

The joy of the Lord is our strength. We quote this verse from the book of Nehemiah all the time without understanding the full impact of this statement.

***He said to them, “Go and eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”***

***Nehemiah 8:10 (NET)***

The Jews had been taken captive by the kingdom of Babylon. Babylon had been overthrown by Persia and there was a different king in power. Nehemiah was a cupbearer for this king.

Nehemiah's heart was breaking for his hometown, Jerusalem. The king noticed his sadness and asked what he could do to help Nehemiah. Nehemiah's heart was to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

It is interesting reading the book of Ezra that he also had petitioned the king at a different time to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Nehemiah's focus was on the city, Jerusalem.

There are a people today whose heart is set on seeing Mount Zion, the city of our God, come into her glory and become the joy of the whole earth. Mount Zion is where the King lives and rules and reigns. It is the center of His Kingdom.

***Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*** ***Psalm 48:1,2 (MEV)***

I believe Ezra represents the Ekklesia and Nehemiah represents the Kingdom of God. We must understand both for the Ekklesia is the vehicle God uses to advance the Kingdom of God in the earth.

There is a remnant today who see the city that Abraham saw, one not made by human hands. They long to be set free from Babylon and pursue the city where God reigns, where Jesus is King. They appeal to the King and He says "Pursue".

Let's look at this story a little closer found in Nehemiah. David declared in this psalm this place called Mount Zion would become the "JOY" of the whole earth. Nehemiah tells the remnant that the JOY of the Lord is their strength. What had just happened to cause Nehemiah to say these words that would become a battle cry for generations to come?

The remnant had left captivity. They left the land where they were slaves. They came out of Babylon. They were free. They came together with one purpose, to rebuild Jerusalem. They were united in their purpose. They knew what God wanted, but they were not quite sure how to do it.

They asked Ezra, the priest, to read the books of Moses to them. They were hungry to hear what God had to say. They wanted what God wanted, men, women and children who were at an age where they could understand what was being discussed.

They made a platform for Ezra to stand on as he read from the books of Moses. That platform was large enough, not only for Ezra, but for six men to stand to his right, and seven men to stand on his left, thirteen in all.

There are also thirteen more mentioned. They are Levites and their job was to clearly explain what was being read by Ezra, the priest. It is not clear if these men were standing on the platform as well. The names of both sets of thirteen men are recorded.

Why are these men called out and names mentioned? This must have an important message to us. I believe the thirteen mentioned on the platform with Ezra represent the old covenant and the thirteen mentioned who interpret what is being read, represent the new covenant. We cannot fully comprehend what Messiah was going to do and has now done without moving from the old to the new. This was a reflection of God's plan and purposes for His people from the beginning of time.

The Israelites were chosen by God to live out God's promises so the world would see who God was and what He was like. Their lives were examples of spiritual truths that would be seen through the new covenant that was to come. Sin in the garden had caused mankind to lose sight of who God really was. The Israelites were chosen as a people to live out the truth about God. Not only would nature reveal God, but now there was a nation that would, also.

Ezra stood and read from the books from dawn to noon. Imagine a sermon that long! In slavery they had a compromised view of God. They had a mixture of the true and the false. But this remnant wanted to know the true God. They were hungry! They did not yet realize that they were going to be filled with an understanding of God's plan for the earth and it would bring them great joy!

***So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. Nehemiah 8:8 (KJV)***

"Distinctly" means to "distinguish, define".

"Gave" means "to set, to establish"

"Sense" means "insight, understanding, wisdom"

"Understand" means "discern, give heed to, perceive"

I like the way the New English Translation puts it.

***They read from the book of God's law, explaining it and imparting insight. Thus the people gained understanding from what was read. Nehemiah 8:8 (NET)***

They went from just knowledge of God's law, seeming to be just a rules manual, to understanding God's purposes and His plan for mankind. They began to gain insight or wisdom in how what they were doing in the moment (restoring Jerusalem) would demonstrate for generations to come God's intent.

Did they fully understand? I don't know. But I believe they received insight into the fact that what they were doing was important to God and had it's place in revealing

who their God was. by their obedience to what God wanted them to do, they were presenting a picture of the future in the present.

How do I know that? Nothing God does is ever by coincidence. It all has meaning. We only understand that meaning by seeking insight from our God. There is a reason for one man who speaks and thirteen others who stand on the platform at his side. There is a reason for the thirteen other men who do the interpreting.

Thirteen is an interesting number in scripture. Nimrod, the great grandson of Noah, was the one who established Babel which became the center of Satan's counterfeit kingdom. Nimrod was the thirteenth generation from Adam. It represents rebellion against God and His plan for planet earth.

Ezra, standing as a picture of Jesus who would be the one who would overcome this selling out of our inheritance, and reclaim our promise made originally to Adam. He would be the answer to man's rebellion. The old covenant was how to live under this until the Messiah would come and fulfill the promises set forth in the books of Moses. Six is the number that represents man, or self-rule.

Ezra as the priest represents our Savior as the High Priest, who is speaking to us. The thirteen on the platform represent the old covenant under the curse, under the counterfeit kingdom, looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Their names portray the Messiah, the last Adam. The platform that they stood on signifies the time they lived. There were six men placed on one side of Ezra and seven on the other side of Ezra.

The six on the right were mentioned first. I believe they represent the fact that man would control the earth for six days. Six is the number that represents man, or self-rule. Jesus would come as the last Adam and restore the original mandate. The seventh day would be the Lord's day when man would come to the place where they totally surrendered to the will of their Father and fulfilled the mandate and possessed their inheritance. Seven is the number of maturity and completeness.

