

[R2530 : page 246]

THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

– NOV. 19. – NEH. 8:1-12. –

**"The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the Law."
– Nehemiah 8:3.**

REBUILDING the city wall tended to unify the hearts of Israel and to revive faith in the Lord, and in his gracious promises to that nation. Nehemiah was wise in beginning the reformation movement as he did, and his wisdom undoubtedly was of the Lord and in harmony with his prayers for wisdom and usefulness. So all who would engage in divine service require not only zeal but also the wisdom which cometh from above, and only those who seek it prayerfully will be in condition to be used of the Lord and to be helpful as reformers amongst their brethren.

As illustrating different methods of serving the Lord, and how some methods are wiser and more successful than others, and as a means of adding to our own wisdom respecting methods of serving the truth, let us here contrast the efforts of Nehemiah with those of Ezra. For instance – Ezra seemed to find only faults in the chiefs of the people, and berated them as tho they had nothing commendable in them. Nehemiah, on the contrary, began his work by ignoring some of the evils which he doubtless quickly discerned, and sought the cooperation of the nobles in the general cause. Subsequently at a favorable opportunity, when [R2531 : page 246] the people cried out because of usury and oppression, he very wisely yet very moderately remonstrated against their course, pointing out in kindly words yet boldly their wrong, and he was successful in correcting the wrong without antagonizing the wrongdoers. (Neh. 5:7-13.) Ezra, full of zeal and anxious for quick reform, convened the people, in the rain, without shelter. (Ezra 10:9-13.) Nehemiah, on the contrary, not only chose the pleasant season, but also the accustomed occasion, for his gathering of the people. Ezra attacked the one particular sin of intermarrying with

the surrounding peoples, and thus held up one particular class of the people to special shame and confusion: Nehemiah seems to have taken a broader view and to have assailed sin in general, showing that all were sinners in some respects, and that all needed reformation. Ezra's method was the more aggressive, accompanied by legal prosecutions, penalties, etc. (Ezra 10:8,14.) Nehemiah's method was to make general a knowledge of the divine law, and through it to appeal to the awakened consciences of the people, that each might act for himself, heartily as unto the Lord. Without finding fault with Ezra's intentions, all reformers may profitably apply the lessons of this contrast to themselves, and seek to use Nehemiah's wise and gentle method in dealing with those who are in error, either doctrinally or otherwise.

With the completion of the wall and the security thus realized and the faith and hopes thus inspired, it was but reasonable that the event would be celebrated with feasting and rejoicing. But Nehemiah wisely waited this until he had reorganized the people socially according to the heads of their families, especially the priests and Levites, who were the divinely appointed ministers and teachers of the people. (See Chap. 7:63-73.) **[R2531 : page 247]** Meantime also, donations were received for the Temple and its service, and Nehemiah, himself very wealthy, setting an example of liberality in his large gifts, was imitated by many. By this time the "Feast of Trumpets" on the first day of the seventh month drew near. It was a time for the general gathering of the people, the beginning of their civil year, announced by trumpet blowing. Here the narrative of our lesson begins, with the spontaneous gathering of the people in an open place, a plaza, near the water gate, called here a "street."

In all probability this congregation of the people was instigated, first by Nehemiah, the Tirshatha (Persian for provincial governor), and secondly, through the heads of the people and the priests and Levites. Evidently preparations had been made for such a gathering, for a large platform, called a "pulpit," had been erected. When the people assembled and called for the reading of The Book of the Law of

Jehovah, appropriate at this season, all things were in readiness, and Ezra the priest, accompanied by thirteen men, evidently chiefs of the people, representing the various tribes, took their appointed places on the platform or "pulpit" to give dignity and importance to the service.

Apparently the convention was opened with prayer. "Ezra blessed Jehovah the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads and worshiped Jehovah with their faces to the ground." They were about to begin a study of the divine Word, as expressed in the Law, and no one is in the proper attitude of mind to be taught and blessed by the Lord's Word unless he be in the attitude of heart which appreciates the greatness of God and the unworthiness of himself. Such a condition of heart is essential to true hearing and understanding. And here we have the secret of much of the failure to understand God's Word – today as well as in times past. "He that seeketh findeth; to him that knocketh it shall be opened," and the "seeking" consists not merely in church attendance or Bible reading, but in a heart-hunger to know the truth and to obey it.

