

## True Security

### Nehemiah 8:1-10 (New American Standard Bible)

**8** And all the people gathered as one person at the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. <sup>2</sup> Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it before the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left. <sup>5</sup> Then 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. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people remained in their place. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

<sup>9</sup> Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go, eat the festival foods, drink the sweet drinks, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, **for the joy of the Lord is your refuge.**"

## Introduction

The sermon this morning was planned three months ago to be preached on this day and the Holy Spirit works in a mysterious way. I am amazed that I am going to talk about Jerusalem this morning as we see the escalating war between Israel and Hamas. Please pray for the peace in the region. One thing I am sure about the situation in the Middle East: they need Jesus the Prince of Peace. They need to embrace the Christian gospel. Hate and revenge are not the solution. Love and forgiveness are.

Now, let's go back to today's text.

### **Historical Background of Today's Text**

- In 583 B.C. Jerusalem (the capital city of the Kingdom of Judah) was invaded and destroyed by its enemy. Its walls were totally razed by the Babylonians.
- For the next 150 years, the city remained neglected and mostly un-inhabited due to the lack of security (no walls to protect) and on-going harassments by the surrounding enemies (Samaritans in the North and Edomites in the South).
- Nehemiah was a Hebrew slave serving King Artaxerxes I of Persia as cupbearer. The king appointed him to be governor of Judea. Nehemiah's main mission was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1)—It was the year of 445 B.C.
- With God's help and with people's cooperation, he was able to complete the reconstruction of the walls in 52 days. It was an amazing feat considering the size of the walls: 16 feet high surrounding the area of 960 acres, approximately 1.5 sq. miles. "Many archeologists believe that the walls of Jerusalem were about the same in both Nehemiah's day and Jesus' day"--- wikianswers.com).
- At the completion of the walls, Nehemiah called for a public worship to dedicate the walls to the LORD (Nehemiah 8). That's what today's text is all about. Please note in verse 9: All of them wept as they listened to Torah. Why crying in such a great day of celebration? Because the Law of Moses reminded them of the sins of their ancestors: idolatry and injustice. Some were reminiscing their good old days of independence, power, and glory of King David and Solomon. I am sure most of them spoke to themselves, "Never Again!" of such humiliation of Babylonian captivity and destruction of their homeland. They might even have the thought of securing their homeland by raising their military power and by building fortresses to protect themselves from enemies.
- That day, standing before the walls, Nehemiah gave the congregation of Israel a solemn reminder: *Look, these walls will give us a protection. However, the true security is not made of stone but made of faith in God. The ultimate strength and protection are not from the walls but from the Lord. 150 years ago, Jerusalem was destroyed, not that it didn't have walls, but that our ancestors disobeyed God. Remember, the joy of the Lord is our strength, he declared. In other words, when we live out a life that is pleasing to the Lord, and when we worship and serve Him only and do justice, the Lord Himself will be our fortress and refuge.* Do you believe what Nehemiah said is true? I do.

### **The Joy of the LORD**

- The key verse in today's text is verse 10: *the joy of the LORD is your refuge*. Verse 10 can be also translated into "the joy of the LORD is your strength/protection/fortress."

### **Mauz (מָעוֹז)--translation**

- The Hebrew Word (mauz) appears 35 times in the Old Testament. It was translated into several meanings such as
  - Fortress and fortresses (11)
  - Refuge (8)
  - Stronghold (7)
  - Protection (3)
  - Height (1)
  - Strength (2)

Here, I choose the translation: the joy of the LORD is your **strength**.

- Let's think about the meaning of strength for a while.

### **Strength Desired**

- Many a people of God often ask me to pray for them to be strong and patient during the time of adversities.
- They want to endure/persevere/weather out/even overcome their stormy situations with strength and courage.
- Unfortunately, sometimes people look at the wrong place to find strength and courage. They try to find them in themselves, or someplace else, but not in the Lord. That's a big mistake.

### **Media's Influence**

- In our culture, secular media such as movies, the internet, and books often associate strength with physical strengths and athletic abilities.
  - Often a professional athlete is considered as role model to the kids (baseball, basketball, football, golf,...).
  - Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Ironman, Captain America, Hulk, Wonder Woman, Hercules... all of them boast some special abilities, mighty muscles, or physical strength.
- In a nutshell, the world looks for strength in muscles and six packs of abs. E.g. Mr. Universe. Basically, the world believes that power and strength come from our own might.

### **Biblical Understanding of Strength.**

God looks differently. Before God's eyes, physical strength doesn't count much, because it often hinders us from experiencing God's power. On God's scale, spiritual and emotional maturity weigh far more than physical one.

- Proverbs 16:32 “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.”

Furthermore, the source of strength is never ourselves. It is always the LORD. Consider David and Goliath. I Samuel 17:44-47: *The Philistine (Goliath:kc) also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild animals.”*<sup>45</sup> *But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a saber, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.*<sup>46</sup> *This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I will strike you and remove your head from you. Then I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,*<sup>47</sup> *and that this entire assembly may know that **the Lord does not save by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will hand you over to us!**”*

### **More Examples...**

- Gideon's 300: Not wanting Gideon to rely on the size of the troops, God waited until the number of soldiers was reduced from 32,000 to 300. God's help becomes undeniably mighty when human hope ceases.
- The Lord is my strength and song—Miriam (Exodus 15:2).
- Advice to the kings: Never rely on horses. Isaiah 31:1. *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on **horses**, and trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!*
- The king shall joy in Thy strength, O LORD (Psalm 21:1).
- The LORD is my strength and my shield (Psalm 28:7).
- Fools rely on their own wisdom and strength (Proverbs 1:7).
- Jehovah is my strength and my song (Isaiah 12:2).
- LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress (Jeremiah 16:19).
- For My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

### **Conclusion**

Imagery of Strength... *.A Mighty Fortress is Our God (Martin Luther). Rock (Psalm 31:3—the Lord is my rock and my fortress).*

So, verse 10, the joy of the LORD is your strength reminds us that

- The true security and protection are not made of stone nor coming from horses but made of faith in God.
- We are not the source of the strength. The Lord is.
- When the Lord is delighted with us, and when we put our trust in the Lord and walk in His truth and justice, He shall be our protection and security in times of need.
- The Lord is our true security and protection. And, every child of God will say, “Amen!”

Amen.