

27.11 The Jews' Covenant of Purity (Nehemiah 9:38; 10:1–39)

✓ “*Check*” it out. An opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud; they also show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Three charts found after the lesson: (1) Signers of the covenant; (2) The laws contained in the covenant. Perhaps the teacher could fold the paper so that, as each new point on the outline is mentioned, the unfolded paper reveals the point. (2) One hundred coins to demonstrate a tithe and a tithe of a tithe. (Color or highlight one coin out of each set of ten. With a different color, highlight one of the ten previously highlighted coins.)

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print on colorful cardstock and cut apart.

- *first fruits*: When a person grows a garden, not all the vegetables ripen at the same time. The first fruits are the items that are ripe first—the first picking of the food. ✓To some gardeners, these first fruits seem to be the best of the produce of the garden—maybe because they wait so long for them.
- *redeem*: “to buy back.” God, in Exodus 13:2, 13 and Numbers 18:15–18, commanded Israelites to offer as a sacrifice to God the firstborn of livestock—sheep, cattle, goats—and the firstborn child. Rather than have a man sacrifice a child on an altar (which He strictly forbade), God said the child should be redeemed. In other words, an offering of five shekels (✓\$4.50 in today’s money) was given to God in place of the child. The firstborn was *redeemed* by that payment so that he would not die as a sacrifice.
- *covenant/oath*: a solemn promise; an oath, which, if broken, would bring God’s wrath upon the promise-breaker.
- *debts*: money that has been borrowed and is owed to someone else.
- *Sabbath*: the seventh day of the week on which God rested after creation. God commanded, “Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy.” Also, every seven years the land was not to be worked so that it, too, had a Sabbath. In that Sabbath year all debts were to be forgiven and all slaves were to be freed.
- *tithes*: one tenth: one dollar out of every ten dollars, or one potato out of every ten potatoes, etc.

Scripture: (ESV)

Nehemiah 9:38 “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

10:1 “On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor . . . [and 21] priests. 9 And the Levites: [17 men]. . . . 14 The chiefs of the people: [44 men]. . . .

28 ”The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, 29 join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. 30 We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. 31 And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

32 “We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the

new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. 34 We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law. 35 We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; 36 also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; 37 and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. 38 And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. 39 For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God."

Introduction/Review:

In our last story the Levites prayed, remembering all of God's wonderful mercies to their fathers, even when they had sinned. Hearing God's Word, the Jews confessed their sins, but they did more than just confess. They *did* something in order to change their actions and to prevent future sins.

Story:

Preparing for the covenant

This is what the Jews did: First, they separated themselves from the non-Jews of the land. Then they made a binding covenant, writing it down, and signing their names to it. Twenty-three priests, sixteen Levites, forty-four chiefs of the people, and, of course, Nehemiah, the governor—a total of eighty-four men—signed the oath.

The chiefs signed for the common people, for "the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, the wives, the sons, and the daughters—all who understood the importance of this covenant and promised to walk in God's Law. ✓ Some of these people had turned from false worship to worship of the one true God of Israel.

What did they do by signing this covenant? [Promised to walk in God's Law.] What does it mean when the Bible states they promised to "walk in God's Law"? [They promised to obey all of God's commandments.] You see, God had always commanded these things, but the people had neglected or refused to do what God wanted. Now this group of men determined to return to God's precepts and to live by them.

Signing the covenant

These are the laws they promised to obey: [See visual aid chart that follows this lesson. Flesh out these points as you go through them.]

