

12

## The Joy of the Lord

[Nehemiah 7:1-8:18](#)

### The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength

In chapter 8 verse 10 Nehemiah tells the people that the “joy of the Lord is your strength.” That sounds great, but what does that exactly mean? Let’s look at the context of when and why this statement was made and see if we can get a better handle on what this means.

The first half of the book of Nehemiah dealt with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The end of Chapter 6 reports that the walls were finished on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month Elul (about Sept. 20) meaning it took just 52 days to complete. The enemies around became disheartened because they knew this had to be the work of God.

### Nehemiah 7 and All the Names

The second half of the book deals with rebuilding the people starting in Chapter 7. Nehemiah notices that since most of the houses still weren’t rebuilt yet, the city is somewhat empty. This prompts him to take an inventory of the people and he decides to register them by genealogy. He found a genealogy list of those who had returned with the first group. He then lists all of these people from verse 7 to verse 65 of chapter 7. He says the grand total equals 49,942 people.

A list like this was very important to the early readers of the Book of Nehemiah. It was like our memorials today. It recognized that these were the people who made it back from captivity and helped establish Jerusalem again.

Another reason for the list had to do with the priesthood. Since they were beginning to build up the people again spiritually, the ministry of the priests was very important. So it was crucial to establish who had the right to be in this important position. As priests must be from the tribe of Levi, a clear genealogy was needed.

### Spiritual Need

Something else Nehemiah saw that was needed in the mid-fifth century B.C. is just as badly needed in the Modern West today. He faced a generation that was frighteningly and

pathetically ignorant of the Word of God. So he set about addressing this aching need of the people.

All the people gathered together in the open square and called on Ezra to come and continue teaching them. The prophet Ezra had returned with an earlier group of people and had realized how spiritually hungry the people were. The people knew him, trusted him and wanted to listen to him,

**<sup>1</sup>Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel.**

So Ezra stood up on a platform and read from the Torah, the first 5 books of the Bible. He read from morning until midday and the people listened attentively the whole time.

**<sup>2</sup>So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.**

**<sup>3</sup>Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.**

**<sup>4</sup>So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; ...**

### The Response of the People

When Ezra opened up the book everyone stood up and listened. And when the people heard the Word of God they realized that their ancestors had sinned which led to their captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem. The other priests were also there to help explain the Scriptures to the people so they could understand the Law. The people came to realize their own sins; and the people bowed down and began to weep before God.

**<sup>5</sup>And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.**

**<sup>6</sup>And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.**

**<sup>7</sup>...the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.**

**The JOY of the Lord is your strength  
The joy of the Lord is YOUR strength  
The joy of the Lord is your STRENGTH  
But the real emphasis?  
The joy OF THE LORD is your strength**

**<sup>8</sup>So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.**

**<sup>9</sup>And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.**

### **The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength**

So Nehemiah then tells them:

**<sup>10</sup>...“Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”**

The people understood and went away rejoicing.

**<sup>12</sup>And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.**

And then they applied what they had learned. The last several verses of Chapter 8 record how the people, after hearing how--right then--was the feast of Tabernacles and they should be observing the feast, they went right out to do as it was written in God's Word.

### **How to Have the Joy that Comes from the Lord**

#### **1) Know who you are and Whose you are.**

The people would have heard about how God had delivered their ancestors from bondage in slavery and brought them to the Promised Land. They would have learned that they were...

- not a bunch of losers
- not a product of fate or chance
- responsible to God
- created by Him and for Him
- to be like Him and lead holy lives

How great to know that we are not an accident of the cosmos, but are a creation of an all-powerful God who made us in His image. This means we have DIGNITY AND PURPOSE. No one is here by accident. When God created us, He did so with a purpose so that our life has a divine meaning and value. We are valuable to God—And when we know that we are valuable to God and loved by Him, we have joy.

#### **2) Discover the will of God in His Word**

There is an ancient Jewish custom whereby when a young boy begins his 1<sup>st</sup> lesson in the Torah, a drop of honey is dripped on the 1<sup>st</sup> page reminding the student of the sweetness of God's Word.

The people of newly built Jerusalem requested Ezra to read God's Word to them. They wanted to know God's will. It

was sweet to them even if it brought guilt and conviction upon them. They could rejoice as Nehemiah and the prophets encouraged because now they knew even better what their Creator created them to do and to be. Joy comes from knowing God's will found in His Word and doing it.

#### **3) Repent and receive God's grace**

The call to joy came after the people's repentance, not before. After the people heard the reading of God's Word and understood how they had grieved God, they fell on their faces in repentance. They did not try to explain away the Scripture or rationalize their sin.

Some people do not want to hear the Word of God because it cuts them to the heart and causes pain to their consciences.

If you are avoiding your sin, the penetration of God's Word is not welcome. If you are wanting to please God then you want the Word of God—even if it hurts.

The people were not weeping because they **got caught**. They were not weeping because of **the trouble they were in**. They were weeping because they had **not only broken God's laws**, they had **broken His heart**, and as a result their lives and their nation were in ruins.

Real guilt had brought about real change in their lives. Repentance had done its work.

--If they had tried to **deny they had done anything wrong**, joy would never have come.

--If they had **not been honest about their sin**, they would never have experienced joy in their hearts.

--If they had **not been willing to turn from their sin**, they would have continued to live in self-destructive ways.

But when repentance came, joy came. Joy is found not in avoiding your sin, but in confronting your sin. Because when you confront your sin, you come face to face with God, and the miracle you experience is a miracle of grace.

#### **Psalm 30:5**

**<sup>5</sup>For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.**

#### **1 John 1:9**

**<sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

