, of course, we have returning Jewish exiles, who rebuild a broken city in a lot longer than an hour, but the idea is the same.

These chapters talk a lot about working together. In fact, chapter three is entirely devoted to a listing of who worked on the walls and where. But perhaps the most striking example of disunity is in Nehemiah 3:5. The author singles out the nobles from Tekoa as the only people refusing to work. What he doesn’t tell us explicitly is why they refused.

It’s not as if they were the only nobles asked to work. Many of the listed workers (e.g., Malkijah son of Recab, ruler of Beth Hakerem; Nehemiah, ruler of a half-

These chapters talk a lot about working together.

district of Beth Zur; and Shallun, son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of Mizpah) were nobles. Maybe these nobles just couldn’t keep up with the other Tekoans, who repaired not only a section near the Fish Gate (3:5) but also one near the wall of Ophel (3:27).

The last part of Nehemiah 3:5 reveals what seems to me to be the problem: “Their [the Tekoans’] nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors” (NIV). An NIV footnote gives perhaps another revelation of the problem. It suggests that the word “supervisors” could be replaced by “lord” or “governor.” The idea one gets is that they saw God as just another supervisor to be ignored, and their supervisors as absolute nobodies.

What to do? The take-home message, it seems, is twofold. If you are like these nobles, stop being that way. It’s ridiculous to shrug God off as just another supervisor, and just as ridiculous to think you’re too good to work for someone. If you have to work with people like this, work a little harder as the Tekoans did, and build an extra section of wall.

REACT

In what situations do you, perhaps unwittingly, act like these nobles?

By Byron Kneller, a graduate student studying chemistry at the University of Washington at Seattle.

Social Responsibility

HOW-TO

Key Text: Neh. 5:14-18

When we receive the inspiration to perform that which God wills, we must do so with courage and confidence. Many times on our journey to success we must endure the threat of danger, mockery, and personal loss. If what we are aiming for is God's will, however, the positives of that accomplishment will certainly outmeasure the negatives.

Nehemiah was aware of the sacrifices that he and the citizens of Jerusalem would have to endure in restoring their city. Even so, his call to action, combined with his faith and love and trust in God, overcame any fears and doubt. Constant measures to renew and revitalize our relationships with God will make us more cognizant of His presence in our lives. As our awareness and understanding increase, our faith will strengthen, our love will expand, and our trust in His will will

We as Christians today must also be willing to forfeit individual privileges for the good of our communities.

know no confines. As we progress, courage replaces fear and confidence replaces doubt.

In Nehemiah 5:14-18, Nehemiah demonstrates selflessness. Disregarding his position as governor, he refuses the wealth enjoyed by his peers. Nehemiah recognizes the sacrifice of the citizens and forgoes any personal material ambitions and prerequisites.

Likewise, we as Christians today must also be willing to forfeit individual privileges for the good of our communities. Civic duty is not a responsibility we should shy away from. As in the time of Nehemiah, many of our cities and towns are witnessing both physical destruction and moral decay. With one hand we must be ready to defend ourselves against threatening forces. With our other hand we must commit ourselves to the reconstruction of the foundations that steady our communities and strengthen our families. Through our commitment and action we will build anew as did the citizens of Jerusalem.

By Jonathan Mitchell, a research technologist at the Fred Hutchison Cancer Center, Seattle, Washington.

The Intimidators

OPINION

Key Text: Gen. 4:9

It comes in many forms, is called by many names, but is always aiming for the same results.

Ice hockey calls them thugs. Basketball calls them enforcers. Hired guns, goon squads, whatever the title, the effect is to intimidate. Intimidation is the insidious attempt to “keep people in their place.” There is no need to debate whether intimidation actually exists. Instead, we must look into our own souls to see whether it dwells there.

I have no wish to meddle, sling mud, or stir up emotions. But I have to be honest about intimidation. It exists. It exists in our churches, and except for the grace of God, it exists in me. And in you.

The question that must be asked is How do we face intimidation in our church? I believe that the only answer is found in the concept of unity. We must be our

Hired guns, goon squads, whatever the title, the effect is to intimidate.

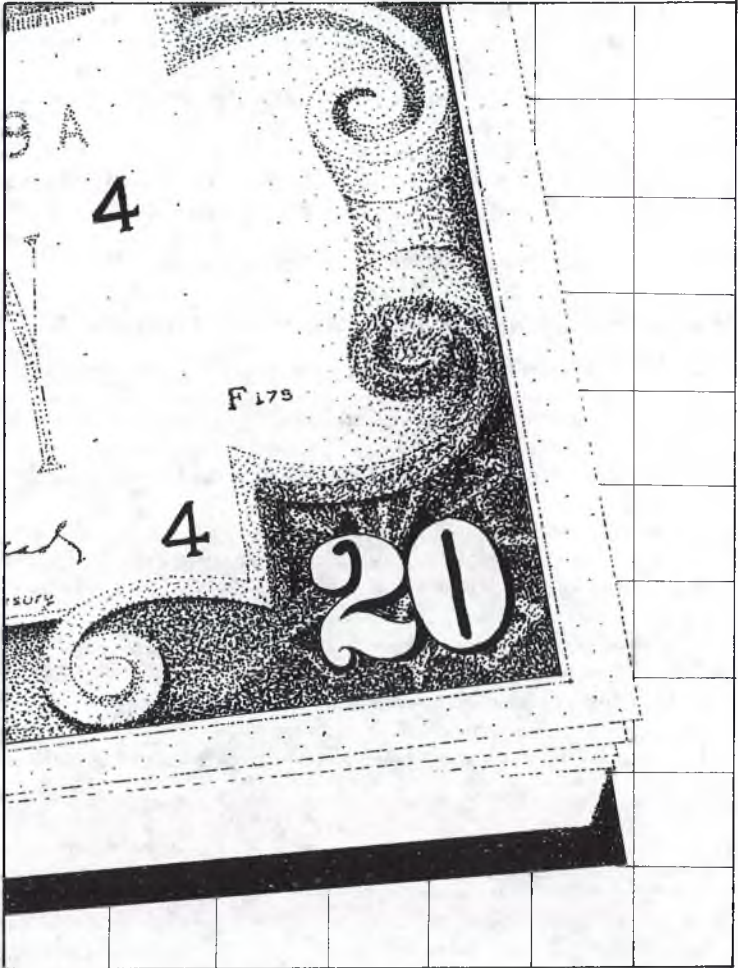
brothers’ keepers and be willing to defend and support those around us who are being told to “stay in their place.” Defending the people around us comes at huge personal risk. I know. I once “questioned the system,” only to be told that I was too young to ask and would be “taught lessons” for being insubordinate. There were those around who could have spoken out and defended me, but they didn’t. I don’t resent them, for I don’t know their reasons for silence. But I resolved to become more concerned about my brothers and sisters. I believe it is my duty to oppose intimidation. I also believe it is yours.

REACT

1. In the setting of your church, what forms of intimidation have you observed?
2. What are the characteristics of intimidation?
3. In practical terms how should one oppose intimidation in a church setting?

By Mark R. Weir, associate pastor of the Green Lake SDA Church in Seattle, Washington.

PAWNBROKER RELIGION



“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (Prov. 19:17).

Taxing News

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Neh. 5

A couple of months ago my husband and I received a letter from the Internal Revenue Service. In the nicest possible terms, the computer-generated document informed us that our income tax had been underpaid and would we please, at our earliest convenience, send them a check for the corrected amount?

With the added interest and penalties, the amount totaled into five figures. Shock followed surprise, and then anxiety set in.

We've all heard horror stories about the IRS when it comes to claiming what they believe is due them. I have friends who have had their savings accounts raided, had their wages "attached," or had liens placed against their property.

The bottom line is that the IRS has you over a barrel, and they know it. They don't care where the money comes from. Take out a loan. Borrow against your credit cards. Sell your car. But whatever you do, pay. And pay now.

Because the IRS has the power to do almost anything it wants to do, it strikes terror in the hearts of the most fearless among us. So we meekly obey.

As I read through Nehemiah 5, I'm struck, once again, by how little things

With the added interest and penalties, the amount totaled into five figures.

change over the centuries. To make it worse, the citizens of Jerusalem weren't paying taxes. They were only trying to buy enough food to stay alive. The message is clear—give anyone absolute power and they will enforce it, often ruthlessly.

Pay now. No matter if it means selling your own children into slavery—pay what we say you owe.

Our story had a happy ending. After the shock wore off, we began plowing through records and discovered, to our immense relief, that the problem stemmed from a missing piece of documentation. The oversight was quickly corrected, and eventually a second letter arrived, acknowledging the mistake and canceling the debt. Life went back to normal.

We'll still pay taxes. They are, as the saying goes, inevitable. But the fear of asset seizure, of a sizable blemish on our credit rating, and the nagging anxiety of "How are we ever going to get the money?" is gone.

It could have been much worse for us, and it still wouldn't have been as bad as what the inhabitants of Jerusalem went through as they struggled to come up with the overwhelming amount of money required just to keep from starving.

Because of Nehemiah they were fortunate. A man who had the power to cry "foul" also had the strength of character, the sense of right and wrong, to do so. And the people got a reprieve. They were granted mercy. The IRS could learn a lesson.

By Jamie Williams, an advertising manager at Informix Software in Menlo Park, California.

Moral Leadership

LOGOS

Neh. 5:6-12

The Enemy Within (Neh. 5:1-5)

Many organizations, including churches, focus on the resistance to their plans that comes from outside. Enemies may actually cause an organization to thrive: the blood of the martyrs, it has often been said, was the seed of the church.

In fact, most often the reason that organizations are brought down is not resistance from the outside, but moral problems within.

Building the Jerusalem wall was a reach-out-in-faith project, of a type not unfamiliar to Christians. It appears that the Jerusalem settlers do sacrifice for the project. They stand guard against enemies, brave toil and want, and complete the wall in a mere 52 days.

But it turns out that it wasn't Sanballat and his troublemakers outside the wall that most threatened the project. The biggest threats came from within.

Many times abuses inside a family come about so gradually that no one clearly sees the magnitude of the problem. In this "family," even God's laws had not protected the interests of the poor, and the poor had to complain bitterly.

Some had large families. The land was suffering a famine. Taxes forced some to mortgage land for immediate cash. Some scholars feel that the concluding phrase of Neh. 5:5, "Some of our daughters have already been enslaved" (RSV), refers to the daughters being prostituted for the survival of their families—a serious social breakdown in a mere 52 days.

Sadly, it was Jewish brethren, not Gentile enemies, who were guilty of taking advantage of the poor. "We are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and . . . our sons are as good as theirs" (verse 5, NIV) expresses the poor's frustration that the cause for which they'd been willing to be poor together had been betrayed.

A Problem in Focus (Neh. 5:6-8)

Sometimes it takes a clear, courageous statement of the problem to make everyone realize what's going on. Nehemiah spoke the right word at the right time, and suddenly the accepted abuses appeared as immoral as they truly were.

While charging interest of countrymen was illegal (Deut. 23:19), taking collateral for a loan was not (Deut. 24:10-13). Although English translations of this story use the word "interest," some scholars feel that the Hebrew words used to describe the business transactions of the nobles and officials (verses 7, 10) may refer only to simple, legal loans secured by property, not to illegal usury.

In any case, many of the poor had been forced to secure loans with their only means of survival—family land. Deuteronomy 24:10, 11 suggests that it may have been the practice for the lender to take possession of the collateral at the time of the loan; if that happened, families may even have lost the income of the land to their creditor when they used it as security. If the debt couldn't be paid, family members could be sold into slavery, further reducing income potential. Deuteronomy 24:12, 13 warns lenders not to keep the collateral of a poor man. Debt became a rapid downward slide for families in ancient times, even as it is for many today.