1. No intermarriage. What does this mean? [They would not let their sons marry non-Jewish wives, nor would they allow their daughters to marry non-Jewish husbands.] This would be similar to present-day believers being commanded not to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14).
2. Sabbath-keeping.
 - a. Every week: No buying or selling on the Sabbath or on holy days.
 - b. Every seven years (Leviticus 26:35): Not working the land and forgiving debts. Because the people had not done this before they went into the Babylonian captivity, God had said they would stay in Babylon seventy years—one year for each year they had neglected the Sabbath year. How long had they stayed in Babylon? [Seventy years.]
3. Temple support

- a. One-third shekel (✓\$0.30 in today's money) per man every year for
 - (1) Shewbread. Where was the shewbread? [In the Holy Place of the Temple.]
 - (2) Twice-daily grain offerings. One was offered in the morning; one, at twilight.
 - (3) Twice-daily burnt offerings. One was offered in the morning; one, at twilight.
 - (4) Offerings for the Sabbaths (once a week), new moons (once a month), and set feasts (about three each year)
 - (5) Holy things. This is probably the utensils, like pitchers, bowls, spoons, tongs, forks, oil, etc., used in the Temple.
 - (6) Sin offerings to make atonement for Israel. Atonement involves making things right between people and God. The sin offerings represented the repentance of the people and God's acceptance of them.
 - (7) The "work of the house of our God." This catch-all term includes anything else needed in Temple worship.
 - b. Wood for the altar. Lots were cast so that the job of gathering wood for the sacrifices was spread out among the priests, Levites, and people. The fire needed to burn all the time; so lots of wood was needed.
4. First fruits to the priests at the chambers of the house of "our God." The priests needed to eat, didn't they? This was one way they received their food—from the first fruits.
- a. Of the ground and trees—wine, fruit, oil
 - b. Of dough [or baked bread]
 - c. Of animals. Remember, the first fruits of the sheep, goats, and cattle were actually given to the priests and Levites; the unclean animals, like donkeys and camels, were redeemed.
 - d. Of children. All firstborn children were redeemed by paying five shekels. In that way, God received the first fruits, and the parents retained the child. We sing a song about one exception—about a boy who actually was given to God to live and serve at the Tabernacle. Who was that? [Samuel.]
5. Tithes—one tenth
- a. Levites got the tithes of the ground—food like fruit and vegetables. This was another way God had said they should be supported so that they could do the work of God without having to worry about raising food. Often, the Levites were neglected, however.
 - b. Priests were to be with the Levites as they collected the tithes. ✓Maybe they needed to keep the Levites honest. It was a good system for accountability.
 - c. A tithe of the tithes went to the Temple storerooms (treasure house). [Demonstrate a tithe of the tithe with one hundred pennies or the visual aid at the end of this lesson.]

Keeping the covenant

Does this seem like a lot of things for the people to promise to do? Really, it was not. In the New Testament, God says to His people, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). In other words, if we love the Lord, we will want to do all He commands, and His commandments are not difficult or burdensome. In fact, although we may not always like God's commandments, we need to realize that they are for our good—even for our protection.

Do you think these Jews will keep their covenant with God? I hope they would, but I would remind you that most of the time in the Old Testament when people promised God something, they did *not* keep their

promises? We will find out whether or not they kept their covenant in a couple of weeks.

We must beware of the wrath of God upon those who do not keep their promises. Although we should not lightly make promises, neither should we shy away from promising to love and serve the Lord. Think seriously about how worthy God is, and promise to love and serve Him all your lives. Unlike Nehemiah's day, in our day God's children have the Holy Spirit within them to keep them true to God. Let us be true to Jesus.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
Christ is called our Redeemer. Why? He paid, by His own sacrifice, for the sins of His people. Those whom He saves are saved from eternal punishment.
- The people, including those who formerly were false worshipers, separated themselves from the pagan people of the land. This is sometimes necessary today.
- We must not "love the world, or the things that are in the world." We must separate ourselves from false worship.
- All the people, including young people who understood, made a covenant with the Lord. "As soon as young people grow up to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of acting intelligently, they ought to make it their own act and deed to join themselves to the Lord" (Matthew Henry). But beware: the breaking of the covenant is a very serious sin and deserves God's wrath.
- "We will not neglect the house of our God," said the Jews. Think of ways you may help around the church to keep it looking good.