Another story in scripture that illustrates this truth is the story of the first city the Israelites went in and possessed in their promised land, Jericho. They marched around the city one time each day for six days. Nothing happened. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times and the walls fell. They went in and possessed the city. Six men on one side, six days. Seven men on the other side, seven marches around the city for victory. Thirteen times around the city in total.

The names of the thirteen on the platform Ezra, six men on the right, and seven men on the left:

Mattithiah – Gift of Jehovah

Shema - hear (God hears)

Urijah – Jehovah is my light

Maaseiah – work of Jehovah

Mishael – Who is what God is

Anaiah – Jehovah has answered

Hilkiah – My portion is Jehovah

Pedaiah – Jehovah has ransomed

Malchijah – My king is Jehovah

Hashum – Enriched

Hashbadana – Considerate judge

Zechariah – Jehovah remembers

Meshullam - Friend

The old covenant portrayed the coming of the Messiah to earth as the gift from God. He would be the Light of the World. God hears and answers the cries of His people and He was working in their behalf to restore what they lost. Their portion, their inheritance, their birthright, their promised land was theirs to possess. He would restore the original promise and the original mandate.

There were thirteen others who were the ones who interpreted and explained what Ezra read. The ones on the platform were silent. It reminded me of a conversation Jesus had one day with a Samaritan woman. Her reply to a question that Jesus asked was “I know that the Messiah is coming and when He comes He will explain all things”. (John 4)

There is silence on the platform because these things would not be fully understood until the Messiah had come and the new covenant was in place. The second thirteen represent the coming of the Messiah and the new covenant that would come, the covenant based on everything being complete that restored the promise of God made in the beginning of time.

The earth was redeemed and back in the hands of mankind through the blood of Jesus. Now heaven and earth would coordinate to fulfill the mandate. The last Adam from heaven’s throne and mankind, descendants of the first Adam, would make earth look like heaven.

The names of the second thirteen who interpreted and explained:

Jeshua - (Salvation)

Bani – build, establish

Sherebiah - Jehovah has scorched

Jamin – right hand

Akkub – lying in wait, ambush, insidious

Shabbethai – sabbatical, restful

Hodijah - my majesty is Jehovah

Maaseiah – work of Jehovah

Kelita crippled, handicapped (like a sacrificial lamb lacking body parts)

Azariah - Jehovah has helped

Jozabad - Jehovah has endowed or bestowed

Hanan – He is merciful

Pelaiah – Jehovah does wonders

Jesus came to earth to die to provide salvation for His people. He came to bring the fire of God to the earth, the fire that destroys wood, hay and stubble and purifies that which is gold and silver. He came to destroy the works of the enemy, the counterfeit kingdom. He came to be the sacrificial lamb and to bestow on mankind the restoration of our inheritance and birthright. Jesus came to build His Ekklesia and to establish His Kingdom through them.

They were preparing to come together as one to see Jerusalem rebuilt. They were in agreement as to purpose and as they understood what God was doing by reading the books of Moses. Ezra told them not to weep at what had happened and how far off track they had gone from God's intentions for Israel. Jerusalem had been toppled because of their sin, but now God would help them to restore the city.

They were not to be sad, but to rejoice because the God that they served was a merciful God and He was going to be with them in the task they now faced. Rejoicing in the God who sees you, forgives you, establishes you, helps you, gives you rest and so much more, will give you the strength you need to do what He tells you to do.

Things are changing rapidly in our world. We are finding that a lot of the things we have been taught are rooted in religion, not in relationship with our God. We are realizing that the fire of God is destroying a lot of things that man has built thinking they were doing God's will. The fire will destroy but it will also purify. Don't resist the fire and don't cry at the loss. What is ahead is far better.

We will want to cry when we wake up and realize that so much of what we have built was not built by God. But, I believe, God is saying when this happens, we should not cry. We should not despair. We should rejoice in the fact we now see, and we have the strength to pursue His ways even in old age. We should rejoice in the fact He has not forgotten us, has not given up on us, has not forsaken us.

All this that happened on that day with Ezra and Nehemiah, was in preparation for what would happen the next day. The following day would be the beginning of the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. It was a feast of seven days to remember their time spent in the wilderness because of disobedience, but it was also a time to celebrate that even though the older generation failed to enter into the promised land, there was a generation that did.

It was a reminder that God does not forget and He does not forsake His people. His promises are yea and amen. It was a time to celebrate the harvest, the fullness of the land God had given to His people to possess. That is the harvest. The harvest is not billions of souls getting saved. Harvest is when the tares are separated from the wheat and the people of God take seriously the promises of God. They do not just look and see their promised land and their birthright. They go in and possess it.

The Jews in Nehemiah's day stood at the Water Gate. That gate represents salvation. Salvation is the doorway into the Kingdom, but there is so much more. We stand at the gate of salvation and see the promised land that is ours if only we go in and possess it. Let this be the generation that sees and desires to possess all God has given to us.

We must come to the place where we understand the Kingdom of God, our inheritance, our birthright and take our place as the Ekklesia, united as one with God's purpose and plan engraved upon our hearts. Then the harvest is ours! Let us not be sad and grieved by man's past failures (including our own) but rather rejoice with exceeding gladness in the glory of our King! He has forgiven us and has not forsaken us. That joy will enable us to possess what God has given to us from a place of rest and with great strength and purpose. Go forth in JOY!