The text implies a circular trade in human beings: individual creditors forcing debtors' sale into slavery to the Gentiles for payment of loans, while the community as a whole, in kindness to their own, tried to buy as many as possible back. These lenders robbed not only the individuals themselves, but the will and spirit of the entire community.

The Legal vs. the Right (Neh. 5:9-11)

The actions of the nobles may or may not have been strictly illegal. But they were correctly condemned by Nehemiah for missing the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. Leaders in the community were behaving like loan sharks rather than like

Debt became a rapid downward slide for families in ancient times, even as it is for many today.

brothers. Their actions were deficient in love, generosity, and contribution to the sacrificial spirit of the building project.

Nehemiah's rebuke is an ethical, not a legal, one: "What you are doing is not right." It merits "the reproach of our Gentile enemies," he says, implying that even the enemy outside the city was more united in spirit than God's chosen inside.

Nehemiah admits that he himself had participated in lending. While his shock at the depth of the problem suggests he had not abused this system as others had, now he sees that this was not a time for banking—even legal banking—but for generous, no-strings-attached gifts to the poor (verse 11).

Repentance (Neh. 5:12, 13)

When Nehemiah brings the problems into focus, the actions of these leaders appears shabby even to themselves. All repent verbally, but it appears that Nehemiah suspects, if not their sincerity, at least their ability to police their own actions. He seals their promise with an oath sworn in the presence of priests, and finishes it with a prophet-style visual aid that surely must have warned these people that there was more at stake here than Nehemiah's displeasure.

A Pattern of Leadership (Neh. 5:14-19)

The last section of the chapter breaks from the time period of the first. Nehemiah summarizes his leadership for the 32 years following this event, insisting that as long as he was in charge he resisted the temptation to tax the people even the amount he was legally allowed. His attitude brings to mind Paul's later cheerful disregard of what he had coming (see 1 Cor. 9:12).

REACT

1. What problems can you identify that illustrate the statement that the church has more to fear from within than without?
 2. What do Nehemiah 5:12, Exodus 20:7, and Matthew 5:33-37 suggest in regard to binding oaths?
 3. How should a Christian's view of debt be different from that of others?
 4. How should this view affect the taking of large debts for good causes, such as a school or church?
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By Loren Seibold, pastor of the Adventist church in Palo Alto, California.

Haves and Have-nots

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Neh. 5:19

Ellen White's words applying Nehemiah 5 to her generation seem to fit today's world equally well: "In this generation the desire for gain is the absorbing passion. Wealth is often obtained by fraud. There are multitudes struggling with poverty, compelled to labor hard for small wages, unable to secure even the barest necessities of life. Toil and deprivation, with no hope of better things, make their burden heavy. Careworn and oppressed, they know not where to turn for relief. And all this that the rich may support their extravagance or indulge their desire to hoard!"¹

The gap between the haves and the have-nots is growing again today. Yet "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 . . . the religion of Christ is held in contempt."²

"The slightest departure from rectitude . . . prepares the heart to do greater injustice."

If you justify a little profit-taking of your own by claiming that "everyone does it," remember that "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."³

When the rich oppress the poor, it is not only the poor who lose. "The slightest departure from rectitude breaks down the barriers and prepares the heart to do greater injustice."⁴

REACT

1. What concrete actions can I take to help the poor in my area?
2. How can we balance our responsibility to help the poor with the task of meeting our own needs, and those of our families?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 650, 651.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 651.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 651, 652.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 652.

By David E. West, a software engineer at Central Point Software in Foster City, California.

Love Over Legality

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Neh. 5:7-11

Lending was brutal business in ancient times. Babylonians charged interest up to one-third, and Nuzi documents show rates as high as 50 percent. In Israel, lending money or goods to fellow Jews was acceptable, but interest was prohibited (Exod. 22:25, Lev. 25:36, 37, Deut. 23:19, 20). Because interest was illegal, lending had no regulation (much like illegal drugs today).

By law a lender could take a debtor's possession as collateral. Ideally, he was not to seize it from one's house, nor was he to take an item essential for survival. But these laws too were ignored. Sadly, for the poorest the most available collateral was a family member placed at the disposal of the creditor—which amounted to legal slavery. All such slaves were to be released in the "year of jubilee" (Lev. 25:39-41), but this was seldom done. Some were sold instead.

The transactions recounted in Nehemiah 5:7, 10, however, may have been interest-free and technically legal, according to commentator Derek Kidner. "The normal word for 'interest' is not used here. . . . The terms here and in verse 10 mean,

For the poorest the most available collateral was a family member.

at their simplest, 'lending' (not 'exacting') and 'a loan' (not 'interest')."*

If the "hundredth" that the lenders were to return to debtors in Nehemiah 5:11 refers to interest, it would be uncharacteristically low. Kidner suggests that the Hebrew "hundredth" may actually mean "income"—the income the creditors had received from the confiscated land.

If this interpretation is correct, then the story in Nehemiah 5 appears to be teaching the New Testament lesson that the law is limited in what it can accomplish. A spirit of love, received of God and cultivated in the heart, comes closer to God's ideal. This story anticipates the teachings of Jesus and the apostles that true righteousness goes far beyond the merely legal (Matt. 6:12; 12:1-13; 22:36-40; 23:23, 24; 1 John 3:23).

REACT

1. In what way does the spirit of love over legality also apply to lending possessions (other than money) to friends or relatives?
2. Should Christians charge or receive interest? Why or why not?

* Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1979), pp. 95, 96.

By Carmen Seibold, a psychiatric nurse in Palo Alto, California.

Beyond the Letter of the Law

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 14:31

Few of us have the means to become loan sharks, but this week's lesson still has several valid applications for us. By looking to Nehemiah as a role model, we see the following challenges:

1. *Keep your personal and business transactions honest and open.* Nehemiah's enemies hounded him continually and didn't bother to confine their accusations to the realm of truth. Because Nehemiah knew that he had done the best he could to be honest, he proceeded with a clear conscience. He didn't waste time defending himself, nor was the cause of God dishonored because of any dishonesty. His ethical behavior in the past (and the absence of a personal motive) gave extra weight to his stirring appeal to the Jewish rulers.

2. *Be willing to assist others in whatever ways you can.* Nehemiah wasn't satisfied merely to know that he hadn't done anything wrong. Instead, he took active steps to help others who had been oppressed. He already had bought back

Nehemiah used his money and influence to represent those who would not have possessed political power in their own right.

Jews who were slaves in other nations. Now he turned his attention to those Jews who were virtual slaves in the city of Jerusalem. He used his money and influence to represent those who would not have possessed political power in their own right. In sharp contrast to the greedy rulers of Jerusalem, Nehemiah demonstrated that God is concerned with the intent of His law, not merely with its literal application.

3. *Always make the welfare of people, rather than economic or political power, your primary motive.* When your highest consideration in making decisions is the positive effect on others, you inevitably will choose a path different from the one you would choose if you were seeking to maximize personal gain. Nehemiah consistently demonstrated this concern for other people, even at great personal cost and inconvenience. He left a comfortable job as the king's cupbearer because he wanted to see the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. He worked diligently with the inhabitants of Jerusalem and thereby ensured their physical safety against invaders. Once the wall was up, he turned his attention to improving the lot of those same inhabitants. When he learned of the oppression and extortion taking place, he threw his time and energy into resolving that situation. God was able to use Nehemiah so effectively because Nehemiah loved God and His people.

REACT

What have some of your motives been for making loans to others?

By Kathryn Lampson, a homemaker/financial analyst living in Sunnyvale, California.

Hidden Agendas

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 6:1-4; 14:13-21

Not all of us are able to lend great sums of money. But we often do give of our time, possessions, or expertise, if not money. Every day each of us gives a little—and takes a little—and perhaps we can learn a more unselfish attitude toward others from the story in Nehemiah 5.

You've no doubt been to concert halls, or even some churches, and seen the engraved names of patrons who gave money to a building fund. Whether their motives were right is for each individual to answer. The Adventist Church may be faced with a more subtle question of motives for its generosity. Although the church does not lend money, it is actively engaged in another kind of lending, for which it often expects a significant return on investment.

Is it not a subtle form of deception to feed empty stomachs when the motive is evangelistic?

The church practices “lending” in its medical outreach, among other places. It has a valid goal of spreading the gospel. It also has a long history of health emphasis, and its hospital system is now among the world's largest. But the hidden agenda is evangelistic. Although not expecting a return on anything loaned materially, the church nevertheless anticipates a response counted in “souls.”

There is nothing wrong with evangelism, per se, and there are countless examples of unselfish giving on the part of “medical evangelists.” But in the context of the lessons of Nehemiah 5 to the extent the church supports medical outreach with the goal of expecting a response it lacks the true love of Christ. Christ's love is the kind that just gives—nothing, more or less—and expects nothing in return. It sees others where they are, empathizes with their needs, and tries to meet those needs. Naturally, the church perceives spiritual as well as material needs, but is it not a subtle (if well-meaning) form of deception to feed empty stomachs when the real motive is evangelistic?

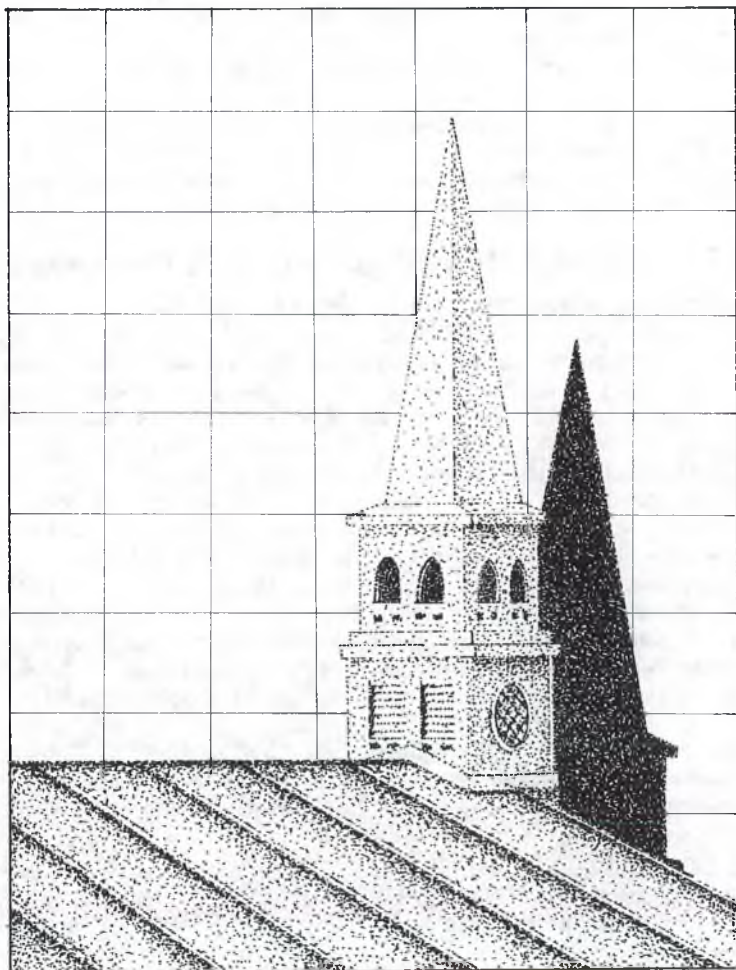
I do not mean to question the validity of the church's valuable medical program, nor its agenda to spread the gospel. What I do question is the extent to which this agenda remains hidden. When Christ fed the multitudes, He fed them. When He preached to the multitudes, He spoke to them. But He didn't mix the two, or use one as bait for the other. Christ did not give with the expectation of return. Neither should the church if it is to be truly unselfish in its giving.

REACT

1. How do you respond to the concept of evangelism as a hidden agenda?
2. Should a Christian give money to worthy causes *only* if his or her motive is unselfish?

By Michael D. Welch, a technical editor and writer in Foster City, California.