Activities:

- Play dough: fruits, vegetables (like peas in a pod)
- Snack: Various fruits.
Cast lots for the jobs of bringing snack items to the table.
Also, if the fruit chosen to serve is grapes, ask students to put in a separate container one-tenth to give to the pastor (as the people gave tithes to the Levites).
- Practice finding the tenth of things using blocks, money, etc.
- Starting at 3 minutes and 12 seconds, watch the video "Celebrate" found at [Bible Stories for the Young : Stories](#). Click "Stories" and scroll down about 3/5 of the page. This video will be in the right column.
- Sing "Let's Be True to Jesus" found below.
- Review questions: (Game: Print the page found below that lists the various types of people who signed the covenant and lines below those classifications. A student who answers a question correctly may choose what type of person he pretends to be and will sign his or her name on a line under that person's title. Note: students are not actually committing to obey as those people did but play-acting.)
 1. Why is it sometimes necessary to separate ourselves from certain friends? [Because they are a bad influence.]
 2. How did the people show their earnest commitment to keeping God's Law? [By signing their names to the covenant.]
 3. What is a covenant/oath? [A solemn promise which, if broken, would bring God's wrath upon the promise-breaker.]
 4. Name one of the 3 or 4 classes of people who signed their names to the covenant. [Priests, Levites, chiefs of the people, and Nehemiah.]

5. Five basic items were listed in the covenant. Name one of them. [1) No intermarriage; 2) Sabbath-keeping; 3) Temple support; 4) First-fruits giving; 5) Tithe giving.]
6. What amount is a tithe? [One-tenth.]
7. Fill in the blanks. If we love the Lord, we will want _____ all He commands, and His commandments are not _____. [To do; difficult/burdensome.]

Memory Verse[s]: [Choose one or two of the following.]

- Review: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
- Review: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
- Review: “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).
- Review: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me’” (John 14:6).
- Review: “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).
- Review: “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).
- New: Hebrews 4:12: “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” [This may be shortened to the first clause only.]

Handwork:

- Students may color or paint the picture of the twelve fruits and vegetables shown at the end of this lesson. They should cut out one of the pictures (almost a tithe) to give to the teacher. [Teacher, you might display the cut-out picture in the Sunday School classroom—kind of as a “dedicated” thing.]

