

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. ² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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

One of the words we often talk about and desire to have is "security." Job security, financial security, emotional security, building security, national security, and so forth. Here's what I mean by security: the state of being free from danger or threat. Who doesn't want that?!

There are two types of security in terms of reliability: false security and true security. They both look OK in peace times. However, the false security crumbles in times of crisis.

It's like a house built on the sand. When the rain comes down, winds blow, and waves slam against it, it collapses, and the damage is great (Matthew 7:27). Example. As a retirement package, one man received a million-dollar's worth of Lucent Technology stocks. He was looking forward to a comfortable retirement until the stocks lost values to almost nothing. That's what I would call false security.

There's another type of security that doesn't fall apart in times of hardship. I would call it true security. It's like a house built on the rock. The rain comes down, winds blow, and waves slam against it, but it stands strong. True security keeps us balanced and strong all the time, in all areas of life and in all circumstances. There's only one true security. That is the LORD our God. None other. Without the LORD, we will have no lasting security. He is our security. True security. When we pursue a life that is pleasing to the Lord, the Lord never leaves us alone, and we will enjoy true security. The joy of the Lord is our security. Nehemiah couldn't agree more. Let's check it out in today's text. Let me begin with the

Historical Background of Today's Scripture

The year of 587 B.C. was the worst year in the history of Kingdom of Judah. The Babylonians from north invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem, the capital city. Its walls were totally razed by the enemy. For the next 150 years, the city remained in ruins and mostly un-inhabited due to the lack of security (no walls to protect). Even for the remnants, the enemies around (Samaritans in the North and Edomites in the South) kept harassing them to make sure that Jerusalem would not thrive.

It was the year of 445 B.C. 1,400 miles away from Jerusalem, in Persepolis, the capital city of Persian Kingdom, Nehemiah, the Hebrew slave, was serving King Artaxerxes I as cupbearer. One day, the king appointed him to be the governor of Judea. Nehemiah's first priority was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1). With God's help and with people's hard work, he completed the reconstruction project in 52 days! Quite an amazing feat considering the size of the walls: 16 feet high surrounding the area of 960 acres, approximately 1.5 sq. miles. By the way, "*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 the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Law (Torah)*. Why crying in such a joyous day of celebration? Because Torah (the Law of Moses) reminded them of the sins of their ancestors: *idolatry and injustice*. Some people were reminiscing the 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 had the thought of securing their homeland by raising their military power and building fortresses to protect themselves from enemies.

That day, standing before the walls, Nehemiah gave the congregation of Israel a solemn speech: *Look, these walls will give us protection. Thank God for that. However, the true security is not made of stone but made of faith in God. The ultimate strength and protection are not the walls but the Lord. 150 years ago, Jerusalem was destroyed, not because it didn't have walls, but because our ancestors disobeyed God. Remember, the Lord is our strength. Remember, the joy of the Lord is our strength.* Do you say ‘amen’ to what Nehemiah declared? I do. With all my heart.

The Joy of the LORD Is Our Strength.

The key verse in today’s text is verse 10: the joy of the LORD is your *refuge*---‘**mauz’ in Hebrew (מַעוֹז)**. The same verse can be translated into “the joy of the LORD is your strength/protection/fortress.”

Mauz (מַעוֹז)—translation:

Hebrew alphabets have a pictographic origin. In other words, each alphabet carries certain meaning. E.g., אב (ab) is father. It is a composite of two alphabets: א (alef---ox)+ ב (beit--house)= strength of the household = father.

Likewise, מַעוֹז consists of three alphabets,

מ: mem: walls (enclosed space)

ע: ayin: roof (overhead cover)

ז: zayin: drive away fear

Walls and roof drive away fear = security = mauz

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 places where people look at to get their strength from.

Strength Sought in Wrong Places

People often ask me to pray for strength during trying times. They want to persevere/weather out/even overcome their stormy situations with strength and courage. I get that. And I do pray for them as they asked. However, I often wonder if the same people who asked for my prayers necessarily look to the Lord for what they need. They seem to seek their own strength rather than God's. In other words, in their prayer, God's role is reduced to assist them to muster up their own power and courage from within, not those of God. They even try other places or people for their needs, but, once again, not in the Lord. That's a huge mistake.

Media's Influence

All the influences of media don't help us, either. In our culture, we create and look up to heroes with physical strength and athletic abilities. Big time. They are everywhere: movies, the internet, and books. Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Ironman, Antman, Captain America, Hulk, Wonder Woman, Hercules... all of them boast some special abilities, mighty muscles, or physical strength. How about a professional athlete who is also considered as role model to the kids (baseball, basketball, football, golf,...)? The world believes and promotes power and strength that come from within, the self. It looks for strength in muscles and six packs of abs. E.g. Mr. Universe.

Biblical Understanding and Examples of Strength.

God looks at it differently.

In God's eyes, physical strength, no matter how strong it may be, doesn't count much at all (remember we are mortal). On God's scale, spiritual and emotional maturity weigh far more than physical strength. Proverbs 16:32 "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." The earlier we realize that the source of strength is God, not us, the less chance that we become a fool. *Fools rely on their own wisdom and strength* (Proverbs 1:7). The source of strength and might is always the LORD. Consider David and Goliath. 1 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.”⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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,⁴⁷ 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: To teach Gideon a lesson that salvation comes from the Lord not from the size of troops, God reduced the number of warriors from 32,000 to 300. God’s deliverance becomes undeniably mighty when human hope ceases.
- Advice to the kings: Never rely on horses or chariots. Look to the Lord. 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!*
- LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress (Jeremiah 16:19).
- Christ saying to Paul, *For My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

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

- True security and protection are not made of stone nor come from horses but are found in God.
- We are not the source of the strength. The Lord is. Power dwells with Him.
- 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. When we worship and serve Him only and do justice, the Lord Himself will be our fortress and refuge that no one can penetrate or destroy. Let us live out a life that is pleasing to the Lord.
- The Lord is our strength. He is our true security and protection. And, every child of God says, Amen!