The service began early in the morning, "From the morning [daybreak] until midday," and during that time we are told that "the ears of all the people were unto the book of the Law," that is, they gave close attention to hear and to understand every word. It was not only necessary that they should desire to know and that they should be in the attitude of heart to implore divine blessing and assistance, but it was also necessary that they should be *attentive*, giving ear. And more than this, it was necessary that there should be amongst them teachers capable of expounding the Law, explaining the meaning of words, and how the divine Law was to be applied to the daily life, and what it signifies. Thirteen teachers (Joshua and twelve others) are indicated by name. These probably were priests, and the statement is that associated with him were "the Levites." These "caused the people to understand the law, and the people stood in their place." We are not to understand that the people *stood* for five hours: they stood while the

Law was being read, and sat down, after the eastern custom, on their haunches, during the time explanations were being given. The expression "all the people stood in their place" signifies that the teachers mentioned moved about amongst the people, instructing them, answering their questions, making plain the meaning of the features of the Law just read, while the people remained in their places.

There is a lesson here for God's people of today – all who are interested in the welfare of Zion and in the repair of her walls of righteousness. As Nehemiah looked up the genealogies of the priests, it is appropriate for us to recognize the difference between the consecrated, whose names are *written in the Lamb's book of life*, and the unconsecrated, whose names assuredly are not so written, and who therefore cannot be recognized as religious teachers in any sense. So also today our Governor, the Lord Jesus, is searching amongst the people and separating to himself those whose names are written – *the consecrated* – for his kings and priests – a "royal priesthood." Arrangements are already made for the great antitypical "Feast of Trumpets," and the beginning of a new civil year or Millennial era for mankind – for all who desire to be the Lord's people, to hear his Word and to obey it. Raised above the people, on a *higher plane of being*, will be Christ, the great Priest, and his associates, spiritual Israel, to declare the Word of Jehovah, the Law of righteousness, the Truth; and amongst the people, to teach them and to expound the Law to them, will be the ancient worthies, representatives of Israel in the flesh, and the Levites, all who believe, the entire household of faith aside from the elect and then glorified Church.

The blowing of the trumpets announcing the beginning of the antitypical Jubilee year will soon be heard throughout all the world, and the true-hearted will speedily respond. Meantime our great and wise Governor is instructing the Royal Priesthood, and thus preparing for the great work of the future. The arrangements are all so perfect and so complete that when the declaration comes the people will all

hear the word of the Lord "distinctly," and they will get the "sense" and "understanding" of it. It will no longer be as in the past and at the present time, a din, a Babylon of confused noises, misrepresenting the divine message, and confusing those who desire to know the will of the Lord. The first result of that presentation will be weeping **[R2531 : page 248]** and mourning for sin, but the message of the great Priest and Governor will go forth to the people, to the effect that they need not weep and mourn, because the great sacrifice for sins has already been offered, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and that in consequence the Millennial Day in which they will be living is not to be a day of mourning but a day of rejoicing, a day of acceptance of divine favor, a day of newness of life and of consecration to the Lord.

The message will then be similar to the one which Governor Nehemiah promulgated, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet [enjoy the wonderful provisions of God's bounty with thankfulness and pleasure] and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared [cause the knowledge of the Lord to fill the whole earth], for this day is holy unto the Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the pleasure of Jehovah is your strength" – rejoice that you are restored to divine favor. And all the people will rejoice, because they will understand the words of the divine Law – because they will see and appreciate the divine arrangement, and find it to be indeed "good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people."