A SPIRITUAL REHAB UNIT



“Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).

To Preserve or to Change?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: James 1:21

“Keepers of the Flame.” “Guardians of the Truth.” These names and ideas are only a few of those attributed to people in our church who try to preserve the doctrines and traditions of our church’s past. Such preservation is not an easy task in this turbulent age. Some believe there is no room for tradition in our denomination, while others of the “old guard” believe that there is yet no need for change.

In Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s day times were uncertain too. While political structures rose and fell, the Jews were released from exile and returned to Jerusalem to make what sense they could out of the chaos of their lives. Zerubbabel struggled to rebuild the temple, while the prophet Nehemiah labored to restore the city’s walls and gates. Both men faced incredible odds and opposition from all sides as they tried to fulfill God’s plan. (Read the story in Neh. 1:1–2:20.) But these men

Some believe there is no room for tradition in our denomination, while others believe that there is yet no need for change.

persevered, and their theme of rebuilding both lives and lands continues throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

This week, stop and take stock of your experience. Are you resisting the restructuring of your spiritual life that God longs to do? Are you abandoning truth for a new, more exciting style of religion? Maybe the opposition from those who are not rebuilding their own walls and gates has gotten you down. Take time this week to ask God to help you know yourself and to let you see how the lessons of Ezra and Nehemiah apply in your life. Keep your eyes and mind open as we study and share, and spend this week with Him.

By Tanita Davis, senior English major/religion minor at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Revival Time!

LOGOS

Neh. 8-10

The Importance of Unity

“All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate” (Neh. 8:1, NIV).

The preceding verse indicates an important catalyst in sparking the revival described in Nehemiah 8:10. As part of their celebration of the Feast of Trumpets, the people assemble “as one man.” This Hebrew idiom implies that whatever economic, theological, or cultural differences may have divided the people in the past are now set aside so that God’s people are one in their commitment to seek the reviving presence of the Lord. And this unity continues throughout Nehemiah 8-10, portraying both leaders and people unified in their commitment to revival.

We are reminded of another occasion in Scripture when there is a similar picture of a harmonious fellowship of believers. “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). The description of the mighty work that God does in and through the early believers follows upon the heels of this verse.

Significantly the theme of unity is prominent in both Nehemiah’s revival and the events that occurred on the Day of Pentecost. This suggests that if God is to revive His people today, we must set aside minor nondoctrinal issues that separate us and come together in a spirit of harmony.

What are some issues that sow seeds of disunity among God’s people today? What is the difference between unity and uniformity?

The Centrality of God’s Word (read Neh. 8:1-8)

“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” (verse 8).

The proclamation and study of God’s Word is another major catalyst in producing and nurturing this revival. It is hard to overstate the role of the Word of God in this revival. God’s Word is so significant to the Israelites that they accord it a royal reception, standing when it is opened (verse 5). They listen attentively for several hours while the Scriptures are read and explained (verse 3). Then the next day they are hungry for more, making a commitment to study the Scriptures even more deeply and carefully (verse 13). This is not bibliolatry; they are not venerating the Bible as a relic to be worshiped in and of itself. Rather, the Bible is valued because it contains God’s message to them. Over and over again this chapter places an emphasis on the importance of understanding God’s Word (verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 12).

Nehemiah’s revival, like other revivals in history, such as the Protestant Reformation and the Millerite movement, was propelled by the study and proclamation of God’s Word. God wants to revive His people again today. Doubtless God’s people must make a renewed commitment to the study and understanding of their Bibles if this is to happen.

Why is the Bible so influential in prompting revival? Do we as a church value the Bible as highly as we once did? If not, why not?

The Proper Emotion: Joy (read verses 9-18)

“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (verse 10).

It will surprise some to discover that gladness and rejoicing are prominent in the revival. The text goes out of its way to indicate that this is not a time of gloom and despair. Verse 12 states that they are celebrating “with great joy.” Verse 17 echoes this, noting that “their joy was very great.” Although confession and sorrow over sin are important aspects of a revival and these emotions will come (see chapter 9), it is important to notice that the people are instructed that the correct initial emotional reaction is that of joy.

This aspect of Nehemiah’s revival should sound a message to some contemporary “Sadventists” who frequent the church with long faces: revival and gloom are mutually exclusive. Conversely, happiness and holiness are next of kin. True revival always brings great rejoicing in its wake (cf. Acts 8:8, 39). Today God wants His church, the modern Israel, to experience the joy that always accompanies His reviving presence.

What is the difference between the joy of the Christian and that of the non-Christian? Why do some Christians seem to feel that happiness and Christianity

This aspect of Nehemiah’s revival should sound a message to some contemporary “Sadventists.”

are incompatible? What is the key to experiencing lasting joy in the Christian life as spoken of in Philippians 4:4?

Conclusion (read Nehemiah 9; 10:28-39)

“For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them, or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God” (Neh. 9:30, 31).

Many other aspects of this revival are worthy of notice. The beautiful prayer of Nehemiah 9:5-37, which confesses the chronic sinfulness and rebellion of humanity and places it in stark contrast with God’s enduring mercy, is a classic that reminds us of our need of sincere repentance. The changes in lifestyle that this revival effects, such as greater diligence in Sabbath observance (10:31) and renewed devotion to the house of God (verse 39), indicate to us that no revival is true or complete that does not result in holy living. Genuine revival always produces sanctification in the lives of those who experience it.

But the main lesson to learn from Nehemiah’s revival is simply this: Each generation, each era, must experience revival for itself. Previous revivals do not suffice for us. We, today, must experience revival for ourselves.

What are some specific changes that a revival would produce in the church today? in my life? What are some concrete steps I can take to help spark a revival in my church?

By Greg A. King, assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

God's Recovery Movement

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Neh. 10:29

Taking stock of ourselves is currently all the rage in the recovery movement. Such leaders as John Bradshaw have a devoted following of people eager to come to terms with their past. Most of us bear some scars from our upbringing, and the idea of exploring any unhealthy relationships that result deserves applause. And yet this idea is not new. In fact from the dawn of time God has encouraged us to do it. Every covenant or love pact He ever offered revolves around the same key theme—that of seeing things as they really are.

In an effort to beat the woven lies of the devil, God has repeatedly told us that He loves us and that we cannot be separated from paradise if we accept His gifts. Kings, priests, disciples, and prophets speak in harmony on this, anticipating a struggle with the deceiver right down to the wire. Ellen White is no exception. Her contribution to God's recovery movement is extensive. She talks about having an "abhorrence of evil"¹ as the basis of true recovery. Like Bradshaw, she advocates taking responsibility for our own lives and honestly facing the gremlins within. It

God has repeatedly told us that we cannot be separated from paradise if we accept His gifts.

is not enough to fake regret for the presence of evil in our lives when God's power is available to pull us out of it.

Rather, as at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, we must openly announce our condition, this time to God, knowing that our assurance of care is guaranteed: "Like the poor publican, not lifting up so much as his eyes unto heaven, he will cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' and those who do acknowledge their guilt will be justified, for Jesus will plead His blood in behalf of the repentant soul."² The publican was an honest man, stripped of all pretense and acutely aware of negative behavior in his life. If we are to take stock of ourselves, his is a fine example.

The main obstacle to accepting God's gifts is the illusion that we do not need them. Rather like failing to see our codependence, we may fail to see the effects of evil in our lives. Yet this problem is easily overcome by the Holy Spirit. "The 'Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,' illumines the secret chambers of the soul, and the hidden things of darkness are made manifest."³

This shows we are never left to our own struggles. If that were so, recovery of any kind would be impossible. But with God's promptings we can see behind the lies and take His hand.

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 41.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

By David Wood, a 1992 graduate in theology from Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Coming Out of Babylon

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Isa. 48:20

Some significant differences may be found between the preexilic Israelite and postexilic Jewish communities. A number reflect a growing tendency to copy Babylonian religious and legal practices.

In Nehemiah 8-10, Ezra and the Levites uphold the preexilic understanding of law that was defined as “teaching” rather than mere “legal regulations” (cf. Deut. 6:1). Israelite law differs from Mesopotamian law in that Israelite codes are interspersed with stories of God’s dealings with His people (in a setting of teaching) whereas Mesopotamian codes reflect a more strictly legislative emphasis. In keeping with their heritage, the Levites complete the reading of the law and Ezra prays, recounting God’s gracious dealings with them from the call of Abraham to the present. Just as God has brought Abraham out of Mesopotamia and the early Israelites out of Egypt, so now He has brought them out of Babylon.

Nevertheless, reflections of Babylonian ideas and practices appear in these chapters. Before the Exile, Moses is generally seen as a God-sent deliverer; here

God’s holy days were not for fasting, gloom, and oppression, as they were to the Babylonians.

he is viewed as a lawgiver (8:1, 13, 14; 9:14). The sealing of the covenant (9:38–10:27) also reflects Babylonian practice, as do the curse and oath (10:29; cf. Exod. 19:7, 8; 24; Deut. 4-6; 11:18-32).

Babylonian religion possessed a number of sacred days. The seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the month were “evil days” when people had to be careful to please the gods and to refrain from whatever might offend them. The fifteenth days, *Shapattu/Shabattu* (similar in sound—though not necessarily in origin—to the Hebrew word for Sabbath, *Shabbat*), was a day for appeasement (of divine wrath).

Apparently the people were in danger of equating Hebrew holy days with Babylonian taboo days. Ezra wanted to remind them that God’s holy days were not for fasting (cf. Isaiah 56-58), gloom, and oppression, as they were to the Babylonians, but for joyful celebration of the meaning of what the Sabbath represented—God’s gracious ways and actions.

Ezra was unable to stem the forces already at work. Many of the institutions of postexilic Judaism—oral laws, highly legalized Sabbath observance, greater priestly involvement in civil judicial matters, priests as mediators between the people and God, sacrifice as substitutionary appeasement—correlate with Babylonian practice. All are factors that led to Jesus’ crucifixion. It is our privilege to respond to God’s continual, historical call to move away from Babylonian views to a more accurate understanding of our heavenly Father and His ways.

By Jean Sheldon, graduation analyst at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Seeing It as It Is

HOW-TO

Key Text: Neh. 10:29

Psychiatrists often say, "If you can't feel pain, you can't feel anything." In other words, if you haven't first suffered, you will never know what happiness is worth. A good example is an Auschwitz survivor stepping outside the barbed-wire gates and sucking in lungfuls of free air. For us the ecstasy of breathing is almost unknown, but for him the tiniest pleasure is thrilling.

Quite often repentance works the same way. There's no point apologizing if we are not sorry, and we will never be sorry until we have seen our negatives as they really are. Of course, that is never easy, yet God helps us to see ourselves as loved, priceless, and capable of so much more. How He does this is seen in a three-step rehabilitation of our self-awareness.

1. *Getting sensitized.* The genius of evil is in numbing our senses. It makes us content with mediocrity, so much so that we no longer care about another man's

Evil is often too clever, and we awake from the spell, realizing the pain it eventually brings.

struggles or even our own. Once evil has a grip, nothing seems important except the trinkets evil uses to lure us ever deeper into negative behavior. Fortunately evil is often too clever, and we awake from the spell, realizing the pain it eventually brings. For these awakenings God is to be credited, and He is ever ready to multiply their frequency. Ask to be sensitized, look at people with renewed interest, read between the lines in your motives, apologize for your part in the world's ills, and your mediocrity will vanish.

2. *Knowing you are wanted.* God doesn't want automatons blind to individuality. He wants sons and daughters unique in every way. As with every good father, it is inconceivable for Him to abandon His family, and we can look to Him, not as a judge, but as a mentor dedicated to our success.

3. *Feeling relieved.* No matter how deeply evil has caused us pain or how oblivious we have been to the suffering we have caused, God can bring us full relief with a fresh start. Like the Auschwitz survivor and the lepers healed by Jesus, we may taste happiness more keenly than ever. And in our relief we can dedicate our lives to the visions God shows us in the great struggle of good over evil.

