

The Joy of Life Change

Nehemiah 8:9-18

I. Have We Responded to God's Word with a **SINCERE WORSHIP?**

1) Their Worship was Physical.

(v.6) – “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.”

- Now this is not **prescriptive** (that is, telling us a command); but rather **descriptive** (that is, telling us what happened). But it still gives us a great symbolism of their respect for the Word of God.

Verses on Lifting Hands in Worship:

Psalm 63:4 - Thus I will bless You while I live; **I will lift up my hands** in Your name.

Psalm 28:2 - Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, **When I lift up my hands** toward Your holy sanctuary.

Psalm 134:2 - **Lift up your hands** in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.

Psalm 141:2 - Let my prayer be set before You as incense, **The lifting up of my hands** as the evening sacrifice.

Psalm 143:6 - **I spread out my hands to You**; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Selah

Lamentations 2:19 - Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. **Lift your hands toward Him...**

1 Timothy 2:8 - I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, **lifting up holy hands**, without wrath and doubting;

2) Their Worship was Vocal.

(v.6) – Then all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!”

- It is firm, established, we assent, we agree.

- The repetition is for emphasis and reveals the intensity of their heart and affection for God.

3) Their Worship was Emotional.

(v.9) – “for all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.”

II. Have We Responded to God's Word with a **SIGNIFICANT LIFECHANGE?**

The Bible was not given just to inform, but to transform!

1) Hearing God's Word leads to conviction, which should lead to repentance.

(v.9) – “for **all the people wept**, when they heard the words of the Law.”

2) Repentance leads to forgiveness, which should result in joy.

(v.9) – “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**’...”

Warren Wiersbe says, “It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us.”

3) Joy brings strength, and strength aids in further obedience!

(v.10-12) – “Then he said to them, “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**.¹¹ So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.”¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions

4) Understanding and obedience brings blessing and victory!

and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.”

III. Have We Responded to God’s Word with a **SUBMISSIVE DEVOTION?**

(see v.13-18)

“When Ezra read from the book of the Law of God, the people rediscovered one of the requirements of the Law, the Feast of Booths (or Feast of Tabernacles), which is described in Leviticus 23:33-44. This feast, celebrated on the fifteenth day of the month of Tishrei (in September or October on our calendars) lasts seven days. It is named for the booths or tabernacles (Hebrew *sukkot*; fragile and temporary dwellings often covered with palm branches) that resembled the dwellings of the Israelites during their forty years of wandering after they left Egypt.”^a

Nehemiah 8:17—Was this feast not celebrated since Joshua’s time or was it celebrated later by Zerubbabel?

PROBLEM: According to this passage, the Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated by Israel “since the days of Joshua the son of Nun.” Yet, Ezra 3:4 declares that Zerubbabel and the Israelites “kept the Feast of Tabernacles” after they returned from the Babylonian captivity.

SOLUTION: The Nehemiah passage means there had been *nothing like this celebration* since Joshua’s day. It does not mean no one had ever celebrated this feast since Joshua’s day. Nehemiah’s celebration was unique in many ways. First, it was commemorated by “the whole congregation” (Neh. 8:17). Second, it was celebrated with “great gladness” (v. 17). Third, it was celebrated with a Biblethon, that is, with continual Bible reading for one week. Fourth, they celebrated it exactly as Moses had commanded, with a restored priesthood and temple (8:18; cf. 12:1ff). Nothing like this had occurred since Joshua’s day.^b

They said, “We haven’t done this in 1,000 years! You want us to make tents or booths? We don’t even have houses yet. We haven’t fortified the city inside the walls yet... **BUT... If God’s Word tells us to make booths, let’s make some booths. If God’s Word tells us to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, that’s what we’re going to do!**”

They didn’t explain the difficult text away – “Oh, that’s what they did in Joshua’s day, but that’s not for us today.” They could have said, “King David didn’t do it like this. King Solomon didn’t even do it like this.” The result was there was **“very great gladness” (8:17)! The happiest Christians are not those who continue to excuse away difficult passages in the Bible, but those who simply say, “I don’t understand all that I read in God’s Word, but that which I understand, I will live out with all my heart.” [See also James 1:22-25 and Matthew 7:24-27]**

^a Michael Youssef, *God, Help Me Rebuild My Broken World* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2016), 138.

^b Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 218.