

## A THOUSAND YEARS OF NEGLECT

**“The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this.” (Neh 8:17)**

Joshua, the son of Nun, was a contemporary of Moses. Ussher in his chronology states that Joshua died in 1,443 B.C. He was 110 years old at the time.

Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. After the walls were completed, Ezra began reading the book of the Law to the people of God. Nehemiah noted: **“They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded thorough Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month” (Neh. 8:14).** So, they decided to do what God commanded them to do. Nehemiah said, however, that they had not done this since the days of Joshua the son of Nun.

There were three major feasts that all Israelites were commanded to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Each feast had it's own major emphasis. It should not come as a surprise that the Feast of Tabernacles (or booths) involved tabernacles (or booths). Listen to Moses: **“Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so that your descendants will know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” (Lev 23:42-43)**

For forty years the Hebrew people wandered in the wilderness. Since there were no cities or towns there, each time they moved they had to erect a new little booth to live in. Obviously, these temporary dwellings were inadequate and uncomfortable. It was an experience, however, that God didn't want the Hebrews to forget. That's why He commanded that for seven days each year, the people were to live like their ancestors did in the wilderness. That is the point! They were to get out of their nice, comfortable homes, and live in uncomfortable little booths made out of palm leaves and tree branches.

Nehemiah said they had not done this since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun. Some have suggested that either Nehemiah was mistaken, or some scribe had inadvertently inserted the “son of Nun” into the text. They cannot believe that something God so clearly commanded was overlooked and neglected for a thousand years. Yet, for those of us who believe the Bible, there is no alternative. The Bible is to be believed and the scholars are not. Bible believers therefore conclude that the Israelites had not correctly observed this feast since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.

The text is made even more incredible by the fact that during this thousand year period there were many great reformers who called their wayward nation back to God. Samuel, for example, was a Levite, a prophet, and a Judge. David was a man after God's own heart. Elijah and Elisha were fearless prophets. Hilkiah discovered the book of the Law during the reign of Josiah. Isaiah and Jeremiah were godly men who suffered for saying what God wanted them to say. Yet, for some strange reason, the Israelites had not correctly observed this feast since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.

This bad habit was established after the death of Joshua. Maybe the first year it was too cold and the next year it was too hot. Perhaps on the third year too many people were sick. At any rate, for whatever reason, the people concluded that it wasn't necessary to literally obey God. They figured that they could worship God from inside the house just as well as they could from inside a booth. Consequently, they placed their comfort and convenience above their obedience.

Over the course of time children and grandchildren came to interpret the Scriptures in the same way their parents did. They either concluded that the Bible didn't means what it said, or that the message of Scripture didn't apply to them. Those many years in Babylonian captivity, however, awakened in the people of God a sensitivity to Him that had not been experienced for many generations. Note that when they obeyed God “their joy was very great” (Neh. 8:17). Our joy will also be great when we cast aside the traditions of men and do what God commands!