REACT

1. Why would someone apologize for something for which he or she is not sorry?

2. Can anyone truly recognize good without having first experienced evil? Explain your answer.

By David Wood, a 1992 graduate in theology from Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Take a Deep Breath

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Kings 18:21

As we reached the crest of the hill, we saw the tall, red towers of the Golden Gate Bridge stretching high into the clear, blue sky. Had my girlfriend and I not been engulfed in a theological discussion, we might have noticed the presence of the awesome bridge and the beauty of San Francisco's skyline beyond. But the scenery would go unnoticed this day as the debate roared on. Neither of us being ready to compromise, the debate was beginning to get out of hand when out of the corner of my eye I saw the gate posts of the bridge. Personal tradition required that we attempt holding our breaths from one side to the other. Our discussion ended midsentence as we approached the edge of the bridge. We both inhaled deeply and turned to focus on the other side. Suspended hundreds of feet above the waters of the bay, the car was filled with silence, and only then did we begin to hear each other's words.

God didn't hand us a book with all the answers to every question to every ancient and modern problem and say, "Now you will never have to wonder what

Our discussion ended midsentence as we approached the edge of the bridge.

to do." He instead gave us the ability to think and to create ideas, and with those ideas to create opinions. Fortunately He also gave us the ability to communicate so we could share and discuss our opinions with others.

Opinions, as I am finding out, are very important to our spirituality. After all, with nothing but our own lives as a base, how can we truly take stock of our own spiritual experience? We need to consider others' opinions as we together try to find the actual truth. The point is made in the scenario of a traffic accident viewed by ten witnesses: although you may get ten versions of the incident, you can combine all ten to find a story much closer to the truth than any of the individual accounts.

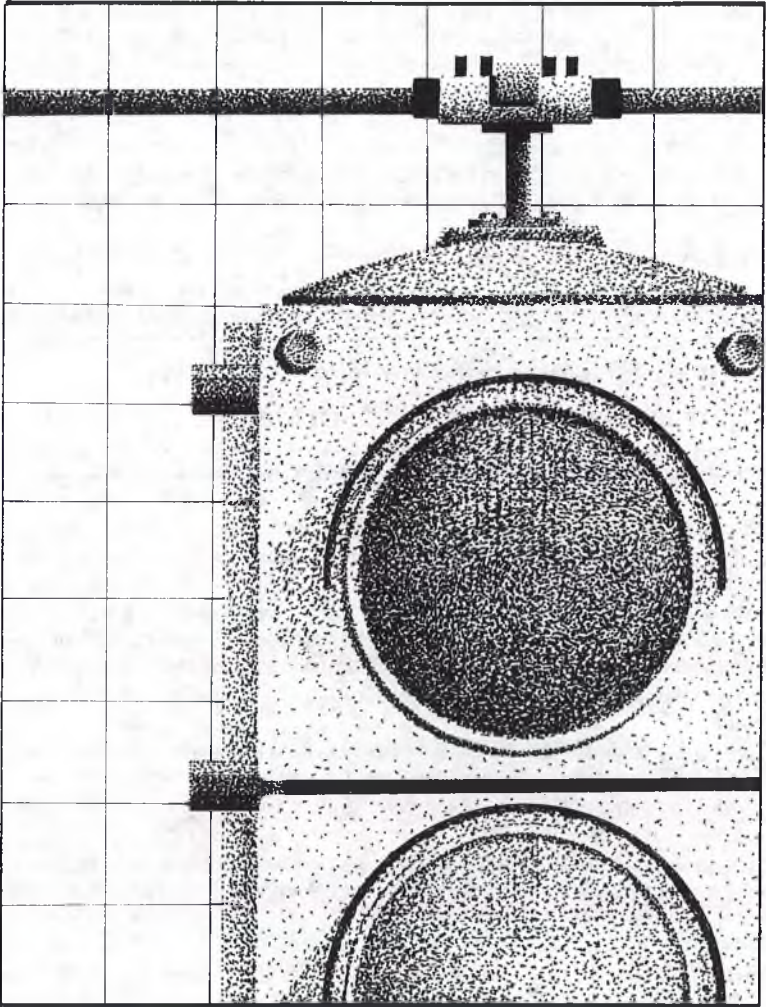
Of course someday debates will be easily settled in a walk with God along the shores of the sea of glass; but until that day, we will continue to hold and share our individual opinions. The key is not only in valuing our own opinions, but in valuing also the opinions of others. With so many capable and individual minds, together we can grow closer to His truth. And should we reach an impasse, a point where our opinions seemingly won't combine, let's take a deep breath and really listen to each other.

REACT

What is the role of opinion in the Christian community?

By G. Wesley Bailey, a sophomore majoring in public relations at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

OVERCOMING THE CHAOS



“We will not forsake the house of our God” (Neh. 10:39).

Working Together

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Neh. 4:16-18

Have you ever been driving home from work during rush-hour traffic only to find that the traffic light at a busy intersection is out of order? Each driver inches forward in determination that he or she will be the next one through the light. Soon the idea of taking turns diminishes, and as tensions rise, horns sound and drivers begin to yell, "Hey, it's not fair; it's my turn." All sense of law and order are broken because of the loss of three colored, blinking lights!

In the days of Nehemiah there weren't any traffic lights to monitor the crowds, or electronics of any type to help with communication. Crowds upon crowds of

**Soon the idea of taking turns diminishes,
and as tensions rise, horns sound and drivers
begin to yell.**

people came to help reconstruct Jerusalem, and with so many tribes involved, chaos was almost inevitable. However, as I read Nehemiah, I continually felt a sense of order in the activities. I was thrilled to find that each person or group had their place or role in the reconstruction: gatekeepers, singers, builders, and guards—even those who were to live in the city—had their position chosen by drawing lots. No one seemed to be left out or thought less important. The people shared a common goal of building up that city once more and establishing themselves as its people. I admire their determination as they carried a sword in one hand against their adversaries and building materials in the other for their task at hand. With this kind of dedication, the city was soon completed.

This orderliness and determination intrigues me, as today our world is filled with chaotic confusion. Can God's kingdom be built in this man-made confusion? Have we identified our parts in this reconstruction process?

By Tammy Huntsman, a 1992 graduate in social work from Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

To Care With Care

LOGOS

Neh. 7; 10:30-39; 11-13

Imagine standing before a freshly refortified city, roomy enough for thousands yet populated with only a handful of families. Such was the near-ghost town scene facing Nehemiah in 444 B.C.

In the closing chapters of his book, this Jewish leader narrates the resettlement and reformation that followed the restoration of Jerusalem's protective wall. His mostly first-person account is interwoven with several parenthetical, one-sentence prayers in chapter 13. He also cites extensive census data on those taken captive a century and a half earlier, nearly duplicating the list in Ezra 2.

A Time for Action

"Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isa. 58:12).

Nehemiah saw a problem—and a solution. Though the Jews had begun trickling back to their home 90 years earlier, morale was sagging, and the population scattered. He must launch an urban redevelopment program and lure the people back to their capital.

His task was twofold, however. Although the physical walls of Jerusalem had been repaired, the spirituality of her people still suffered from gaping holes. According to chapter 13, they had backslidden on returning their tithe (13:10, 11), polluted the Sabbath by harvesting crops (13:15), and intermarried with the heathen (13:23, 24).

It was a classic skewing of priorities in their finances, time management, and personal relationships. Familiar themes, right? Only this time, the Lord's servant of the hour had the added challenge of pulling the people together physically, as well as sparking a spiritual reform. It was not a job for the faint of heart.

Nehemiah's Methods

"He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good" (Prov. 16:20).

Nehemiah was a daring and decisive man. He dared to undertake one of the largest census projects of Old Testament times. He dared to rally the people to return to their now-restored city. Perhaps most impressively, he dared to clean up their religious life.

Impelled by a no-nonsense attitude, Nehemiah confronted these problems with a refreshing style of sanctified assertiveness. He booted the Sabbath-violating merchants out of town, with the added warning that he would "lay hands on" them if they kept loitering about the city gates during the sacred hours (Neh. 13:21). As for the families engaging in mixed marriages, he "plucked off their hair" (verse 25) while admonishing against such practices. Sometimes the Lord looks for a diplomatic approach, and sometimes He prefers more direct confrontation!

Along with Nehemiah's daring qualities, however, we see another set of attributes just as important: restraint and cautiousness that tempered his boldness. Especially noteworthy is Nehemiah's patience and regard for proper timing. A comparison of Nehemiah 2:1 and 13:6 and related events leads George Rawlinson*

to believe that the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem was probably completed at least 12 years before the dedication ceremony. Rawlinson speculates that Nehemiah may well have waited until he could personally visit King Artaxerxes in Babylon to ask for approval. A more impetuous maverick might have bolted ahead recklessly and jeopardized the entire plan.

Furthermore, the great attention given to genealogical records and research shows Nehemiah's care for detail. Though moved to stir things up, he understood the importance of first getting his facts together. We sometimes yawn at the long lists of names found in chapters 7, 11, and 12, but they reveal data about real people and places. Analyzing the details of who lived where enabled Nehemiah to convince the officials and his fellow Jews that it made sense to resettle "one in ten" of the people in Jerusalem (11:1).

Indeed, we see in this story the work of a self-disciplined man. From his resettlement of families by the casting of lots (11:4-20) to his division of companies marching around Jerusalem at the dedication (12:31-40), Nehemiah proceeded with well-ordered structure. He avoided unbridled boldness and excessive caution

Although the physical walls of Jerusalem had been repaired, the spirituality of her people still suffered from gaping holes.

and obsession with details. One extreme would have rendered him sensational but dangerous, and the other, safe but limp.

Proof in the Pudding

"And the rest of the people . . . entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law" (10:28, 29).

The results speak for themselves. Led by the Levites in musical praise, the Jews "sang loud" at the long-awaited dedication ceremony and were "heard even afar off" (12:42, 43). What really mattered, though, was that the spiritual breaches that had so troubled Nehemiah were repaired for a time. The Jews resumed their tithing (12:47), and strict Sabbath observance became the standard, even to the guarding of the edges (13:19).

As we focus on the closing chapters of this Old Testament book, we see again what God can do with His human instruments when they are committed to accomplishing His will. Nehemiah combined his natural talent with divine guidance as he responded to what "God put into . . . [his] heart" to do (7:5).

REACT

1. What aspects of Nehemiah's approach to reform would be most appropriate and helpful in the church today?
2. How can we study genealogies of Scripture more meaningfully?

* George Rawlinson, *Pulpit Commentary*, ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co.), vol. 15, p. 132.

By Greg G. Rumsey, associate professor of communication, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Renew in Me a Steadfast Spirit

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 51

Paul said he died daily. Christians today have that same need to experience a renewal of their spiritual walk every day. Ellen White wrote that “a revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.”¹

“Revival and reformation are two different things.”² A revival is the renewal of the spiritual life, but reformation is the actual “change in ideas and theories, habits and practices”³ brought about by the revival.

Next to knowing that we all need daily spiritual revival in our lives, the most important thing is knowing how to renew our commitment with Christ. Ellen White

Christians today have that same need to experience a renewal of their spiritual walk every day.

states that Christians need to seek revival in our lives through “confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer.”⁴

Sometimes it is easy to wonder whether God is really walking with us, but we should remember that Ellen White has told us that “wicked men and devils cannot hinder the work of God, or shut out His presence from the assemblies of His people, if they will, with subdued, contrite hearts, confess and put away their sins, and in faith claim His promises.”⁵

The Holy Spirit can bring the needed revival and reformation in each person’s life. If this is lacking, though, God warns that “because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16, NIV). Yet, to all who are willing to follow Christ, “this is what he promised us—even eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

REACT

1. How do I stand before God?
2. How can we start a churchwide revival?

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1. *Christian Service*, p. 41.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 121.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

By Erwin Reitsma, a theology student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Importance of Being Hopeful

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 21:26

Israel had lived in Babylonian exile for longer than most could remember when their barriers began to fall. Then, suddenly, and in unexpected ways, there were opportunities to return home. But only a small number—a remnant—actually did. Why?

