



Sunday, August 4, 2013

## GREAT REJOICING

Unifying Topic: **FESTIVAL OF BOOTHS**

Lesson Text

I. **Hearing The Word Of The Lord** (Nehemiah 8:13-15)

II. **Obedying The Word Of The Lord** (Nehemiah 8:16-18)



**The Main Thought:** 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. (Nehemiah 8:17, KJV).

**Unifying Principle:** People use festivals and celebrations as observances of things most important to them in life. What are some times or events we celebrate? The Festival of Booths and Ezra's reading was an observation of the Israelites' wilderness exile and the giving of the Law, which the people celebrated joyously, followed by solemn contemplation.

**Lesson Aim:** To acquaint students with the connection between the wandering in the wilderness, the giving, and reading of the Law, and the Festival of Booths.

**Life Aim:** To point students to the ongoing work of the Lord in the world and the Church, and the remembrance of that work through the various acts of worship.

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8:13 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.

8:14 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:

8:15 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.

8:16 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.

8:17 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.

8:18 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.

### HISTORY:

#### Nehemiah 8:1-12

Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, although Ezra was probably much older. Nehemiah was the governor (*the political leader*), and Ezra was the Chief Priest (*the religious leader*). No doubt the Jews would have liked to set up the kingdom again as in the days of David, but this would have signaled rebellion against the king of Persia to whom they were subject. The best alternative was having Nehemiah as governor over Jerusalem and Ezra serving in the Temple as priest.

The last verse in Nehemiah 7:73 we find out that the priest, Levites, porters (*gatekeepers*), singers (*choir members*), some of the people, and the Neth'inim (*the Temple attendants*) returned and began to live in their own towns. <sup>1</sup>These were the same towns that God had given to their ancestors. Many years later, the nation divided into two parts. The name of the northern part was Israel, and people called the inhabitants Israelites. The name of the southern part was Judah, and people called the inhabitants Jews.

**8:1 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.** The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are two parts of the same story. This verse resembles Ezra 3:1. Here, Nehemiah explains these events. All the people gathered together as "*one man*." The idea was that they gathered in unity for the same

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/nehemiah-lbw.htm>

purpose; having a spirit of unity among them or a fresh resolve suggests it was all for the purpose of God. They met in the street (*open square*) in front of the Watergate which is the main water source outside the city wall. Unity is one of the basic foundations for accomplishing a work for God. That's why it was important for Ezra to speak to them of the book of the Law of Moses. This is the first mention of Ezra in the book of Nehemiah. He had come to Jerusalem 13 years prior to Nehemiah. He holds two offices: that of scribe and that of priest. You will see it being interchanged.

**8:2 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.** Ezra brought the Law of the Lord before the congregation. At this time the law was a scroll, as opposed to a text consisting of bound pages. Such a reading was required every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. It was vital that they know and understand God's ways even though it had been neglected in the generations since the Babylonian captivity until this occasion. "*The first day of the seventh month*" was a day to do no work but a day of blowing the trumpets unto the Lord—This made it a solemn preparation for the sacred feasts. Ezra as priest was not leaving anyone out. If they were old enough to understand they gathered together before Ezra.

**8:3 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.** Ezra began to read the book of the Law of Moses in front of the water gate from the first light of morning until noonday for all those who could understand; all who had attentive ears; all that listened very intently. You've got to remember that there were no comfortable chairs around.

**8:4 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.** Ezra was standing upon a pulpit of wood. This sounds like the first "*pulpit*" mentioned in the bible. This platform was large enough to hold, along with Ezra, six priests who stood on his left and seven priests who stood on his right as he read. All of these people stood with him upon the platform.

**8:5 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:** And when Ezra and all the priests stood on the pulpit above the people, opened the book of the Law and reads it, the congregation also stood up. <sup>2</sup>The fact that they stood up, showed great respect for Ezra and for the law he was holding in his hand.

**8:6 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 begins blessing the Lord with praises coming from His lips. The people responded to this thanksgiving by saying Amen (*twice*), coming into agreement with him. They began lifting their hands as a sign of praise lifted up to heaven to God. They bowed their heads in humility, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground in unison with Ezra. How awesome is that? The "*Amen*" was an affirmation of what Ezra had just did, bringing in the presence of God by lifting Him up. This was a very symbolic moment of humility in the presence of the Lord. They felt they were unworthy to lift their faces to heaven.

**8:7 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.** Now the above named Levites assisted Ezra by moving through the crowd to see if the people were able to understand what was being read. Apparently the reading of the Law was interrupted by several events. At certain times the people responded with an Amen and by worshiping the Lord. Second, the Levites took time to explain the various portions of the Law to the crowd.

**8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.** They would read and expound on the Law of God in which the people lacked understanding. They helped the people to understand its meaning; to breakdown the text into its parts so that the people could understand it.

**8:9 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.** "*Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha*", meant Nehemiah is governor; "*Ezra the priest the scribe*" were the two offices Ezra held; and the Levites altogether were able to teach the people. They began to declare

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/nehemiah/08.html>

unto the people: *"This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep."* At this point, hearing the words of the Law brought weeping from all the people when they realized how far they were from obeying the Lord. It was important to weep when you find out you have sinned. They had not been utterly destroyed as a nation in spite of their sin, so this was a day when they would celebrate one of the Lord's feasts and they were to be joyful.

