

As we come to our text today we're going to essentially see a worship service that will last 7 days. A remnant of the Jews are back in the land, the temple is in the process of being completed, the walls and the gates to the city are completed and now the people of God are going to give thanks and celebrate, according to the law, as God has been faithful to them.

It appears that our text is found to be parallel to that of Ezra's account of the same event in the same time frame.

Ezra 2:61-63 ⁶¹ Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name. ⁶² These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean *and excluded* from the priesthood. ⁶³ The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

Nehemiah 7:63-65 ⁶³ Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. ⁶⁴ These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean *and excluded* from the priesthood. ⁶⁵ The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.

By the way, the reference to Urim and Thummim is an interesting one, and its significance goes back to the time in which the Lord was giving the instruction to Moses regarding the priesthood.

Exodus 28:29-30 ²⁹ "Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. ³⁰ "You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

So, the first thing we see is that whatever this Urim and Thummim are they are associated with the breastpiece of judgment and this was to be placed over the heart of the priest as he carries the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart.

We see other references to the Urim and Thummim.

Leviticus 8:6-9 ⁶ Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near and washed them with water. ⁷ He put the tunic on him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band of the ephod, with which he tied *it* to him. ⁸ He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. ⁹ He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

So, in Exodus Moses was given instructions regarding the construction of the breastpiece with the inclusion of the Urim and Thummim, and Leviticus shows Moses now placing this breastpiece, which included the Urim and Thummim, on Aaron.

The next reference gives us a little insight as to how the Urim and Thummim were to be used by the priests.

Numbers 27:18-21 ¹⁸ So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; ¹⁹ and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰ "You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*. ²¹ "Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation."

Here the Urim and Thummim appear to be used by the priest to gain information regarding the will of God for Joshua as Joshua would seek the Lord through the priest. This is why some Jewish scholars suggest that the Urim and Thummim were used as types of oracle stones in seeking the Lord.

No one knows what the Urim and Thummim were made of. The breastpiece of the priest contained a number of different things that were either sown in or hung on the breastpiece as God commanded Moses.

Exodus 25:3-7 ³ "This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, ⁴ blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goat *hair*, ⁵ rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, ⁶ oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil

and for the fragrant incense, ⁷ onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

And so, it was very likely that precious stones were sown into the garment that made up the breastpiece, but we're also told that other precious materials went into its construction.

Exodus 28:15-16 ¹⁵ "You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen you shall make it. ¹⁶ "It shall be square *and* folded double, a span in length and a span in width.

Were the Urim and Thummim made of precious stones? Were they made of precious materials like fine purple linen? Nowhere in the word of God are we told. But what appears to give us some clue as to their use is limited to what we were told regarding the seeking of God's will for Joshua where the Urim and Thummim may have been taken out of the pocket of the breastpiece and possibly used as in the casting of lots where depending how the Urim and Thummim align themselves when thrown to the ground would then determine how the priest would view God's will in a particular matter.

This is of course speculation, but what is not speculation is the way in which God sees the symbolism of the Urim and Thummim.

Exodus 28:29-30 ²⁹ "Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. ³⁰ "You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

And so, what is clearly pointed out here is the juxtaposition of the names of the sons of Israel, (ie., the 12 tribes), that were placed in the breastpiece of judgment over the heart of the priest as they are then associated with the Urim and Thummim also placed over the heart of the priest.

And according to verse 29 why were the names of the sons of Israel, in proximity to the Urim and Thummim, placed over the heart of the priest?

As a memorial before the Lord continually.

So, what might this signify?

The people who are God's own possession are continually on His heart, that is the heart of our Lord Jesus who is our High Priest. But the most important thing to note here is that this memorial, which is associated with the Urim and Thummim, is in connection with the judgement of the sons of Israel over the heart of the priest.

What is the connection between the judgment of the sons of Israel and the High priest?

The priest stands between the people and God and it is our Lord Jesus Christ who stands as our Mediator between God and His people, the Israel of God, who are ever on His heart, and whose judgment is placed upon our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The Urim and the Thummim represent the people of God who are hid in the bosom of the Lord, who are protected from His judgment and wrath and who now have a heart that beats for God.

If as Moses clearly points out that the Urim and the Thummim are placed over the heart of the High Priest and they are equated with the judgment of the sons of Israel over the heart of the priest, then is it possible that the Urim and the Thummim represent both Jew and Gentile believers who are in Christ?

It is certainly possible, but then how do we explain the reference to knowing the will of God through the Urim and Thummim that is certainly inferred in **1 Samuel 28:6** ⁶ When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets.

It is certainly possible that Urim and Thummim may have had more than one meaning in the economy of God's revelation. There is a common denominator in all of the cases of the Urim and Thummin and that is that they are always associated with the judgment as their rightful place is within the breastpiece of judgment that was worn by the priest.

