

# The Joy of the Lord is My Strength

## A Study in the Book of Nehemiah

### #9 It is Time to Rejoice (Neh. 8:1-18)

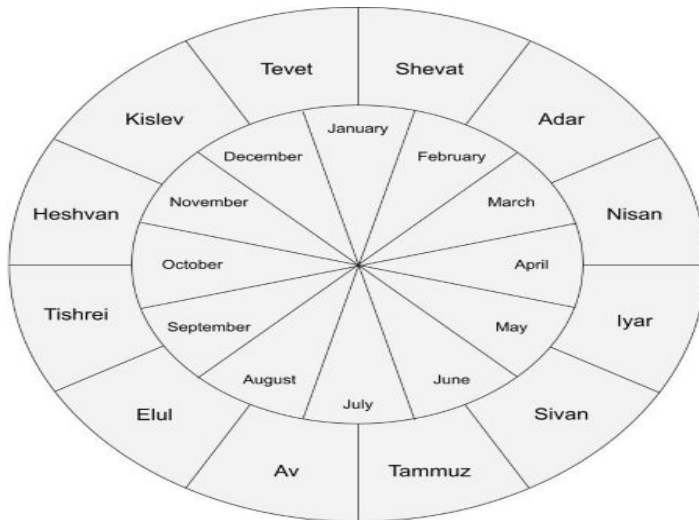
#### Introduction

“The wall reconstruction project had been completed and the people had moved into their own dwellings. According to Chapter 7, which is a detailed chapter on organizational structure, the people were well ordered, well defended and well governed. But in this community, even though its residents had nice homes and good jobs and well-protected, there was still something missing. Nehemiah sensed the spiritual vacuum as did the people (*Hand Me Another Brick*).”

#### Ezra Appears (8: 1-9)

516 BC: The temple had been rebuilt, and there was a brief period of spiritual zeal throughout the land. But soon the nation drifted into apostasy again. (See Mal. 1:6-14, 2:11, 3:5.)

458 BC: Ezra (a lineal descendent from Eleazar, the son of Aaron the high priest) received permission from Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to carry out spiritual reform. 1800 Jews went with him. (38 Levites were persuaded to join them.) After the 800-mile trek, Ezra set about delivering all the temple treasures to the Levites and to overseeing the spiritual reform.



445 BC: Ezra appears in the 7<sup>th</sup> month (Tishrei) with Nehemiah.

On the first day, men, women and older children assembled at the Water Gate. Ezra and Nehemiah were standing on a high platform. They brought out the Torah (the first five books of the OT). Ezra read it aloud from sunup till noon. (The people stood as they listened.)

The people responded by shouting “amen,” raising their hands, bowing their heads and weeping. They listened intently and the Levites explained the texts.

Vs. 8 They gave the meaning of the texts so people could understand.

Vs. 13 They gathered that they might gain insights into the words of the Law.

The truth was explained: “Translating it, making it clear; to make something distinct, to separate it from something else so as to make it flow together in a meaningful fashion.”

### **Nehemiah Speaks (8:10-12)**

“This day is holy:” Holy means to be separate, set aside, unique for a purpose.

“Do not grieve...the joy of the Lord is your strength.” So, the people went away to eat and celebrate. There are several kinds of joy listed in the OT scriptures.

1. The joy is spontaneous, unsustained feeling of jubilee
2. A feeling so strong that it finds expression in some external act
3. A feeling prompted by an external and unsustained stimulus (Ps. 32:11, 42:4 and 126:5 for example)
4. This term is used only twice in OT (8:10 and I Chronicles 16:27). It refers to a joy that sustains!

“Strength:” means stronghold or fortress. A place where things are safe and secure. See Matt. 25:21 where we are invited to enter the “bliss prepared for us by the Lord.”

### **Ezra returns on the second day of the month (8:13-17)**

There is a discussion of one of the feast /festival days: The Feast of the Tabernacles (15-21 Tishrei, October). This feast lasted 8 days remembering that God brought them out of Egypt (Lev. 23:43).

**Leviticus 23** describes the Sabbath together with seven feasts:

\*The Feast of Passover (Deliverance from Egypt) Nisan 14-21

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Deliverance from Egypt) Nisan 15-21

The Feast of First Fruits (Acknowledging the fertility of the land) Nisan 22

\*The Feast of the Harvest/Pentecost (Giving of the Law/wheat harvest) Sivan 6 weeks after Passover

The Feast of Trumpets/Rosh Hashanah (Signaling the beginning of new civil year) Tishri 1

The Day of Atonement (High Priest makes atonement) Tishrei 10

\*The Feast of Tabernacles/Booths (Commemorates the wandering in the desert) Tishrei 15-21

\* These three required every Jewish male to annually visit Jerusalem (Ex. 23:17)

## The celebration (8:18-19)

They celebrated with days of fasting, prayer and confession. This kind of celebration had not happened since the days of Joshua. Their joy was very great.

## So What?

There are two take aways from chapter 8:

1. There is a real difference between “input” and “insight.” (Mark 6:51-52)
  - A. Pursuing insight requires:
    - Time: There is no such thing as instant insight. (Luke 2:40 [“continued”] and Romans 11:33 [“unfathomable”])
    - The right leaders and teachers (Deut. 11:19 and II Chron. 17:9)
    - The right attitude... insight must be valued. (Proverbs 8:11)
  - B. The results of insight:
    - We will walk in obedience (Joshua 1:8 and I Sam. 15:22)
    - We discover genuine happiness (Psalm 4:7, 45:15)
2. There is a sustaining joy in the service of the Lord (Ps. 61:1-4)
  - vs. 2 The rock.... strength to rely on
  - vs.3 The shelter...a place to hide
  - vs. 3 A strong tower...protection
  - vs. 4 The shelter of thy wings...personal care

## Discussion Questions

1. Considering their comfortable situation, what was missing for the Israelites? Considering our comfortable situation, what is missing in our culture?
2. Can you imagine people in our neighborhoods **STANDING AND LISTENING** to the Word of God being read for three hours? What does that suggest about our era?
3. As the Word of God was being read to them, why do you think the Israelite community initially responded with such sadness?
4. Discuss the differences between “input” and “insight.”
5. What are the characteristics of “sustaining joy?” Have you experienced it?

## Personal Reflections

1. We know what was missing in the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. Is there anything missing in your spiritual walk? What should you do about it?
2. What is your capacity for listening / reading the Word of God? Could it be better?
3. In your devotional time, do you read for understanding? Do you meditate on what you read?
4. This passage declares that the JOY of the Lord sustains us. How does He sustain you?