first fruits

redeem

covenant/oath

debts

Sabbath

tithes

Signers of the Covenant

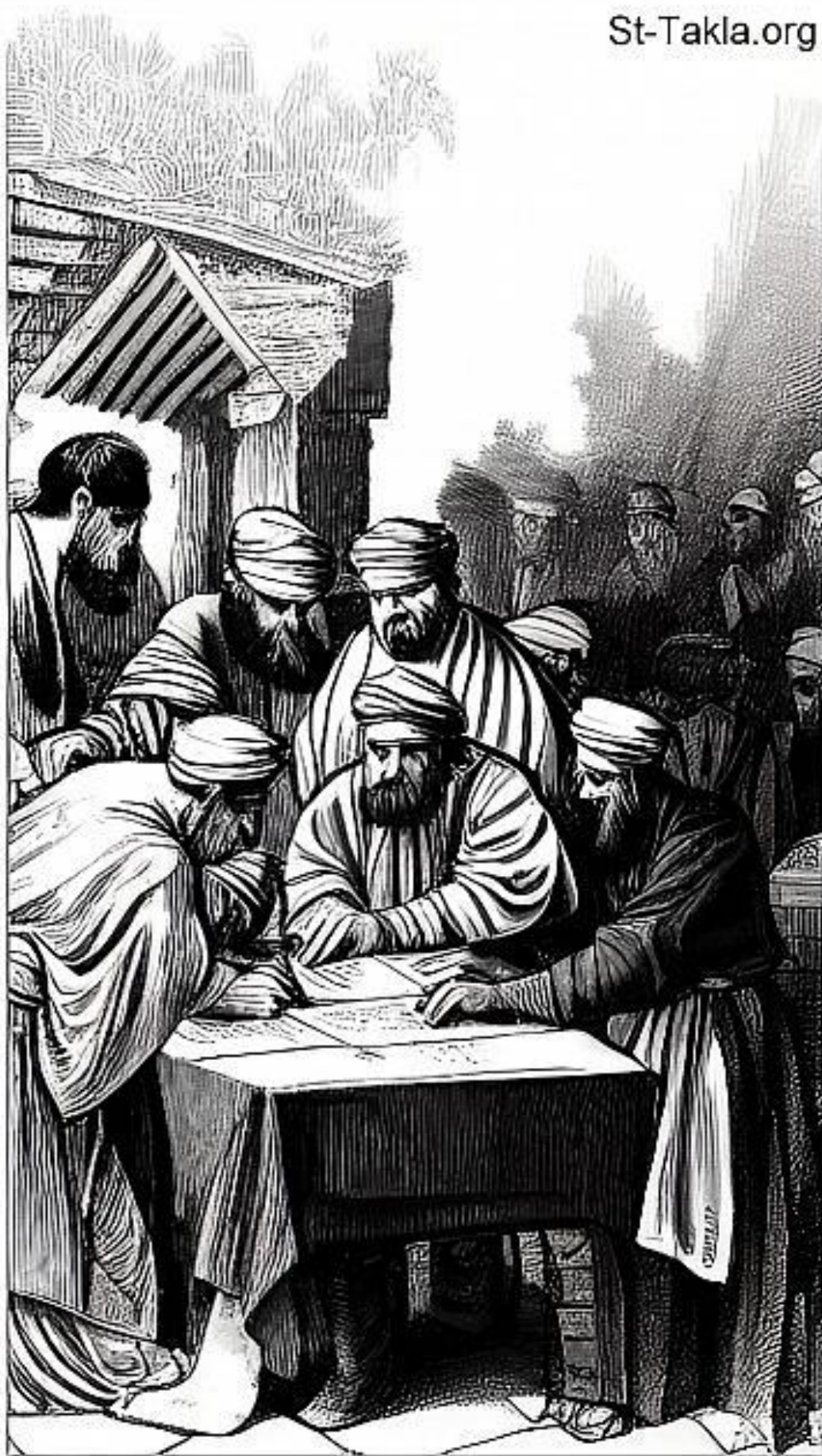
Priests	23
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Levites (including gatekeepers, singers, Nethinim)	16
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Nehemiah (governor)	1
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Chiefs (They signed for the people— all those who had separated themselves from the people of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding)	44
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Total	84
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Terms of the Covenant

1. No intermarriage



2. Sabbath-keeping

a. Every week

b. Every seven years



3. Temple support

a. One-third shekel (≈\$0.30) per year for

(1) Show bread

(2) Twice-daily grain offering

(3) Twice-daily burnt offering

(4) Offerings for the

Sabbaths (once a week)

new moons (once a month)

set feasts (about three each year)

(5) Holy things



(6) Sin offerings

(7) The "work of the house of our God"

b. Wood for the altar

4. First fruits to the priests

a. Of the ground and trees—wine, fruit, oil

b. Of dough [or baked bread]

c. Of animals (unclean redeemed)

d. Of children (redeemed)



