

S.O.H.L.

WEEKLY MINISTRY MEDITATIONS

Pronounced "Soul"

October 26, 2015

Fearing God Enough to Respect Him

NEHEMIAH 8:1-6 NKJV – (1) 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. (2) So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. (3) Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law. (4) So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. (5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. (6) And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are two parts of the same story and tells of the time when the Jews returned from Babylonia to their own country, Judah. Babylonia was about a 4 months' walk east from Judah. The Babylonians had defeated the people in Judah and forced them to Babylonia to live. After many years, the Persians defeated the Babylonians. Cyrus, the king of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to Judah.

The Book of Ezra is the first part of this story. It tells of the first two groups of Jews who returned to Judah. The first group returned about 70 years after the Babylonians defeat, forcing the Jews into exile. The Book of Ezra also tells of how the Jews built their temple again. Many years later a man by the name of Ezra helped the Jews through teaching them to understand and God's commands.

The book of Nehemiah is the second part of this story, telling the journey of Nehemiah. He was a very important official in the king of Persia's circle. God sent Nehemiah to Judah for a special task; Nehemiah would help the Jews rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. He arrived in Judah about 13 years after Ezra. The king appointed Nehemiah to be the ruler of Judah. Nehemiah, like Ezra, helped the Jews to obey God's commands.

The people finished work on the walls of Jerusalem in the 6th month of the year (Nehemiah 6:15), working hard for 52 days. However, Nehemiah had not finished his work. His next task required much more than 52 days. Nehemiah had to convert the people of Judah into a proper nation of God's people again. They needed to relearn God's commands; the people wanted to hear and understand God's law. On the first day of the 7th month, Ezra the priest was asked to read God's law to them. A high wooden platform was built for Ezra, where he stood while he read the law. He read God's law to all the men and women. Even children who were old enough to understand were also present. He read for approximately six hours and the people listened. Ezra had 13 companions with him on the high platform. Perhaps they were there to assist Ezra, also reading the law to the people.

When Ezra began to read, all the people stood up. They wanted to give honor to God. Then Ezra praised God and the people agreed with him. Next, they turned their faces to the ground. This was to show how much they wanted to give honor to God. Some of the Levites also helped Ezra. They moved among the people and they read the law to smaller groups. They explained the law and they helped the people understand its meaning. Some of the people probably did not understand the language of the book of the law. So the Levites helped translate the law into the language of the people.

The people of God were starting over. They understood what they had been through. They realized and believed in the true and living God. Therefore, they had the utmost gratitude and respect for their leaders who followed the true and living God. To fear God is to give honor, respect, reverence and awe. He is the ultimate, realizing that even "ultimate" may not do justice to our God... There is no ending to Him. God is infinite.

SCRIPTURE READING: ACTS 9:31

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "Let parents then bequeath to their children not riches but the spirit of reverence."