

~ Our Spiritual Safari previously considered the Book of Ezra; but, in this report, Ezra will make another appearance in the Word of God. We're going to have a great Bible reading with Ezra today. Only those who are capable of gathering around the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ with understanding will hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to them through Andrew Hunt in this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God. This so-called safari doesn't have a nursery — so, we don't have crying babies; they have either grown up by now — or they stopped reading long ago. Those who stopped reading did so because the Lord isn't speaking to them. Maybe you don't like that seeming arrogance from me; well....

¹ And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

³ And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

~ In this report, we find Ezra in the water gate. You will recall when we began riding through the gates of Jerusalem with Nehemiah, we learned that the water gate spoke very definitely of the Word of God. So, it is only fitting Ezra constructs his pulpit by the water gate – and that's where he is reading and teaching from right now. Ezra is going to read from morning to mid-day, too. I don't know of any congregation that would endure a

sermon that lasted six to eight hours. I know they used to have such services in the church of yesteryear, but the average person today has roughly a thirty-second attention span; and even less than that in the way of full-orbed comprehension. My reports really aren't that long – the average person should read through them in about twenty minutes – but they seem long because of my long-winded wordiness. Well, many of the people at the time in which we are studying – who have just returned from the seventy-years captivity in Babylon – had never heard the Word of God taught properly, correctly and completely. This was a whole new experience for those people, and they were thrilled to hear what they were hearing from Ezra....

⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

~ Ezra's congregation didn't have a softly-cushioned pew to sit in – they stood up – the entire time; remember, we're talking about a half a day or more. Well, Ezra praised God first and foremost before he did anything. These people Ezra is going to teach didn't just say "a-men," either – they fell down on all four limbs before God. This is the first Pentecostal church program ever recorded or witnessed. Maybe those crazy charismatic types know something the rest of us don't seem to know? Alright, as we move on, I hope you read all the names given in this chapter because they are *VERY* important individuals....

⁷ Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the

Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

~ So, these were stationed throughout the assembly as Ezra read certain portions of the law. I think Ezra would stop reading periodically so each of these men could answer questions about what had just been said. I'm sure there were many questions because there were a lot of men "*causing the people to understand.*" Friends, you can like it or not, but sound doctrine from the Word of God can only be explained to you by the man who actually believes God; and who has taken the time to study the Word of God — or you aren't going to learn it — period. You can misquote Scripture all day long and say the Holy Spirit is your only teacher — but — that only reveals a total and complete ignorance of the Bible.

Ezra would then read another section of Scripture, and they would stop again, and a more in-depth explanation would be given. This is so important to accept, learn and understand I simply cannot make it strong enough. Frankly, I think it would do the modern-day church well to teach from the pulpit this same way. It would clarify many things for the average layman. We need more competent Bible teaching than we have, that's for sure. As the preaching was dispensed, certain men could break off into groups and discuss, explain, and teach details of a particular section of the Word of God. I am absolutely convinced that this is the way it is to be done if we want to teach and preach correctly.

Candidly, I don't think there is any other way to grow a congregation spiritually, either. That's the reason this Spiritual Safari goes through the entire Bible; and I don't just SAY we go through it all as some others say they do — we really do go through it all. I can promise you that when I complete this so-called safari I won't have *ANYTHING* left to say. This is the way it should be done. Taking a themed text and launching out into the deep of the world preaching the Gospel with no thought of ever coming back and explaining it is not effective. That's just not proper, friends; in fact, that's handling the Scriptures deceitfully. People are woefully mishandling Scripture today; and the result is a complete lack of interest in the Word of God by a lost and dying world.

There are several methods the church uses to instill their particular version of Bible information. Most employ psychological approaches of myriad variations. I could list a hundred different ways that *DO NOT* work. One of those ineffective ways is the scholarly tangent – which I try to avoid at all cost – and I’m sure most will agree with me when I say I’m not scholarly. Well, the precious truths of Christ cannot be learned by rote or will. Our safari approach is the manner the Lord has led me to do it – because it is the *ONLY* Scriptural method – as per Ezra and Nehemiah. See, until we understand the Word of God, we cannot understand their plane of teaching.