These blessings which will be to the world in the future may already be appropriated in a measure by the Lord's consecrated people – the Gospel Church, the Royal Priesthood. By faith we are permitted to hear the words of the divine Law in advance of their public proclamation, to the whole world, and therefore blessed are our ears which hear and our eyes which see, for many have not seen and have not heard, – the god of this world at the present time blinding their minds so that they cannot. To us, too, the first hearing of the divine Law should perhaps bring remorse and tears as we realize our

shortcomings, and that with our very best efforts we cannot measure up to the perfect standard. But to us also comes the Lord's message, through his servants our brethren, saying, Weep not, but rejoice. Behold the goodness as well as the severity of God, behold his Love as well as his Justice, and that he has made through Christ a full propitiation, not only for the sins that are past, but also for the inherited weaknesses and blemishes of the present and future – that all of our blemishes have been covered with the great sin-offering finished at Calvary. **[R2532 : page 248]**

It is our privilege, therefore, to dry our tears and to rejoice in the God of our salvation, and to eat of the fat things of his Word, the exceeding great and precious promises given to us, and to drink of the sweets of his favor, and to send portions of this our blessing to others who have not yet seen and have not yet heard and who have not yet tasted of the riches of divine grace. And whoever receives the grace of God not in vain will be prompt and zealous, not only in his own rejoicing, but also in his endeavors to communicate his blessings to others.

Another lesson here is that while God has all power he nevertheless uses human instrumentalities. He could have spoken from heaven, instead of sending Nehemiah; but he did not. He could have thundered his Law without having it read by Ezra; but he did not choose to do so. He could have instructed the people without using the priests and Levites or any human instrumentality for exposition; but such was not his method. And the Lord's dealings in the past are our best guides respecting his mind on such subjects and respecting what are likely to be his methods for the present and the future. In full harmony with this thought is the apostolic statement that "God has set the various members in the body [the Church] as it hath pleased him." Are all apostles? are all teachers? are all orators? Evidently not! And amongst the Lord's people the desire should be to know the Master's will, to know what talents have been entrusted to him, and to use those zealously, and to wait for others to be given, rather than to neglect the

talents possessed or to seek to use those not possessed. "Do with thy might what thy hand findeth to do."

"The Word of God is quick and powerful." (Heb. 4:12.) There is much need that this lesson be thoroughly learned by the Lord's people. Nothing can take the place of the Lord's Word; and all teachings, whether oral or printed, should be recognized as secondary to the inspired Word, and should be received only as corroborated by the Scriptures. Or rather, they are to be appreciated only as they *unlock* the treasures of wisdom hidden in the Bible – riches of which the world in general is ignorant, and of which even the majority of Christian people, altho they have Bibles by the million, know comparatively little. Indeed, as Bibles become more numerous the great Adversary seems to be permitted to have the greater power to deceive and to mislead respecting its teachings; so that today, with its greatest opportunities, is witnessing a general *decline of faith* in the Scriptures – "a great falling away," led by some of the principal luminaries in the nominal systems – falling from their steadfastness of faith, falling into scepticism and into the radically anti-Biblical theory of Evolution – under the lead of so-called "higher criticism" and scholasticism.

The more the Lord's people shall be able to discern that we are already in the "evil day" mentioned by the Apostle, in which many shall stumble and fall from their steadfastness of faith, the more should they give earnest heed lest they should let slip the precious things of the divine Word, which is a lamp to their pathway, and through which God supplies the needed aids for walking the narrow way which leads to the **[R2532 : page 249]** Kingdom. – Eph. 6:13; Heb. 2:1; Psa. 119:105.

And let us beware also in this day of the "new lights" and of many presenting themselves as special teachers, that we permit none to lead us away from the Lord's Word, and to confuse us in our understanding. "Let us hold fast the confidence of our rejoicing [in Christ and his

redemptive work – and not in our righteousness] firm unto the end." Let us earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, of which the ransom is the very center or hub into which and from which every other truth must and does fit perfectly. And let us remember that whatever assists us in this direction is a teaching that is from God, while whatever leads in another direction must evidently be not of God but of the Adversary. While proving the things which we receive, by their harmony with the Scriptures and their ability to unlock them and make clear their meaning, we may well remember the Master's words: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God," – and the reverse of this is evidently equally true. – John 3:20,21; Heb. 3:6; Jude 3; 1 Thes. 5:21.
