

EZRA'S BIBLE CLASS

– *NEHEMIAH 8.* – *DECEMBER 17TH.* –

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." – Psa. 19:7.

EZRA apparently returned to Babylon, there to prosecute his study of the Law and his collating thereof. We next hear of him thirteen years after, again a prominent figure at Jerusalem. Nehemiah's work on the city wall and its gates was completed a week before the Jewish new year. That week was used for rest and refreshment, and on that day (about October 1st) a general convocation or public gathering took place in an open square just behind the temple. There a platform or pulpit was erected for Ezra who was the scribe or learned man of the occasion, who read to the people from morning until noon out of the Book of the law. It was read in sections; The priests and Levites commingled themselves with the people and explained to them the meaning of the various sections. The people, out of respect while the law was being read, stood, and then sat on the ground while it was being discussed.

It was an immense Bible class and aroused deep interest. As the people heard the words of the Divine Law, and realized that they had failed to keep that Law – even to the extent of their ability – they perceived the reason why the Lord had allowed various chastisements, captivities, etc., to come upon them. They perceived that such was His covenant with them; that obedience on their part was to be rewarded with blessings and prosperity, and disobedience with punishment, captivity, etc. The realization of sin brought sorrow and tears – the people wept sore.

Then Nehemiah, Ezra and others explained to the people, directly and through the Levites, that this was not a time for tears, but, on the contrary, a time for rejoicing. They were not only to remember the severity of God in punishing the wrongdoings of their fathers, but they

were to remember also His mercies now returning to them, and especially to appreciate the fact that He had again sent to them the Law, and thus indicated His willingness to receive them back again to His favor. They were reminded that the very Law which foretold the punishments declared also God's mercy, and that when they [R4923 : page 428] would repent He would forgive and restore them to His favor. Thus their tears were turned to smiles, their mourning to rejoicing.

Nehemiah's message was: "Go your way; eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye grieved, for the Lord is your Strength."

THEY READ THE LAW DISTINCTLY

The declaration is that they "caused the people to understand the Law." There is evidently great need of just such instruction today. Nominal Spiritual Israel is in a dilapidated condition because of the lack in understanding God's Word. We seem to be in the time referred to by the Prophet, saying, "There shall be a famine in the land," saith the Lord, "not a famine for bread, neither a famine for water, but a famine for the hearing of the Word of the Lord." – Amos 8:11.

Many imagine that they are familiar with the teachings of the Bible, when in reality they are familiar with one or another of the creeds of the darker past, all of which contain some truth with considerable error, we must all admit. Our great mistake has been in assuming that our confessions of faith and all of our creeds strongly and fully represent the Bible's teachings. This mistake has already been costly. Thousands of the most generous minds have been turned away from the Bible by the mistaken supposition that the creeds properly represent its teachings. Assured that they could no longer endorse [R4923 : page 429] any Christian creed as a whole, these bright minds have renounced them and the Bible as well.

The necessary thing to be done is to resume Bible study, and that without our creedal spectacles. Our forefathers who made our creeds participated more or less in persecutions of each other which we today entirely condemn. They were as honest, doubtless, as are we, but they had less light – they lived in a darker Age. The belief that God is torturing thousands of millions of His creatures led some of our well-intentioned forefathers to torture one another in God's name, in a manner which we today cannot endorse as being either just or loving or Christlike.

Why then should we assume that those creeds are correct in all particulars? Should we not rather see that if so good a man as brother John Calvin committed so great a mistake as to sign the warrant which sent a brother Christian, Servetus, to the stake, this proves that there was something wrong with Calvin's theological ideas, which lie at the foundation of nearly all of our Protestant creeds?

With the wonderful Bibles which we possess today, found in nearly every Christian home, we should know more of its teachings than any of our forefathers could possibly have known. Not only has education aided in this respect, but our Bibles are conveniently formed, and we have study-aids, in the form of concordances, marginal references, etc. Is it not time to strive as Levites and spiritual Israelites to turn afresh to the Bible and instruct the people respecting its teachings?

We are not advocating merely the reading of so many chapters a day, or the committing of verses to memory, nor the ordinary Sunday School lessons. We advocate a reconstruction of our faith upon the basis of the Bible only. Surely if all of God's people could take from their minds their creed spectacles and study the Word afresh in its own light, a great blessing would speedily follow. The Bible students would soon become one with each other and with the Father, and with the Lord Jesus Christ – the one Church of the Living God mentioned in the Scriptures, with one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.

THE POWER OF THE DIVINE LAW

There is a power for good in the Word of God which can be found nowhere else. Higher Criticism has much responsibility in connection with the growing lawlessness of the world. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" – transforming the being. The Higher Critics in all of our colleges and seminaries are doing a terribly destructive work, in comparison to which the work of Voltaire, Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll were as nothing. It is safe to say that three-fourths of all the graduates of all colleges within the last thirty years have been unbelievers in the Bible, and that their influence has been used persistently to undermine the faith of others. The errors which led them to infidelity are liable to influence others. The Bible itself is a study, and only what it teaches should be believed whether favorable to or contrary to our former creeds.