When Paul said to the Ephesians they were “... *chosen in Him before the foundation of the world*” – was Paul teaching the doctrine of election? What is the doctrine of election? Do you think the democrats and republicans would be interested in said doctrine? Well, I doubt they would be interested in anything spiritual. Fortunately, we have a spiritual movement happening today; and some people are interested in learning these things properly, correctly and completely. Let me just assure you that you won’t guess what the doctrine of election is, and the Holy Spirit isn’t going to reveal it to you in a cursory reading of the Bible, my friends – you can just write that down. Learning these things in an educated, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led manner is the *ONLY O-N-L-Y* road to revival, too, by the way. These people had questions; and there were men to answer their questions; even when it took all day to do so. This is one remarkable passage we are learning from in this report....

⁸ So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

~ Friends, we hear the Scriptures read in just about every way imaginable; but I *RARELY* hear it read “*distinctly*.” Ezra hadn’t taken a course in homiletics or public speaking – but he read with genuine enthusiasm – as it should be; because he believed it was the Word of God. Our modern-day monotone mumbling of a rushed reading absolutely kills the little interest there is in the Word of God. We need to make certain people understand the meaning of what we are reading and teaching. *THAT* is what God wants us to do in church service. Until we do that, I do not care how loud or long

the soloist sings, and it is irrelevant how precisely the pianist plays – and it matters not how flowery or funny the message is – if the Word of God is not read *DISTINCTLY* — and if the sense of it is not given — causing people to understand, then it is of absolutely no avail and a complete waste of time. This — the Word of God — is the thing that is *ALL IMPORTANT*, beloved...

⁹ And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

¹⁰ Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

~ There were deep emotions involved in receiving the spiritual truths that were being revealed by Ezra's teaching. Again, this is the first time many of these people had ever heard the Word of the Lord in their lives. They were so moved that they wept – but they were weeping for *JOY*. Verse ten is genuine social service. We talk about a social gospel today – but – if the Word of God actually meant something to them, it would motivate them to get busy doing something nice for other people – such as esteeming others better than themselves! They never seem to get around to that. The Boy Scout may do a good deed helping a little old lady across the street; but, when the Bible is taught properly, correctly and completely, the little old lady might help the Boy Scout cross the street. You'll have to determine what your individual good deeds will be, but we'll each desire them if we're sincere.

The very source of our power is joy in the Lord. The only place you will ever find the Lord Jesus Christ is in the Word of God – and the secret to all of this is a functional prayer life in which we have unbroken fellowship with our Father in Heaven. Does Bible study make you joyful? If church service and Bible study doesn't bless your heart and make you happy, then there is something radically wrong in your walk with the Lord. For the discerning

Christian, it is very easy to look around the sanctuary and determine whether the message has been a blessing to anyone or not. John said he wrote his epistles that our joy in the Lord might be full....

11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

13 And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law.

14 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.

17 And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

~ I hope this Spiritual Safari makes you dear readers happy. Some people are very discouraged today; and I want to help bring those people some joy – but not just a little joy – a *WHOLE LOT* of joy. I can tell you that writing these reports brings me profound happiness. There was a time when I had a biting bitterness in my soul. Nothing in this world could replace that bitterness with joy except the Bible. When the Word of God gets into our life it will have an effect.

Verse thirteen means they came back for a second service. When someone does not return to your church a second time, it means we need to figure out what the problem is. They, obviously, weren't blessed. That's a problem, friends, a *REAL* problem. These people at the time in which we are studying were *OBEYING* the law – the Word of God. It's one thing to read it and study it and receive joy from it; but the joy won't last long until we learn how to obey it. What a marvelous, beautiful, wonderful and exciting chapter Nehemiah records – and this is where the Spiritual Safari really begins – right here with Ezra in the Book of Nehemiah ~

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