Whatever the Urim and Thummim were they had a special place in the worship of God before the people of God and they bore testimony to the judgment of God that in the case of His people was ultimately born by God Himself through Jesus Christ.

Having said all of that there is no evidence that the Urim and Thummim actually existed at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. Remember, that Israel and Judah had both been taken into

captivity. Jerusalem along with all of the elements of worship in the Temple had been destroyed.

So, why would Nehemiah and Ezra make the statement:

Nehemiah 7:64-65 ⁶⁴ These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean *and excluded* from the priesthood. ⁶⁵ The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.

It appears to simply be a figure of speech which assumed this thing will never happen. It would be the same as you or I saying, this thing will happen as soon as hell freezes over. The assumption is it will never happen.

And so, in chapter 8 of Nehemiah we have a recount of the same event we saw in Ezra 3 where the feast of booths was being celebrated.

Ezra 3:1-4 ^{NAU} Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. ² Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. ³ So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. ⁴ They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and *offered* the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;

Nehemiah 8:5-17 ⁵ 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. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. ⁸ They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. ⁹ Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them. ¹³ Then on the second day the heads of fathers' *households* of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law. ¹⁴ They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵ So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of *other* leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." ¹⁶ So the people went out and brought *them* and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing.

Does anyone know what the significance of the feast of booths was for Israel?

Leviticus 23:40-43 ⁴⁰ 'Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. ⁴¹ 'You shall thus celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It *shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. ⁴² 'You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, ⁴³ so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'"

Notice that in Leviticus and in Nehemiah the feast of booths was not simply a reminder of how God brought Israel out of Egypt to

live in booths until they were brought into the Promised Land, but in the feast itself it anticipated the joy of being God's people as this was a 7 day party before the Lord.

In what sense do you and I in Christ celebrate the feast of booths today?

In the sense that every day is a day in which we are under the protection of the Lord as we are strangers and pilgrims in this world, but always with the anticipation that our complete and final rest is in Christ in whom we celebrate forever in His presence.

Yes we live in booths, that is we live in a temporary place as we await our reunification with the Lord, either as we depart this physical body and are present with the Lord, or as we are changed in the twinkling of an eye at His final return. In either case we know that we will one day be brought into the promised land of the new heavens and new earth where there will be perpetual celebration in His presence.

So, why would the Jews of Nehemiah's and Ezra's day desire to celebrate the feast of booths?

Because as the Lord conveyed through Moses in Lev.23:41, it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations to remind you that God brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Well, what does the land of Egypt represent for God's people today?

Leviticus 26:11-13 ¹¹ Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. ¹² I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that *you* would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Galatians 5:1 ^{AU 1} It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Our Egypt was the yoke of slavery to sin and its curse. We have been brought from darkness to light and given life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The number 7 is a number of completion or perfection even as the Lord rested on the seventh day; not that He was tired but that He

gloried in His completion of that perfect creation He spoke into existence which He deemed very good.

Celebrating 7 days in booths is a picture of being in the presence of God with joy and celebration as we remember from where we came, that is the Egypt of sin and bondage, and anticipate the ultimate coming into His presence.

Nehemiah 8:17-18 ¹⁷ The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. ¹⁸ He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day *there was* a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.

But then we come to chapter 9 and there appears to a 180 degree turn around from rejoicing to mourning.

Nehemiah 9:1-3 ^{NAU} Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. ² The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. ³ While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for *another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Why does their joy turn into mourning?

Despite the joy of knowing that God had brought them into the land and that their feasts pointed to their God and Deliverer, the reality is they are still a people who must deal with enemies around them and the pressures of living day by day with uncertainty.

You can celebrate all the feasts you want, and you can take time to party with family, friends and fellow Jews according to the law, but that doesn't automatically alleviate the truth that unless faith in God and His promises is at the center of your life, no religious exercise takes away the guilt of sin.

In fact, the entire 9th chapter of Nehemiah is dedicated to the history of Israel, from the time Abram was called out to their present state as it describes a stiff necked people who rebelled against their gracious and loving God.

But as we come to chapter 9 we see the Levites begin with prayer and it is a prayer of praise and adoration to God, not just the God of the Jews but the God who created all things.

Nehemiah 9:3-6 ³ While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for *another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. ⁴ Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani *and* Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. ⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah *and* Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise! ⁶ "You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.

A proper understanding of life with God must start with who God is and what He requires of His creatures, particularly His people. When we have this proper understanding of standing before our Creator in humble adoration and thanks, then and only then will be desire to love and serve Him all our days because He first loved us.

Unlike the Jews whose 7 days of feasting, as in the feast of booths, was in effect, and then who returned to the reality that God demanded obedience to the law that pointed out their sin, we continue our celebration now and forever because the booth we live in is the covering we have in Christ who is our righteousness.