

Nehemiah was one of the Jewish captives in Babylon, and he was a cup-bearer to the king. Many of the Jews had already been freed to go back to Judah and rebuild the temple under Zerubbabel. Upon hearing that those in Judah were in distress and that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, Nehemiah asked the king for permission to return and rebuild the city. This was around twenty years after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem. The king sent Nehemiah to Judah as governor of the province with a mission to rebuild. Once there, Nehemiah, like Zerubbabel, defied the opposition of Judah's enemies on all sides—Samaritans, Ammonites, Arabs and Philistines (*Neh. 2:20*). Under Nehemiah the walls were rebuilt within 52 days (*Neh. 6:15-19*).

Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, and they both wrote about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which occurred approximately seventy years after it was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Ezra wrote about the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, while Nehemiah wrote concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

(Neh. 8:1-4) - Ezra led the people in a time of thanksgiving and worship by bringing *“the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.”* He *“stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose,”* along with the other elders, and he read the Word of God to *“all that could hear with understanding,”* meaning all who were of age and could understand what was read.

(Neh. 8:5-6) - This was more than a simple religious gathering. It was a true worship service. *“And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God,”* and the people responded in agreement (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

(Neh. 8:7-8) - The elders were diligent and *“caused the people to understand the law.”* *“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”* Notice the order of service here in the reading of the law. First, they read God's Word as set down in the law of Moses. They read *“distinctly,”* which means “clearly” and without adding their own words and personal ideas (*1 Cor. 2:1-2*). THEN, they *“gave the sense,”* (meaning) of God's Word as given to Moses in the law. This is not their own opinions and ideas about God's Word. This is where so many go wrong today in reading the Bible. They fail to use the proper rules of Scriptural interpretation so as to be *“rightly dividing the word of truth”* (*2 Tim. 2:15*). The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture, and not his own agenda or favorite personal topics. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

Then they *“caused them to understand the reading”* as far as man by nature can understand God's Word. We know that the *“natural man”* (unregenerate man) *“receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (understood)”* (*1 Cor. 2:14*). There is no salvation without spiritual understanding as given and revealed by God. The book of *Proverbs* (especially in the first chapters) says much about the necessity of spiritual understanding as that which ought to be the foremost pursuit of our lives - *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths”* (*Prov. 3:5-6*). It tells us that *“evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all things”* (*Prov. 28:5*).

Spiritual understanding is a gift from God in and by the Lord Jesus Christ and leads us to a saving knowledge of Christ. Sinners must be born again by the Spirit and taught of God in order to understand God's Word savingly (*John 3:3; 6:44-45; 2 Tim. 3:14-17*). But true

preachers of the Gospel of God's grace are responsible to preach God's Word and tell their hearers the truth of God's Word, whether the hearers believe it or not. And what we pray for and desire for ourselves and our hearers is SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING of God's Word so that we are made "*wise unto salvation*" (2 Tim. 3:15). Apart from the Spirit of God working in our new birth, the Word will fall upon deaf ears (Matthew 13:13-15; Acts 7:51). God-given faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 13:16; Rom. 10:13-17). The most important rule of proper Scriptural interpretation is the rule of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Consider the following:

(1) The Lord Jesus Christ sends the Spirit of God to His people to give them spiritual life and reveal Himself in opening our understanding to know and believe in Him (John 10:27-30; 17:1-2). "*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20). Eternal life is to God through the Person and work (righteousness) of Christ (John 17:3).

(2) The Word of God, even the law of Moses, is ultimately and finally a revelation of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead as the Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, Life-giver, and Preserver of His people. Spiritual understanding comes from Christ and leads us to Christ as our only hope of forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life, and all of salvation. Consider the preaching of Philip when the Spirit sent him into the desert to preach to an Ethiopian who was reading *Isaiah 53* (Acts 8:30-35). Consider what our Lord said to the Pharisees who claimed to be experts in the law of Moses but had no spiritual understanding (John 5:39-47).

(3) Spiritual understanding is given for us to know God's way of salvation in and by Christ so that we may glorify God in our lives (Rom. 1:16-17; Jer. 9:23-24). It shows us how God is just to justify the ungodly based upon a righteousness worked out by Christ's obedience unto death as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God's chosen people. This understanding comes from the wisdom of God revealed in His Word as He leads His people to Christ, the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work (2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Cor. 1:18-24). It is God's gift to His people - "*For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding*" (Prov. 2:6). When the glory of God is revealed to His people in Christ, "*then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path*" (Prov. 2:9). This understanding is the revelation of "*the righteousness of God*" which is the merit of Christ's obedience unto death imputed to His people (2 Cor. 5:21).

(4) Spiritual understanding equips God's people to live for His glory in Christ (2 Tim. 3:16-17). By this understanding, believers are enabled to live by faith in Christ out of His power and grace so as to run the race of grace "*looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*" (Heb. 12:2). This understanding establishes our hearts with grace and motivates us to live in obedience by grace, love, and gratitude to God for the gift of salvation with all blessings and benefits freely given us in Christ. This understanding gives us the confidence to approach God at His throne of grace because we have Christ as our Great High Priest, and we stand in Him, not having our sins imputed to us, but having His righteousness imputed to us so that we are secure and accepted in Him (Rom. 8:34-35; Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22).