**8:10 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.** Because they had had a chance to listen and understand God's Word, Ezra now tells them go and celebrate; eat and drink; celebrate by giving others a portion of what you have prepared. This was not a time to be selfish. When having this type of joy in your hearts you can't help but be giving to another. We've always quoted the last part of this scripture many times for strength. Well, capture the moment when you gave to someone and even someone you didn't even know, and how it brought strength to your being. The Spirit of God takes that joy of giving and strengthens your thoughts, your attitude, your conversation, and your life, equipping you with power! Do you see how the joy of giving brings you strength? It shows you not to be sorry for yourself and it prepares you to be blessed.

**8:11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.** The Levites began to calm all the people that were weeping, saying, *"Hold your peace, for the day is holy; don't be grieved."*<sup>3</sup> Three times the people are told that the day is "holy" (vv 9, 10, 11) and they are commanded to be joyful. The assumption is that holiness is not glumness, but that holiness and happiness are the most congenial bedfellows! In this being a holy day unto God, therefore, they were to rejoice not weep. The last line of verse 10 contains the primary argument against sadness: *"For the joy of Yahweh is your place of safety."* Perhaps there is the suggestion that ongoing sorrow and grief, while proper at times, can leave the people of God "unprotected"; the text implies that joy and delight in Yahweh fulfill a protective function in believers' lives, keeping them, perhaps, from being swallowed in despair.

**8:12 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.** They were obedient, ceased their grieving, and went their way to eat, drink, and send portions to others because of their understanding of the Word of God that was declared unto them in the reading. *"To make great mirth"* meant to celebrate with great rejoicing (*with music, vocal and instrumental*).

## LESSON:

### **Nehemiah 8:13-15 Hearing The Word Of The Lord**

**8:13 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.** The Word of the Law was reiterated again to various heads of the households (*those who had authority in their homes*) and the religious leaders (*those who had authority in the Temple*) as they came together on the second day. They studied, went deeper with a more intimate understanding of what God desired. You know how it is when we truly get to studying God's Word, He gives a simpler yet deeper understanding of what we need.

**8:14 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:** They discovered and realized that they are in the seventh month where they were to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (*Booths; Shelters*) which had been commanded by God to Moses. They would therefore dwell, live in these booths during these feasts in the seventh month.

**8:15 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.** Upon their findings in the Word of God, they began to publish and proclaim; they made a proclamation that everyone should observe this feast. Go into the mount meant the Mount of Olives and get these specific branches (*olive branches, pine branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of thick trees*) and instructed what preparations were to be made (*make the booths*). These were temporary structures to live in during the week of Feast of Tabernacles.

### **Nehemiah 8:16-18 Obeying The Word Of The Lord**

**8:16 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**

<sup>3</sup> [http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/ral\\_davis/OT.Davis.Neh.8.pdf](http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/ral_davis/OT.Davis.Neh.8.pdf)

**of the gate of Ephraim.** In their studying the Word further they found something within it they had to act upon. That means they were obedient to what they had learned. So the people kept this feast by living in temporary dwellings made from branches to commemorate how they had lived in booths in the wilderness after God had brought them out of Egypt. Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem built their booths on top of their house, while others built in the courts of the Temple, and in the streets. Those who did not live in Jerusalem probably built their booths in the streets. All of this celebration occurred within the walls of Jerusalem (in the square at the Water Gate and the square at the Gate of Ephraim).

**8:17 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.** All who had returned from captivity made and lived in the booths. Some had observed the Feast of Tabernacles previously (Ezra 3:4), however, the present celebration was the most festive and well-attended one since Joshua had brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. All of the Jewish community had not celebrated in this manner in a long time. This reflects growing joy and spiritual strength; great gladness among the Jews who returned from exile.

**8:18 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.** Each day during the feast (seven days), Ezra read the book of the Law of God to the people. On the eighth day a solemn assembly was required. As required in the Law of Moses on this day, they did no work or strenuous activity. It was time to stop, take stock of the situation and return to whole-hearted devotion to God.

#### **SUMMARY:**

<sup>4</sup> After Ezra read God's laws to the people they continued to study them as they desired a deeper and more intimate understanding of what God desired (v.13). A careful reading of scripture always calls for a response such as: what should I do with this knowledge? Or how should my life change? During the seven days of the feast, the Jews lived in booths made of branches (v.14). This was a time of looking back and remembering the nation's forty years of wandering in the wilderness when they lived in temporary shelters. They were to think about God's protection and guidance during their years of wandering and the fact that God would still protect them and guide them if they obeyed His Word. It was a time to remember where they came from, where they were that day, and what they would do in the future. They decided to obey what they had found written in the Law that was read. It focused on the feast in the seventh month to dwell in booths (v.14). A proclamation was published and proclaimed in the cities. They gathered the branches to live in the booths they were to make (v.15).

They gathered the branches to live in the booths they were to make living on the roofs of their houses, in the courts, and in the streets (v.16). All those that returned from captivity made the booths and lived in them showing much gladness (v.17). Day after day for the seven days Ezra read the Book of the Law to them. They feasted for those seven days and on the last day, the eighth day a solemn assembly was called according to scripture (v.18).

#### **APPLICATION:**

How quickly do you obey when you hear the Word of God? Do we have to hear it continuously before we get it? Each person is different, but it's good to be swift to hear. Three positive words we must look at: hear—obey—rejoice. It takes all to accomplish the plan God has for us.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/the-feast-of-tabernacles/>