

Survey of the Bible part 66 Nehemiah 9-13

The last time we were together we were addressing Israel ending their feast of Booths or Tabernacles for seven days which was a celebration before the Lord as it represented God bringing His people out from under the bondage of Egypt, which symbolizes the bondage of sin from which God's people are delivered through Christ.

The other aspect of the feast of booths, as it was celebrated during this time in Israel's history, is the looking forward to the final harvest and the living waters that Christ spoke of when He announced His purpose for this feast. We see this account in the gospel of John.

John 7:1-2 ^{NAU} After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. ² Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.

Later in this chapter we see Jesus now participating in this feast as He was actively fulfilling the law regarding this feast and He makes some amazing statements.

John 7:14-17 ¹⁴ But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to* teach. ¹⁵ The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ¹⁷ "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.

It is toward the end of this feast that we begin to see the significance of the Feast of Booths from Christ's perspective.

John 7:37-39 ³⁷ Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

What day in the Jewish calendar was Jesus referring to as He addressed the living waters being poured out?

The day of Pentecost which falls 50 days after the Passover. We know that Christ died on the day of Passover and on the first day of the week He rose from the dead. Depending on how you count His days in the grave, either full days or part days of 3, there would remain about 48 to 47 days after His resurrection before Pentecost.

How many days did the risen Christ spend with His disciples after His resurrection?

40 days.

So, approximately one week later is when Peter was addressing the crowds as the outward manifestation of the Spirit was poured out on God's people as they spoke in unknown languages as they were worshipping and declaring the greatness of God in this unknown language, which included many of the languages of people from all over the surrounding areas of Israel.

And so, when Jesus was celebrating on the last day of the feast of booths this is what He was foreshadowing. The Spirit of God being poured out and indwelling the people of God. But where do we see this in the feast of booths since the people were not commanded to express it through any aspect of water?

Well, the people were commanded to build temporary shelters or booths or tabernacles depending on your translation, as they celebrated the gathering in of the last crops of the year, but there was another group that had to celebrate this feast with water.

The priests were commanded by God to offer sacrifices according to His prescribed way for all of the holy days, be it Passover, Day of Atonement or in this case the sacrifices dedicated during the feast of booths.

As it pertained to burnt offerings this is what God said.

Leviticus 1:8-13 ⁸ 'Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. ⁹ 'Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. ¹⁰ 'But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect. ¹¹ 'He shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. ¹² 'He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange

them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. ¹³ "The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

The water was used to wash the entrails or the insides of the animal, then and only then could the burnt offering be brought before the Lord. It had to be ceremonially washed with water. This clean sacrifice represents the very pure and spotless sacrifice that would be a pleasing aroma to the Father.

What or who would this represent?

Christ Jesus who is our sacrifice. But it is the living water that our Lord spoke of on the last day of the feast of booths that was to come. Only as the sacrifice was offered and the smoke rose to the Father can the living water be dispensed because only as Christ rose from the dead and ascended to the Father can the Spirit be sent, who is the living water Christ spoke of.

It was the Helper or Spirit that Christ promised.

^{NAU} **John 14:16** "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

John 16:5-9 ⁵ "But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' ⁶ "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;

The feast of booths that the Jews celebrated during this time as Nehemiah records for us is the continuation of the promise that God would bring a people out of the land of bondage, out of sin's bondage, and it would be His harvest as He would bring them into the promised land and then enable His people to live and thrive in the Spirit as He would pour out His Spirit upon them as Jesus foretold.

But as we saw last time, very soon after the joyous celebration of the feast of booths, the people enter into a time of mourning as the leaders and teachers set a time aside to enter into God's presence

with the reading of the law, which can only take one back to the revelation that man's sin separates from God.

Nehemiah 9:1-2 ^{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.

There is nothing in the law that demanded such a day of humiliation on the 24th day of the 7th month. But, even under the law there was freedom to come before God during other times of the year to either celebrate or have times of humbling before God and this appears to be one of them.

It may very well be that although the people were commanded by God to celebrate the feast of booths, Nehemiah and Ezra felt it was necessary to get back to the business of dealing with the problems in the land with the surrounding peoples and that it was vital to humble themselves before the only God who saves.

And this is reflected in the national prayer that is offered to the Lord.

Nehemiah 9:6-7 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. ⁷ "You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham.

The entire prayer is a recap of Israel's journey as God brings them out of Egypt and the final judgment of God who dispersed them to their enemies because of their constant unfaithfulness to God.

Nehemiah 9:30 ³⁰ "However, You bore with them for many years, And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

And then the prayer is ended in this way which shows a desire to walk after the Lord and trust Him.

Nehemiah 9:31-38 ³¹ "Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and compassionate God. ³² "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and

lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day. ³³ "However, You are just in all that has come upon us; For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly. ³⁴ "For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them. ³⁵ "But they, in their own kingdom, With Your great goodness which You gave them, With the broad and rich land which You set before them, Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds. ³⁶ "Behold, we are slaves today, And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, Behold, we are slaves in it. ³⁷ "Its abundant produce is for the kings Whom You have set over us because of our sins; They also rule over our bodies And over our cattle as they please, So we are in great distress. ³⁸ "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document *are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.*"

Chapter 10 is a recount of the names of those leaders and their families who enter into this covenant to walk after the Lord.

All of chapter 11 then gives the names of those who chose to live in Jerusalem to work and rebuild the city. Most of the people lived in the outlying areas and it was determined that at least one in ten should dedicate themselves to live and work in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 11:1-2 ^{NAU} Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths *remained* in the *other* cities. ² And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

Chapter 12 is a list of all of the names of the priests and Levites who were responsible for leading the people into the presence of the Lord in both humiliation and celebration.

Toward the end of chapter 12 Nehemiah appointed two choirs to lead the people in worship as they stood on the walls surrounding the city.

Nehemiah 12:40-46 ⁴⁰ Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me; ⁴¹ and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets; ⁴² and Maaseiah,

Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah *their* leader, ⁴³ and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar. ⁴⁴ On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served. ⁴⁵ For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David *and* of his son Solomon. ⁴⁶ For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, *there were* leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.

As we come to the last chapter of Nehemiah it ends on a somber note because for all that God had done for the people in bringing them back to the land they understood that they were not set apart as their own nation, but still a people under the rule of another.

There were times of celebration and humbling but in the end they seemed to forget the promise they had made to the Lord. Nehemiah had to go back and take care of business with king Artaxerxes but when he heard that there were problems in Jerusalem he came back.

Nehemiah 13:6-8 ⁶ But during all this *time* I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king, ⁷ and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room.

But this was only the tip of the iceberg for the people had gone back to their old ways by not keeping the Sabbath, by not keeping their responsibilities to supporting the singers and Levites so that instead of them staying in Jerusalem to lead worship they went back to their homes outside of Jerusalem since many of them couldn't afford to stay there.

So, when Nehemiah gets back to Jerusalem he begins to fix all of these problems and then discovers that during his time away some

of the people marry foreigners so that the children can't even speak Hebrew but the language of the foreigners.

Nehemiah 13:23-25 ²³ In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon *and* Moab. ²⁴ As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. ²⁵ So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

And it would appear that this is the same account that Ezra spoke of in the last portion of his account.

Nehemiah 13:27-31 ²⁷ "Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?" ²⁸ Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me. ²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. ³⁰ Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, ³¹ and *I arranged* for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

And so ends the book of Nehemiah. He returns to make sure the people of God get back on track with the Lord as it seems it will be a never ending cycle of repentance and then falling back. But it's the Lord who mercifully continues to make sure we stay on track and by His grace He will finally bring us home.