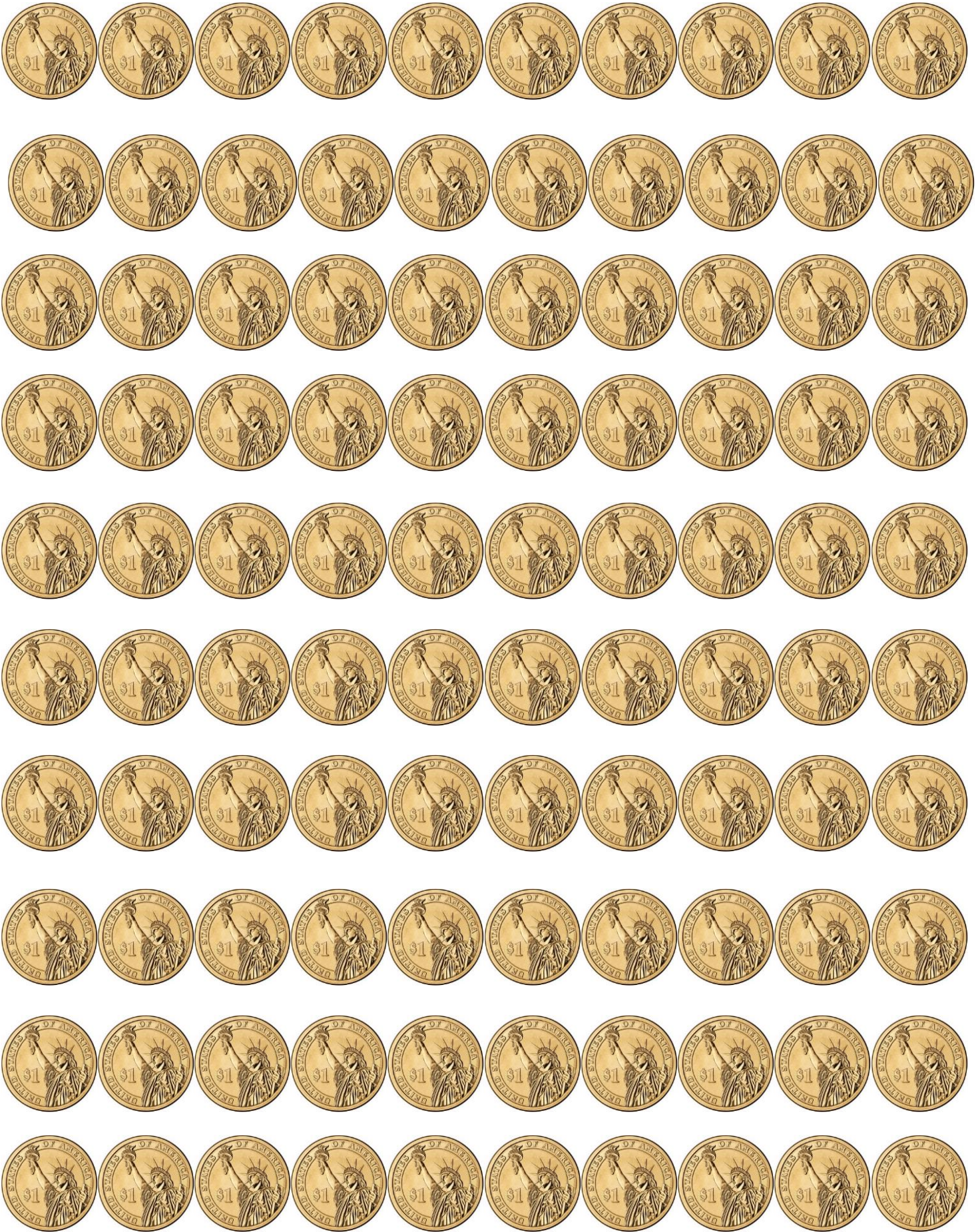
5. Tithes to the Levites

a. Levites got the tithes of the ground.

b. Priests with the Levites as they collected

c. A tithe of the tithes went to the Temple.





LET'S BE TRUE TO JESUS

Annabelle McGull

Effective as a Duet

Old Tune
Harmonized by Robert Savage

Let's be true to Je-sus, tho' a thousand voices from the world may call; 'Twas

The first system of musical notation for the song. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics 'Let's be true to Je-sus, tho' a thousand voices from the world may call; 'Twas' are written below the first staff.

He who died to save us, and demands our life, our loy-al-ty, our all. Since we'll

The second system of musical notation. It continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system. The lyrics 'He who died to save us, and demands our life, our loy-al-ty, our all. Since we'll' are written below the first staff.

walk and talk with Him when our life on earth is o'er, Let us labor now to point the sinner

The third system of musical notation. It continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics 'walk and talk with Him when our life on earth is o'er, Let us labor now to point the sinner' are written below the first staff.

to the open door. Let's be true to Jesus, and we'll reap eternal blessing by and by.

The fourth system of musical notation, which concludes the piece. It continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics 'to the open door. Let's be true to Jesus, and we'll reap eternal blessing by and by.' are written below the first staff.



Priests

Levites

Gatekeepers

Singers

Nethinim

Those who had separated themselves from the people

Wives

Sons

Daughters

Signers of the Covenant

