

**“Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel REJOICE in him that made him; let the children of Zion be JOYFUL in their King. Psa. 149:1,2. “I REJOICE at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.” Psa. 119:162. “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will REJOICE and be glad in it.” Psa. 118:24. “Let them curse, but bless thou; when they arise, let them be ashamed, but let thy servant REJOICE.” Psa. 109:28. “God hath spoken in his holiness; I will REJOICE; I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.” Psa. 108:7. “Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock. The righteous shall see it, and REJOICE; and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” Psa. 107:41-43. “REJOICE in the Lord alway; and again I say, REJOICE.” Phil. 4:4.**

Beloved. Rejoicing in the Lord always is a sure recipe for a joyful spirit, and the joy of the Lord is guaranteed to make us strong in the Lord and the power of his might; to wit:

***“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Eph. 6:10)***

The glorious revival of genuine religion under Ezra and Nehemiah furnishes us with a reliable road map, as it were, going from sinful gloom to, “the joy of the Lord is your strength;” to wit: *“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. 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. 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. 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. 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 Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 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 THEY READ IN THE BOOK IN THE LAW OF GOD DISTINCTLY, AND GAVE THE SENSE, AND CAUSED THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE READING.” Neh. 8:1-8.*

Beloved, right here is the antidote to the death-dealing hypocrisy of all rote religion – i.e., characterized by unthinking repetition, mechanical, routinely reading the same religious words over and over again by false prophets and those who, as the Savior said, think they shall be heard for their much speaking; to wit:

***“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, AS THE HEATHEN DO; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” (Mat. 6:7)***

There is absolutely no substitute for reading the Word of God distinctly, and giving the sense of it, and causing the people to understand it. Think of it. Anything less than that sends a garbled message of the Mind of God to the mind of man.

Deadly heresy is the only possible result. *“And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha (Governor of the returning exiles), 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”* (Neh. 8:9.) – i.e., when they heard God’s Word distinctly, had the sense of it expounded by a man of God who himself knew the sense of it, such that they had conveyed to them an accurate understanding of it.

***“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”*** (Heb. 4:12,13)

Of course the people mourned and wept for their sins under such powerful preaching by Ezra, Nehemiah, and their squadron of Gospel-preaching helpers whose natural and spiritual pedigrees were impeccable, and whose congregations likely were laced with God’s Elect whose names were written in Heaven as well as in the archives of captive Jerusalem as well as Babylon; to wit: *“Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, BECAUSE YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”* Lk. 10:20,21. After some 70 years of cruel, idolatrous Babylonian captivity, and under the Gospel preaching of Ezra and Nehemiah, it certainly appears that many of the returning exiles were God’s Elect; to wit:

***“And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the (Babylonian) captivity MADE BOOTHS, AND SAT UNDER THE BOOTHS; FOR SINCE THE DAYS OF JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN UNTO THAT DAY HAD NOT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DONE SO. AND THERE WAS VERY GREAT GLADNESS.”*** (Neh. 8:17)

Beloved, we have come upon the beautiful doctrine of the SACRED BOOTHS, aka, THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES, which is filled with precious spiritual truths and blessings; which, to ancient Israel’s eternal shame, were ignored by them for some 700 years, or until the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem; to wit:

***“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. 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; 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. 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. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the (Babylonian) 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.”***(Neh. 8:13-17)

Beloved, I do not believe unregenerate people could conduct themselves with such zeal, joy and gladness with regard to the word and work of God. Disobedient, hard-hearted, carnal, stiff-necked Jews went into bloody, cruel Babylonian captivity.

Subdued, penitent, sincere Bible-believing lovers of God returned to rebuild Jerusalem and her walls. Only the sovereign grace of God could explain such a transformation. It is the language of genuine sorrow for sin; to wit:

***“Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloths, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshiped the Lord their God.” (Neh. 9:1-3)***

It will reward us handsomely if we study The Law of the Booths, aka The Feast of Tabernacles – its origins and its significances, starting with Leviticus, chapter 23; to wit:

***“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES for seven days unto the Lord. On the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day; beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your free will offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. ALSO, in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a sabbath; and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. AND YE SHALL TAKE YOU ON THE FIRST DAY THE BOUGHS OF GOODLY TREES, BRANCHES OF PALM TREES, AND THE BOUGHS OF THICK TREES, AND WILLOWS OF THE BROOK; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. (Lev. 23:33-40)***

(Notice here that several verses have given a plethora of feast days, offerings, sacrifices, and other religious duties and mandates – see, Lev. 23:1-32; and then, Bang! “AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO MOSES, SAYING, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the FEAST OF TABERNACLES FOR SEVEN DAYS UNTO THE LORD.”) And now to continue the divine instructions for celebrating this amazing Law of the Booths, aka the Feast of Tabernacles; to wit:

***“AND YE SHALL REJOICE BEFORE THE LORD YOUR GOD SEVEN DAYS. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. YE SHALL DWELL IN BOOTHS SEVEN DAYS; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.” (Lev. 23:41-44)***

Beloved. That is the Old Testament recounting of the Law of the Booths, aka the Feast of Tabernacles, and all must admit it is a very, very unique and interesting law. It binds each home-born Israelite to construct a little shack once a year and live in it for seven days, while performing certain religious rites and ceremonies. At least the roofs of the shacks must be constructed of freshly-harvested “*boughs of goodly trees,*” like branches of palm trees and willow trees.

Moreover, all the while the Israelites dwelt in said shacks, they must demonstrate great rejoicing – presumably in song, psalm and prayer. See, Lev. 23:40. But, what may be the most astonishing thing of all about the Law of the Booths, aka the Feast of Tabernacles, is the fact that it took a bloody Babylonian captivity some 70 years later in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, for the stiff-necked Jews to observe the Law of the Booths/Feast of Tabernacles (!)(!)(!) Maybe the Jews were too high and mighty in the social circles of Jerusalem to condescend to live in one-room shacks for one week each year. Think of the sight – let alone the discomfort – when beautiful Jerusalem would become a veritable trash-heap, a shanty-town, without any kind of sanitation or a bare minimum of amenities. For whatever the reason, the stubborn Jews simply refused to obey that law from the outset.

Think of it, Beloved. The symbolism is profound. The significance of this wonderful law is that it tells the story of the wayfaring pilgrim making his poor and lonely and dangerous journey through a hostile world bound for Heaven – I say, brethren, that this pathetic story could be told in no conceivably better way. Listen:

***“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, DWELLING IN TABERNACLES WITH ISAAC AND JACOB, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, AND CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON EARTH... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; WHEREFORE GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD; for He hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb. 11:8-16)***

In part, the clear message of the Booths/Tabernacles is, if you are not dwelling in tabernacles with Abraham, you are not declaring plainly that you seek a country whose builder and maker is God; ergo, God is ashamed to be called your God; ergo, you are lost and headed for Hell. But now see what happened historically some 700 years after the Lord God first issued the order; to wit:

***“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. 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 SEVEN MONTHS; 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. 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. 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. 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.” (Neh. 8:13-18)***

Joy of the Lord is strength.

I love you. Amen.