Born and raised in a foreign country, most found it natural to assimilate. Israel and Jerusalem were a fading memory. Children of exile did not have the same values as their parents. Who wanted to cross the desert and live in makeshift accommodations to rebuild Jerusalem? In the various lists of Nehemiah, nevertheless, we find names of those who did. What made them different?

A clue is found in Nehemiah 10. Two familiar names—Jeremiah and Daniel—stand out in a list of unfamiliar names. Jeremiah, of course, prophesied Israel's return from exile, and Daniel lived in active hope of its fulfillment. It should not be

When Babylonian barriers began to fall, many must have looked in fear at what was happening.

surprising, then, to find that hopeful parents named their sons after these important heroes. They too lived in active hope of the return.

We too are exiles. How do we look at our changing world? How do we face our opportunities with their possible personal hardships?

Luke 21:26 tells of men's hearts failing for fear for looking after those things that are coming on the earth. Government leaders will be fearful when God's judgments are falling, but right now, before the judgments, who knows what is coming on the earth? Might not the list of the fearful ones for now include some church members? Among those listed as lost will be the fearful (Rev. 21:8).

In contrast to the fearful, Luke 21:28 instructs those of us who witness the beginning of God's judgments to lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh. Looking up is a hopeful gesture. It also suggests that we know from where our strength comes. Ellen White, writing of the early church and its hope of Christ's return, said: "As long as this hope was cherished . . . they were a light to the world."^{*}

What about us?

REACT

1. Why is hope an important attitude for those who face the end of exile?
2. What are some of the important ingredients of hope?
3. What can we do to keep hope alive?

^{*} *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, vol. 3, p. 1073.

By Henry Zuill, a professor of biology at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Pizza Hut, Deliver Me!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Neh. 12:43

The other night I was making a special dinner for some friends; everything seemed to be going wrong, and it was taking longer than I anticipated. I grew frustrated and wanted to throw the meal out the back door and call Pizza Hut so that we could actually eat before we got old and our teeth fell out. Later, after the food had been prepared and eaten, I contrasted my experience with Nehemiah's.

My task was nothing compared to his, yet I was willing to turn my back on it and have Pizza Hut deliver me. Nehemiah, on the other hand, committed himself to the task of relocation, rebuilding, revival, and reformation; in so doing, he called on God for strength and guidance, as opposed to asking for an easy way out.

As I look at what he accomplished, I realize that through his commitment to God, he allowed himself to be used as an agent for change. His story has very timely applications; while in exile, the Israelites had adopted the lifestyle of the

I grew frustrated and wanted to throw the meal out the back door and call Pizza Hut.

culture around them—something I find easy to do myself. When the Israelites began returning to their homeland, Ezra, Nehemiah, and many others, began rebuilding their ancestral godly lifestyle, as well as the temple and the city.

Oftentimes it seems that I try to get away with as much as I can and still be able to consider myself a Christian. As a result of studying the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, I have decided that I need to live as close to God as I can, not as far from Him as “Christianly” possible.

How can Christians today match the revival and reformation of Nehemiah's day?

1. Practice a lifestyle you *know* God will approve of.
2. Be willing to be used by God.
3. Review biblical examples of people who have been in the same position and were able to make changes in their lives.
4. Commit yourself to maintaining a relationship with the Lord.

Why would I want to follow Nehemiah's example and change my life? Because I noticed in Nehemiah 12:43 that everyone was happy; so happy that “the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.”

REACT

1. What is the appropriate Christian response to seemingly insurmountable obstacles?
2. What are the roles of human effort and divine effort in God's work on earth?

By Michaele Lawrence, a senior public-relations major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Is Sabbath a Vacation?

OPINION

Key Text: Neh. 13:15-18

The Sabbath is a major doctrine that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other religions, and the manner of observance often seems to be a topic of disagreement among young adults. Often we see inconsistencies in Sabbath observance, causing us to wonder what is really acceptable Sabbath behavior. I have caught myself focusing on these inconsistencies instead of developing my own base for beliefs concerning the Sabbath.

As we look in the book of Nehemiah, we see that even Israel seemed to have some problems with this issue. On the Sabbath they continued their work of treading the wine presses, reaping the harvests, selling the goods, and carrying on with general business. They seemed to think business would get behind if they took a day off. Often we cut ourselves off from the true blessing of the Sabbath by fitting it around us and our earthly needs instead of fitting ourselves around it.

Let's take God's Sabbath at face value and treat it as we treat those vacations we anticipate.

Instead of carrying on with our normal activities, we have been given an entire day to reflect on God and His guidance. Why, then, do we insist on seeking our own pleasure on the Sabbath?

We anxiously await upcoming vacations from work or classes. We look forward to Christmas vacation, when we can sit back, relax, collect our thoughts, and become organized. We even look forward to that single-hour break we have in our workday or between history and chemistry. We anticipate free time to put things into perspective and catch up on what is important. God has given us 24 hours on a silver platter to do just that: put things into perspective and catch up on what is important. Let's take God's Sabbath at face value and treat it as we treat those vacations we anticipate. Use it to fine-tune our perspective of God and focus on our importance to Him.

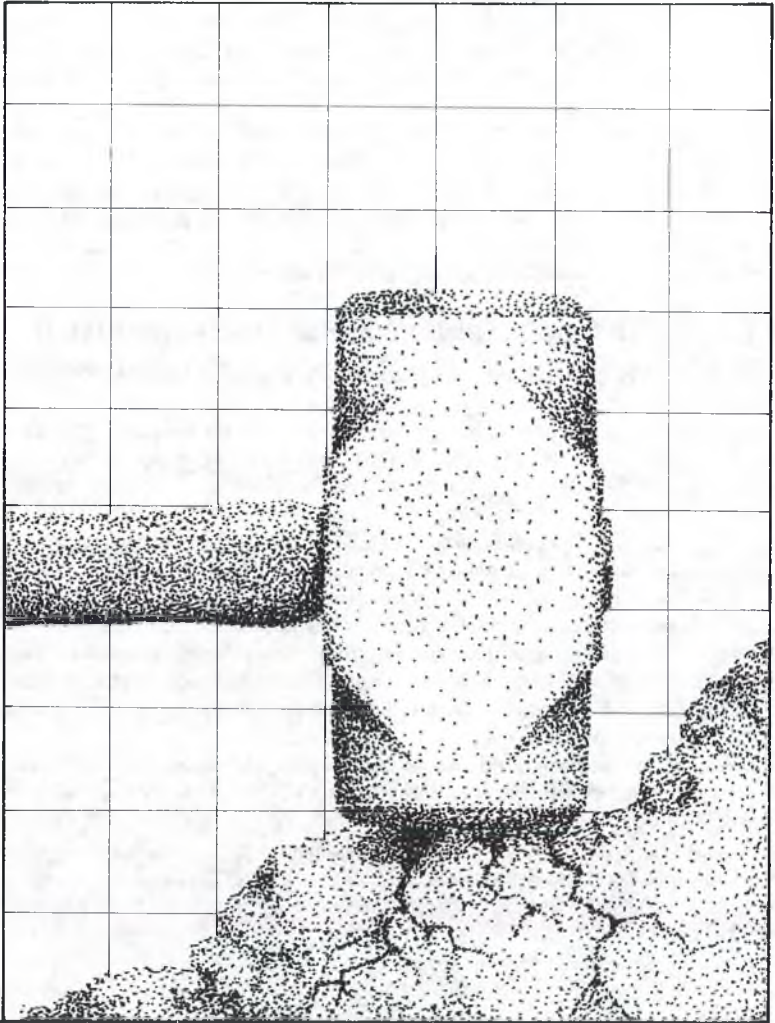
Some people have the tendency to use excuses and rationalize their Sabbath observance. I agree with the fact that we are all at different stages of Christian growth, but that doesn't make something right for one person and wrong for another. As each of us places renewed significance on the Sabbath, we will see our own Christian experience mature.

REACT

1. What were God's reasons for instituting the Sabbath?
2. On what principles should a Christian base his or her keeping of the Sabbath?

By Carla Andersen, a junior accounting/computer science major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

BEHIND THE STORY



“The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build” (Neh. 2:20).

The Wall

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Neh. 2:18

Someone once said, “Four walls do not a prison make.” The original meaning of the statement seems to have been that although walls may imprison one’s body, they cannot hold one’s mind. This testament to the human spirit has been illustrated over and over in recent history, most notably in the destruction of the Berlin Wall. The cold, forbidding structure that has physically separated families and friends in East and West Germany for several decades finally fell. Once again the world saw that even tons of stone and barbed wire cannot stem the tide of men and women striving for freedom. Despite this victory, however, human beings continue to build walls between them and between themselves and God, whether those walls be physical or spiritual. It seems that we are determined to ignore the lessons of the past instead of learning from them.

Looking at the story of Ezra and Nehemiah, we are shown that “four walls do not a prison make” has an additional meaning that perhaps God’s children *can*

Even tons of stone and barbed wire cannot stem the tide of men and women striving for freedom.

learn. In helping the bands of captives returned from Babylon to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, God was giving them freedom from danger at the hands of neighboring Samaritans and Ammonites: “And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God” (Neh. 6:16, NKJV).

Once the physical wall around Jerusalem had been finished, a wall of another sort needed to be erected. Nehemiah 8:1 says, “Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel.” Just as the people needed a wall of stone to be free from physical harm, they needed the wall of God’s law to keep them free from sin and to help them live a life in harmony with God’s principles.

As Christians we have been chosen to build for the Lord as Ezra and Nehemiah were chosen. And as their example shows us, not only do walls not imprison us, but many times they free us. The wall of God’s law is not to restrict us but to help us measure ourselves against His ideal and to protect us from our sinful natures. This week we will discover several lessons that God teaches through Ezra and Nehemiah, lessons that apply as much today as they did in that time.

By Chris Trumble, a secondary-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

History Lessons

LOGOS

Ezra 1:1; 9:8; 6:15-18; Neh. 1:11; 8:1

“The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding” (Neh. 2:20, NIV).

As we have been going through this quarter, we have had an in-depth look at the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These are unique books in that they contain no grand miracles, elegant poetry, or systematic theology. They are in essence history, and the way the authors put together their information is excellent. They give names and dates for events. The books give us letters and decrees from kings, and both Ezra and Nehemiah have good census records. However, the reason we are studying them is not for a history lesson. The purpose behind this examination can be summed up by a famous quotation by Ellen White, “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”*

1. Read Nehemiah 2:20; 1:7-11; Ezra 1:1-4.

This text shows two things. First, it demonstrates the faith of the people rebuilding Jerusalem. Second, it makes clear that there is a real relationship between our actions and God’s actions. That fact is enough to boggle the mind. The God of heaven and earth acts and moves in ways that benefit us. In the case of Ezra 1:1 it is revealed that God is moving kingdoms around, thereby permanently altering history for the sake of a few thousand people.

Compare Nehemiah 1:7-11 with 2:20. By which method of operation does God get the best results from His people—by blessing or by punishment? How does God use these methods today?

2. Read Ezra 1:1-4 and 9:8.

At this point in history God is tired of His people’s being in servitude to another nation. Also at this time it seems as though the people have come to an awareness of what their responsibility as a people is. They are coming to a spiritual and national identity. God is working diligently that the Jews might be uplifted, and for the time being His people seem to be getting the message.

Think about times in your life in which you felt as though God released you from a situation and gave you a chance to make great strides. Compare these experiences to that of those who were in exile.

3. Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 9, 10.

Israel had had a spiritual drought for so long that they longed for the Word of God. The Scriptures simply being read made them cry. The record does not say why they were crying, but it would be reasonable to believe that while they were in captivity they were lost and confused. They were sinners who did not know how to get back to God. Just the release of hearing where exactly they had gone wrong and how they could get back to God must have been very emotional for them. In

addition to that, it also could have been very moving to hear their glorious and disappointing past. However, this sad emotionalism was not what was appropriate for that day. The leaders could have used this prime opportunity to drive home some important points, but they did not. They said that over the years you have done enough mourning. This day has been set aside by our ancestors as a day of rejoicing.

How is rejoicing a learning part of the Christian experience? What lessons have I learned from rejoicing?

4. Read Ezra 6:15-18.

In this passage are two ideas that are often thought of as incompatible. At the dedication of the temple the Israelites combined joy and celebration with repent-

At the dedication of the temple the Israelites combined joy and celebration with repentance.

ance. Since we are living after the time of Christ, it is difficult to imagine how it must feel to go several generations without receiving forgiveness for our sins. It might seem repentance of one's sins would be accompanied by feelings of sorrow for those sins committed. However, we should take a lesson from the people at this exciting service and see that forgiveness brings the greatest joy available to Christians. If we understand that repentance and joy flow naturally together, then we will be able to liven up our prayer life and sing Christ's praises loud and strong.

What are more ways that we can find joy in the act of repentance? In what situations do I feel that sorrow should accompany repentance and what situations beg for joy?

As we study the historical parts of the Bible, it is important for us to realize that the Bible is not just the recounting of facts. It is an important learning tool. As we read about Israel's past, let us keep in mind that it contains valuable lessons for us. Let us ask God for His blessing and guidance as we search for what He has to say to us.

* *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

By Aaron S. Hatfield, a recent graduate of Union College now pastoring in Grand Junction, Colorado.

In Love With His Law

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Neh. 8:1

As the Israelites searched for a new relationship with God in their reclaimed homeland, they developed a renewed thirst for His law. They had again realized the importance of following God's law after years of bondage and estrangement. Perhaps we can learn from this attitude of love and reverence for the law of God.

The result of a loving relationship with God will be a love for His law. "To those who love God it will be the highest delight to keep His commandments, and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight."¹ As a person grows in his relationship with God, the law becomes a priceless treasure. "To those who have consecrated themselves to God to serve Him, the law of God becomes more precious. . . . To the faithful adherent the holy precept will become more dear and valuable."² It is

The unbeliever cannot follow the law, but the Christian delights in it.

impossible truly to obey God without loving His law. "True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God."³ A mature relationship with God produces right doing, not as a result of our own desire to follow the law but as a result of our desire to please God. The unbeliever cannot follow the law, but the Christian delights in it. "The heart that in its unrenewed state is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, now delights in its holy precepts, exclaiming with the psalmist, 'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' Psalm 119:97."⁴ It is exciting to think how we can grow in our love for God so much that we will rejoice in following His precepts!

The Israelites' new relationship with Jehovah had made them so excited about His law that they crowded into the streets, demanding that it be read to them. What an example to us! Let us also yearn for the precious law of God.

REACT

1. How can I maintain a love for the law of God from day to day?
2. What does it mean to love God's law?
3. In everyday terms how should a Christian communicate to others his or her love for God's law?

1. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 217.
 2. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 217.
 3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98.
 4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 63.

By Randy Bergh, a freshman theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

An Offer We Can't Refuse

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Neh. 8:1, 8

Adventists and other Christians have struggled regarding what to think of the law. For years we attached a great deal of pride to our ability to understand and keep the law. Slowly it began to dawn on us that such an attitude made it very difficult for others to enjoy associating with us.

Then we became fascinated with the idea of "righteousness by faith." Now no one dared talk to us about what we do, because that was legalism. We quickly point out that we have a "relationship with the Lord." This freed us up to question some of our attitudes toward jewelry and other behavioral standards.

However, we are beginning to realize that we must achieve some balance between these two attitudes. As we have discarded some of our old standards, we have not replaced them with the "weightier matters of the law" because we do not think about the law anymore (Matt. 23:23). Could it be time, as it was for the

Such an attitude made it very difficult for others to enjoy associating with us.

Israelites, to gather ourselves "together as one man" and ask that the law be read so that we can "understand the reading"? (Neh. 8:1, 8).

A small group of us recently attended an interdenominational meeting. Imagine our surprise to hear a sermon on the importance of the law. It likely would shock many Adventist congregations. Fortunately, one speaker addressed the problem of how the law could be studied and applied without becoming legalistic.

Could it be time for us to restudy our attitudes toward God's law? God has cursed those who do not keep His law (Deut. 27:26). He commanded that it be read before all Israel (Deut. 31:11). David declared, "O how I love your law!" (Ps. 119:97, NIV). Christ pointed out that He did not come to destroy the law; rather He promoted the law, not only in the Golden Rule but in indicating that love for God and for humanity is the pinnacle from which "hang all the law and the prophets." How could anyone refuse to discuss the law with someone who has a deep love for God and an obvious love for us?

Do we really fear legalism or do we fear discipline, choice, and hard work? Fortunately, God saves us; there is no question about that. But, if we are to live by faith and yet we are judged by what we do, we need to think through more carefully the connection of those two ideas.

God clearly points out that He will prove whether we "will walk in my law." We need to pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18). When we begin that study, we are assured that, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (verse 165). Who can refuse such an offer?

By George Gibson, a history professor at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Instantaneous Guilt/Permanent Joy

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ezra 9:8, 9

Well, the Israelites tried again to return to the Lord. How often they would stray and then be drawn back by care or crisis. As Nehemiah ordered the reading of the law by priest/scribe Ezra, all the people listened to what they had forgotten over the years, and they responded with a renewed desire to concentrate on the concept of a remnant. Revival and reformation came as a result of seeing where God had led in the past, what He had in store for them, how permanent His commands were, why they were in the condition they were in, and who was ruling over all.

A reflection can cause two reactions. It can cause grief and guilt as I remember all the bad choices and consequences of those choices in my life. We've all made mistakes and sometimes my reflections result in remorse as I dwell on the disasters. But I can also look back and see the joys, victories, and positive experiences, which allows me to look back at a not-so-perfect past with an appreciation for life and a gladness to be alive.

Might I suggest that perhaps both reactions are valid and necessary as I look back at life and at Christianity. Perhaps the looking back by the Israelites was a

Have we driven guilt so deeply into our psyche that we refuse even to acknowledge it?

motivator not to become too complacent with their goodness or too discouraged with their shortcomings. In looking back, they came face to face with the solidness of God's foundation, His law. When they heard it being read, guilt no doubt flooded their minds as they realized that they had fallen far short of the ideal. But the goodness, yea, greatness, of God overrules that guilt with glorious gladness.

How about with Christianity? Could it be that we have driven guilt so deeply and permanently into our Christian psyche that we refuse even to acknowledge it? I would propose a solution—instantaneous guilt. When God's law is presented to me, I see my sinfulness. But before I sing too many songs about what a wretch I am, I am amazed afresh at God's grace and I move quickly into the joy of the Lord. Two steps: (1) instantaneous guilt and (2) permanent joy. Both are essential. As Ezra reads the law to me, I sense its "schoolmaster" role of revealing my sinfulness. Israel's bondage in slavery and my bondage in sin are both the result of poor choices on our parts. But God has not forsaken us. He has great plans for us, and He has provided all that is necessary to take care of the undesirable part of history and give us a glorious hope.

REACT

What is the proper role of guilt in a Christian's life?

By Rich Carlson, chaplain, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Take Action

OPINION

Key Text: Neh. 2:5, 20

If you are at all like me, you have at one time or another been very discouraged with the Seventh-day Adventist Church or perhaps disappointed with your home church when it didn't reach your expectations. These feelings are very common among our age group.

Yes, there are some hang-ups. Often we don't understand why the church seems so legalistic and artificial. Guidelines are great and the church needs them, but they should never cloud our vision of God's salvation. What we do and do not do isn't as important as our love for and knowledge of Jesus. The heart must be changed first. Often I know I would like to hear more about our awesome Saviour who died for us. Also, we often see the church as being very judgmental and critical. I have had friends leave the church for this reason. Perhaps we should practice being understanding of others and slow to judge. Well, I am sure you can think of more things; these are just a few.

We don't have to be discouraged with the church. We don't have to feel as though we can't get involved to make needed changes. Look at Nehemiah 2:5. In

I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I honestly believe it is God's church.

this passage Nehemiah asks permission to leave and to go help rebuild Jerusalem and the Lord's temple. Like Nehemiah we should take action to build our church up; not sit back and criticize. First of all, as Nehemiah did, we need to pray (2:4). Pray that the church will become what God ultimately wants it to be. Pray that He will use *you* to help accomplish this.

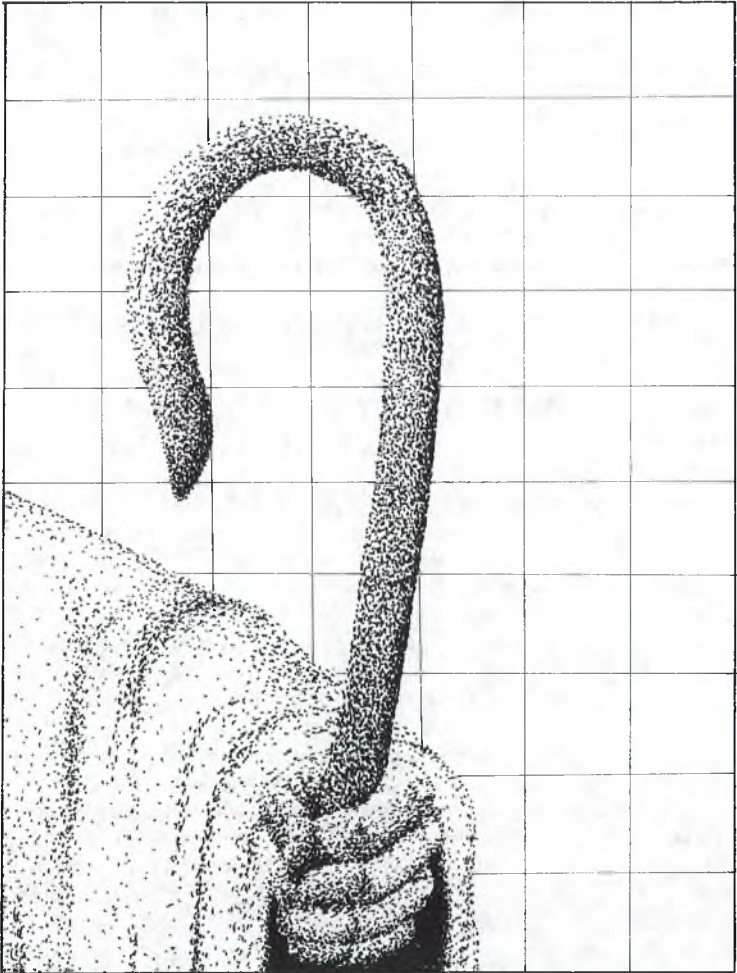
Start building up the church by getting involved. What bothers me the most is hearing my friends, both inside the church and outside, say how the church is boring and uncompassionate. Their problem is that they have never done anything for the church, but always expected something.

Be proud of your church. Sure, it has problems, but being positive can do much good for the spirit of our church. I don't like to see people put their head down when asked what church they belong to or where they go to school. I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I honestly believe it is God's church. I attend Union College and I know without a doubt that I'm getting an excellent education here because this institution is blessed by the Lord. If you ask me, these are things to be proud of!

We can learn a lot from Nehemiah. He was a courageous man who cared about his church. Let's take on that courage today. "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding" (2:20, NIV).

