



June 29, 2008

## *How Did They Miss That ?*

Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah the remnant of God's people returned to Judah, the walls were rebuilt, there was a reading of the Law and the observance of things that had not been done for a very long time was accomplished. One of the things that God commanded the Children of Israel to do was dwell in "booths" or tabernacles during the seventh month for seven days (**Lev 23.41-42**) to represent the deliverance and care of the Lord as they traveled toward the promised land. The feast of Tabernacles is mentioned in the New Testament as well (**John 7.2**). Notice what is recorded as Nehemiah leads the people in this spiritual renewal. *"And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness."* (**Nehemiah 8.17**). There are some interesting things that are related here. First of all is that fact that the observation of living in tabernacles had not been observed since the days of Joshua! Think about it. David was faithful to God and observed the Law. Hezekiah was faithful to the Lord and did much to restore the worship and practice of the Law as did Josiah. But none of them had observed the "feast of tabernacles" or booths. How did that happen? There is a mention of the provisions for those who served in the temple by Solomon but there is no real indication that he had observed this (**2 Chron 8.12-13**) although he had continued to offer the required sacrifices during that period. So we first have to question the leadership. It was required of kings when they were placed on the throne that they should write out a copy of the Law for themselves so that they would know it intimately (**Deut 17.18**). Had that been done? The second question has to do with the priests and Levites. Had they not reminded the people of these responsibilities? Apparently not, for if they had, the observation would have been kept. What about the people themselves? Had they not been mindful of the things that were required of them? The modern interpretation on the

part of some is that the Israelites were not a "literate" nation since they did not produce the poetry and literature that we find in other cultures. Does that mean that they were not skilled in these areas? No. they were commanded by God to write the law on their door posts and gates (**Deut 6.9, 11.20**) and were to teach them to their children diligently (**Deut 11.19**). Moses warned the people about neglect of the Law. *"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons..."* (**Deut 4.9**). Obviously this had not been done. God called this people to be a special nation, a nation of priests (**Ex 19.5**) and they had failed. Their failure eventually led to their destruction as they failed to keep the commands of the Lord. What can we learn from this episode? It is not enough to just "go to church". We have to be committed to living the way that God wants us to, and we have to be thinking of him every day. When we do that, assembling with the saints becomes a necessity that we cannot live without. It is not enough to have the Bible on a coffee table or bedside stand so that we are reminded of its presence. We have to pick it up, read it and seek to understand what is revealed there. We also have to put it into practice so that we are acceptable to God. It is not enough to have a good "preacher", "pastor" or anyone else that we look up to who "really knows the Bible". Understanding and obeying God's word is a personal responsibility. It is not enough to just introduce religion to the kids and hope that it sticks. Israel and Judah are examples of what happens when parents don't practice what God commands. The point is that we have to seek God, work to understand what he wants us to do and then put it into action. Otherwise we may find ourselves in the same shape as Israel and Judah. That is not where we want to be. They were warned and so are we. How can we miss the warnings?

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