By Robb Crouch, a senior at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, studying communications and public relations.

TELESCOPING THROUGH TIME



“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17).

Excerpts From a Pharisaic Journal

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Num. 24:17, Dan. 9:24-27, Ezra 7:1-26

“Heard strange rumors from Bethlehem. It seems shepherds were visited by angels announcing the Messiah’s birth. The Messiah—a baby? Unbelievable. Prophecies as far back as Moses point out that Israel will crush her enemies and become a great nation—that requires a king. Besides, if angels were to appear, it would be to my colleagues and me, not to ignorant, unwashed shepherds . . .

“Three heathens showed up, asking questions about the baby in Bethlehem and claiming to have followed a star from the East. Study of our prophecies convinced them it leads to our new king. Our lack of interest in the baby surprised them. Apparently they took the passage about a star coming out of Jacob literally, added Daniel’s timetable (which they believe began when Ezra rebuilt Jerusalem) and jumped to the conclusion that this baby is the Messiah. Study of prophecy really should be restricted. I can’t believe anyone would follow a star . . .

“Word of the strangers is out. People are worked up about that baby. I am questioned everywhere. I’m reluctant to leave the house . . .

“Three heathens showed up, asking questions about the baby in Bethlehem.”

“Matters are deteriorating. Herod heard the fuss and summoned us. That interloper actually believes we are conspiring with the strangers to start a riot and unseat him. As if we need heathens to get rid of him! He asked where the Messiah will come from. We tried putting him off with generalizations, but he became enraged and demanded to know what the prophecies say. We admitted it would be Bethlehem of Judea. I was frightened of what he would do . . .

“Herod asked the strangers to let him know when they find the child so he can worship him. I wonder what’s up. That interloper has no intention of worshiping anyone. He is becoming more paranoid daily . . .

“Last night the strangers crept off. Now that they are gone we can get back to normal. The public is losing interest in the baby. I doubt we will hear any more about it . . .

“It’s a sad day. Herod’s had every child in Bethlehem under two years killed. He is getting out of hand. I can’t wait for the Messiah to march in and take over. The prophecies say it won’t be long . . .”

* * *

Israelite leaders, with all their knowledge, missed the world’s greatest event. We have the Bible and a “more sure word of prophecy” to show us God is in control. Are we studying and preparing for what will come, or will the world have to tell us that Jesus is here?

By Janalee Shaw, an executive secretary in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Judy Mackie, an entrepreneur in Buffalo, Wyoming.

The Focus of Prophecy

LOGOS

Ezra 1:1-4; 7:1-26; Dan. 9:24-27

Daniel's Confession and Prayer (Read Daniel 9)

"Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake" (verse 17).

Daniel experienced deliverance from present earthly dangers during the destruction of Judah and during the reign of the Babylonian emperors. Daniel's unshakable faith and courage made his mission as God's representative possible; as the result of years of frequent prayer and walks with God, Daniel was "greatly beloved" (verse 23). Although his consuming objective was to petition God for an end to Israel's captivity, God's intention for this favorite prophet was an even more important message: a timetable for the imminent coming of the Messiah.

Gabriel Brings a Prophecy

"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (verse 25).

Daniel's prayers are answered, and the angelic messenger brings news more joyful than Daniel could have hoped—not only an end to years of captivity in Babylon and the promise of restoration for Jerusalem, but the announcement of the coming of the Anointed One, Messiah the Prince.

One can hardly disbelieve that Jesus was the true Messiah after carefully studying this prophecy. Remember that the rule for interpreting prophetic time is "each day for a year" (Ezek. 4:4-6). Almost five hundred years before His birth a time prophecy was recorded that foretold the year of Christ's baptism. This prophecy presents strong evidence concerning the infallibility of God's Word.

The Prophesied Decree (Read Ezra 1)

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem" (verse 2).

"More than a century before the birth of Cyrus, Inspiration had mentioned the work he should do in . . . preparing the way for the release of the children of captivity."¹ The prophet Isaiah had penned this prediction (Isa. 44:24, 28; 45:1, 2, 13). The events that transpired were to the children of Israel "an unmistakable sign that God was shaping the affairs of nations in their behalf."²

The Hand of God (Read Ezra 7)

"This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him" (verse 6).

Like Daniel, Ezra learned about the first advent and Israel's role through his studies in Scripture. As the predicted 70 years of captivity expired (Jer. 25:12), Ezra readied himself to assist God's plan for Israel. Indeed, Ezra's tasks in leading

50,000 Jewish exiles were possible only because of the benevolence of the Persian Empire. This situation came about as Cyrus met Daniel, who informed him of his role in Scriptural prophecy. "The sterling qualities of the man of God as a statesman of far-seeing ability led the Persian ruler to show him marked respect and to honor his judgment. And now God moved upon Cyrus to discern the prophecies concerning himself and to grant the Jewish people their liberty."³

The Third Decree (Read Daniel 9)

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy" (verse 24).

The third and final decree reestablishing the Jewish state is dated 457 B.C. The prophecy of Daniel in verses 24-27 correctly predicts the baptism of Jesus by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16; Acts 10:38), His subsequent 3 1/2 year ministry, His crucifixion, and the formal rejection of the gospel by the Jewish leadership (Acts

One can hardly disbelieve that Jesus was the true Messiah after carefully studying this prophecy.

7:51-60). These events all occur in the last week of the prophecy and end the 490-year period in the year A.D. 34 with the stoning of Stephen and evangelism taken to Gentiles. "This 490-year period was in many ways the great climax of the Old Testament ages—the time that patriarchs, prophets, and kings looked forward to—as it was consumed by the appearing, ministry, and atoning death of the Messiah. The Jewish nation unfortunately filled up its cup of transgression, but it was the Messiah's life and death which has made possible 'an end of sins' which had made 'reconciliation for iniquity' and which has brought in 'everlasting righteousness.' His ministry has confirmed the prophecy. But more than this was accomplished. The anointing of 'the most Holy' refers to the inauguration of the Messiah as man's High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary to minister His merits in behalf of penitent men and women (Heb. 8:1, 2). With this prophecy there is a shift of attention to the heavenly sanctuary. That the Messiah would be the High Priest was foretold in Psalm 110:4, Isaiah 53:12, and Zechariah 6:11-14."⁴ Thus Jesus Christ is shown to be the true Messiah. Of Christ Philip said, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write" (John 1:45).

REACT

1. From a biblical perspective, define the word *prophecy*.
2. What is the value of the 70-week prophecy to us today?
3. What, if anything, can an individual do to help fulfill latter-day prophecy?

1. *From Splendor to Shadow*, p. 285.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

4. Harold E. Metcalf, *Basic Bible Study Helps* (Atlanta: Wm. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1975), pp. 46, 47.

By Walter Reinhardt, a financial consultant in Durham, North Carolina.

Comfort Ye

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Peter 1:19

Do you remember when your father used to throw you up in the air and catch you? You'd squeal with delight and beg, "More, Daddy, more!" You trusted his strong hands to catch you, because they had so many times before. Those beloved, trusting hands served as a comfort and security to you. One of the purposes of Bible prophecy is to serve as comfort and security—a reason for trusting in God.

In the Garden of Eden prophecy served as a source of hope for Adam and Eve. "As the guilty pair listened to these words [Gen. 3:15] they were inspired with hope; for in the prophecy concerning the breaking of Satan's power they discerned a promise of deliverance from the ruin wrought through transgression."¹

In the Garden of Eden prophecy served as a source of hope for Adam and Eve.

"The prophesies which the Great I AM has given in His word, uniting link after link in the chain of events, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tell us where we are today in the procession of the ages and what may be expected in the time to come. All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, has been traced on the pages of history, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order."²

The greatest comfort that prophecy gives, however, is "the assurance that God's kingdom ruleth over all. The program of coming events is in the hands of our Maker. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations, as well as the concerns of His church, in His own charge."³

Second Peter 1:19 tells us to "take heed" to the "sure word of prophecy." Ellen White also states that "we are called individually to be students of prophecy." We need to watch earnestly so we can understand any ray of light which God shall present to us."⁴ So why not study and gain both knowledge and comfort?

REACT

1. How much of a responsibility do we have as SDAs to share Bible prophecy with others?
2. Is that responsibility more than that of other Christians?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 681, 682.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 536.

3. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 121.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 708.

By Virginia Simmons, an elementary-school teacher at Five Oaks School in Durham, North Carolina.

Visionary Faith

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Ezra 7; Dan. 9

Delivered from Egyptian bondage and entering a covenant relationship with God, “from the very first, Israel’s faith had been oriented toward the future. Yahweh’s work in history, according to Israel’s faith, was purposeful, and events were pressing toward the realization of the divine goal for Israel and the nations. History was not spinning in circles, like the cycle of seasons; nor was it governed by blind fate or chance. Israel perceived that its history was part of a great drama which, under the direction of God, was moving toward a final consummation.”¹

Nonetheless, Israel fell into apostasy and disbelief. In response, God repeatedly sent warnings of judgment and doom through the prophets Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Hosea. The calls to repentance fell on deaf ears, until God, “weary of relenting” (Jer. 15:6, NKJV), poured out divine wrath upon the people, driving them into Babylonian exile.

During the exile, the prophets first perceived that the sufferings of Israel at the hands of the Chaldeans was God’s (Ezek. 33; Jer. 44) attempt to shake the people out of their spiritual stupor. God’s desire was to lead them on, to a future where the

“History was not spinning in circles, like the cycle of seasons.”

original intent of the covenant made at Sinai would be fulfilled (Exod. 19:6). Couched in sometimes bizarre visions and symbols, God forecast through the prophets of the exile a new era to come, one free from moral corruption, evil oppression, and death (Dan. 9; 12:2; Jer. 31).

Ezra was familiar with these prophecies. With them in mind, he resolved to go to Jerusalem to reform the religious life of the settlers. His goal was “to restore and reshape the community of Israel so that Yahweh, the Holy God, could tabernacle in their midst and give them a future in the land.”² Under his influence the law of God was once again elevated as the standard of Jewish faith and practice.

In biblical history the role of prophecy has been to reveal the workings of divine grace, stirring the people of all ages to heartfelt service in cooperation with God’s revealed plans. The anticipation of a new era, prefigured in the prophetic writings of the exilic period and, finding practical application in the life of Ezra, still calls us to a life of faith.

1. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986), p. 619.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 537.

By Kathy King-Morgan, a registered nurse at the University of North Carolina Hospitals, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Not Fear, but Rejoicing

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Ps. 27:1; 2 Peter 1:19-21

A friend once tearfully admitted she was having difficulty studying prophecy. "I know Jesus is coming soon," she said, "and I want to know what to expect. But every time I try to read Revelation, it scares me to death." Next time you find prophecy frightening, consider some of these suggestions:

1. *Look at the "Big Picture."* When studying prophecy, it can be difficult not to get bogged down by the gloomy picture of the future and abandon it in discouragement. But stop for a moment and realize you haven't gotten to the last chapter of the story yet. Read on to the prophecies concerning the glorious coming of Christ and the new earth. For especially inspiring reading, turn to chapters 40 and 42 of *The Great Controversy*.

2. *Draw faith and courage from the past.* Have you ever thought seriously about Old Testament prophecies or those in the New Testament that have been fulfilled? Consider Daniel 9:24-27, which foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, and Christ's ministry and death, more than 490 years before they occurred. The

Every time I try to read Revelation, it scares me to death.

earthquakes, falling stars, and darkening of the sun and moon took place more than 1,700 years after Christ predicted them in Matthew 24:29. These familiar examples illustrate God's definite plan for the universe and His control of its history.

3. *Recognize that fear is Satan's tool.* Sometimes it is tempting to look down on the children of Israel for so completely misunderstanding the Messiah's mission when scriptural prophecy gave them such a clear picture of Him. But much of this blindness resulted from Satan's intense efforts. He "studied with diligence the messages concerning the Messiah" and "determined to blind the eyes of the people, so far as might be possible, to the real significance of the Messianic prophecies."*

If we focus on the negative rather than the glory and power of Christ, the gospel is hindered, and we miss out on the joy we could gain from prayerful study of prophecy; for all prophecy confirms the salvation of man by the grace of God and provides a greater understanding of the magnitude of Christ's love for us.

REACT

How can one person help another overcome the fear of prophecy?

* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 686.

By John and Shawn Wilcut. John is a cabinetmaker and nursing student; Shawn is a 1992 graduate of Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

There Shines a Star

OPINION

Key Text: Dan. 10:1

A physician makes a prognosis about a cancer patient to provide some expectations for his illness. A weatherman makes a forecast to provide the needed information for our weekend plans (except for southern Californians). A psychic claims to foretell the future by peering into her crystal ball. Financial analysts provide economic forecasts, relevant primarily to those who can make financial investments. And tests like the GRE, DAT, and MCAT provide information to ourselves and others about how competitive we'll be in getting accepted into graduate school. Sometimes the predictions are favorable, and we look forward to the future. Sometimes the predictions may be met with feelings of dread. Whether we may be eager or apprehensive to learn of our future, some of these sources of predictions allow us to plan for the future.

After all how would we know what schools to apply to, what mutual funds to invest in, and what clothes to wear for the weekend picnic if we had no method of

Whether we may be eager or apprehensive to learn of our future, some of these sources of predictions allow us to plan for the future.

prediction. So, as much as we like surprises, there are just some things in life that we would just as soon have a good method of predicting. Similarly, it would likely be difficult to turn down a glimpse into the future if it were offered.

Given that we are continually using information in our daily lives to make decisions about the future, are predictions of a spiritual nature any less important? Perhaps they may seem less relevant as the schedule book appears double-booked more and more often. After all, we can't be bothered with predictions at a cosmic level. Yet if the cosmic future is of little relevance, we may need to reevaluate our priorities.

Prophecy differs somewhat from our human method of prediction, for the margin of error has been removed. Sure, we won't know the day or the hour of the Second Coming; however, there is much in which prophecy may aid us in making our life decisions and maintaining our spiritual direction. Prophecy in the Bible has provided a vehicle for helping us understand what is to come. Thus, although our understanding of the prophecy may be limited, His prediction skillfully beats out even the most accurate statistical models available to us as humans. We may choose to make our life plans mindful of prophecy or to ignore it.

By Bonnie Klimes-Dougan, a clinical psychology intern at Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Principles of Soul-Winning

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 1994, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: What Did Jesus Teach About Mission?

Scripture: John 4:34-38; Luke 15:1-24

Theme: God has commissioned human beings to share the good news of His saving love.

Lesson 2: Who Are Christ's Disciples?

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rom. 9:24-26; 12:3-8; Heb. 8:10-13; Mark 3:31-35.

Theme: Christ's disciples are all those who, because they believe in Him, are willing to do whatever He asks. All have the same spiritual privileges and the same basic mission.

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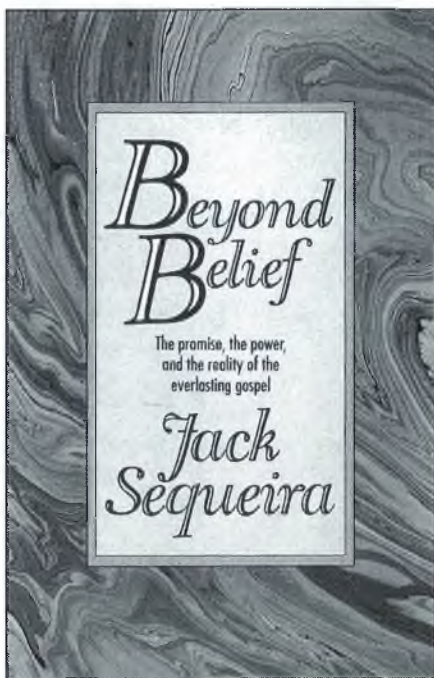
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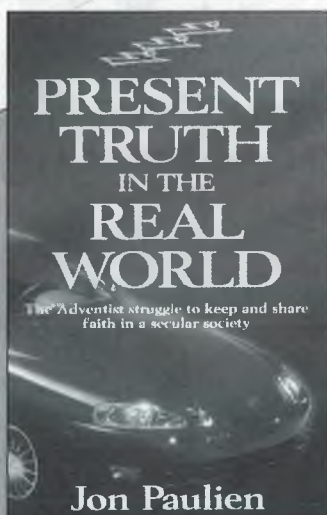
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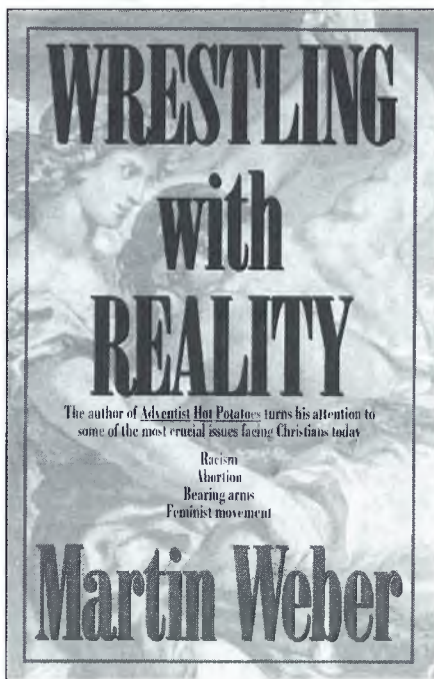
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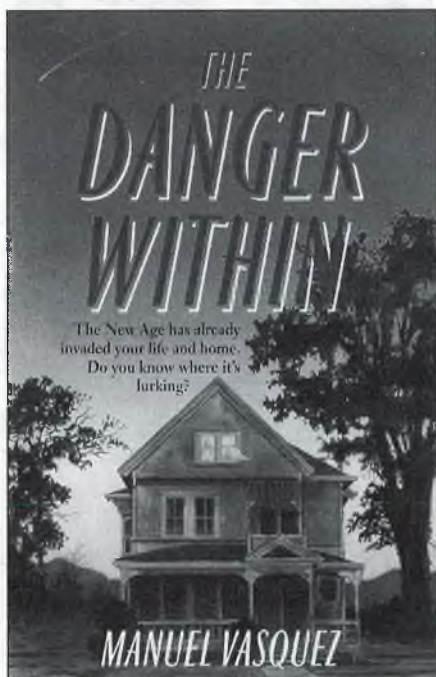
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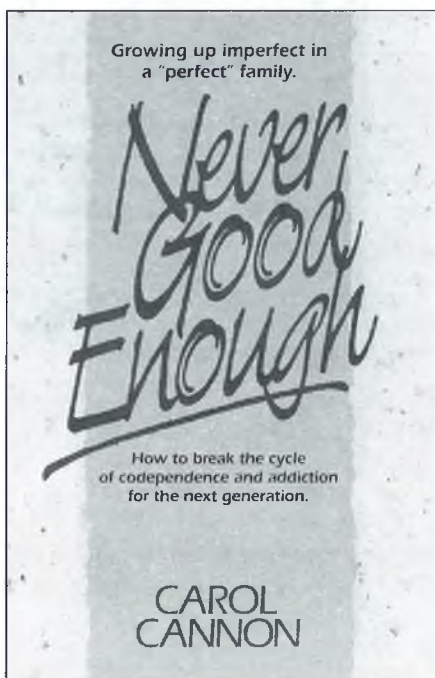
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by Morris Venden

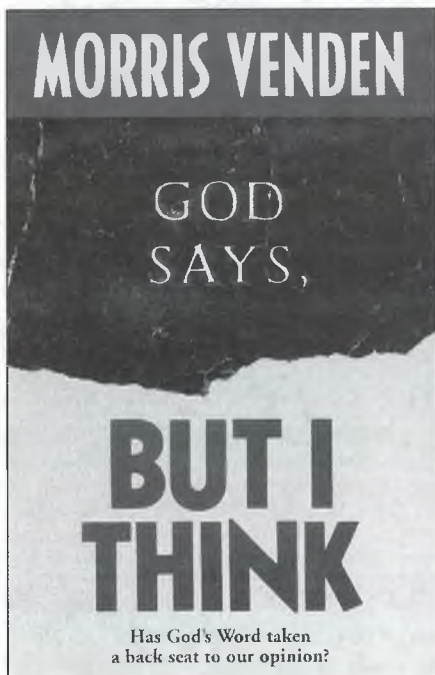
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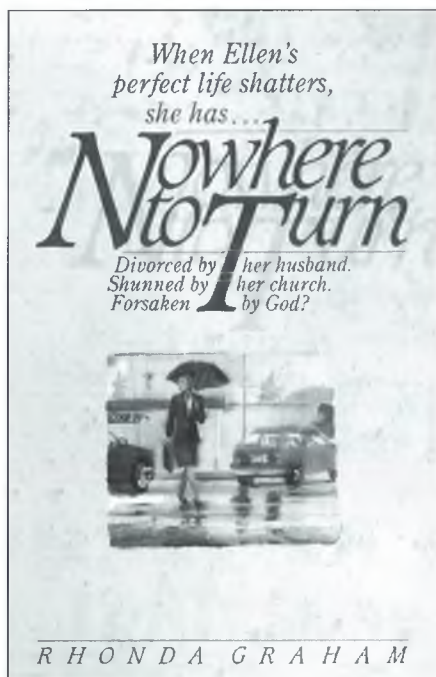
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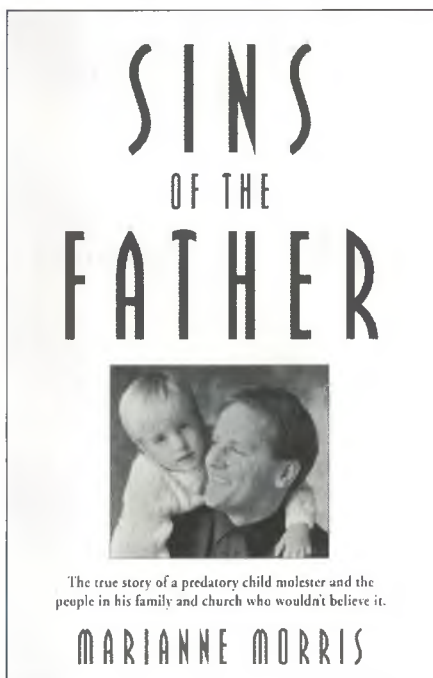
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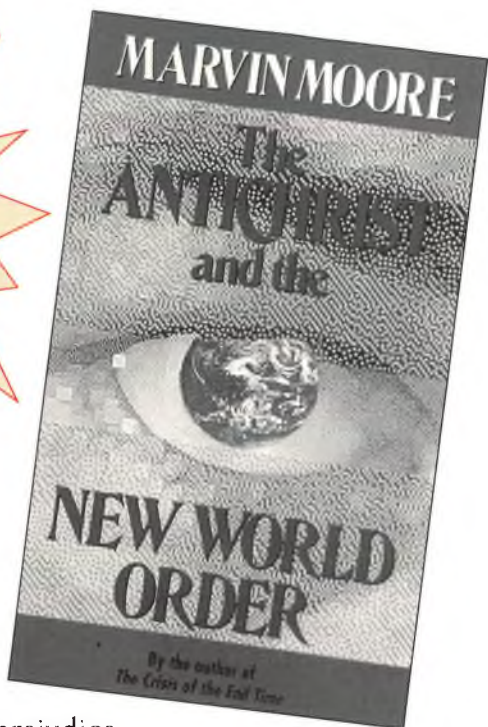
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