

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal a passage of Scripture that reveals how dedicated and intelligent people can overlook the plain teaching of the Bible. Our text is: **"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) Let's take a closer look at this passage.

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. So basically a thousand years had gone by from the day that Joshua died and the time that Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. After the walls were completed, Ezra began reading the book of the Law to the people of God. At that time the people of God made an amazing discovery: **"They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month"** (Neh. 8:14). So, when they discovered this long forgotten truth, they wisely decided to do what God commanded them to do. That's when Nehemiah noted 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 (Ex. 23:14-17). Each feast had its own major emphasis. It should not be a surprise that the Feast of Tabernacles (or booths) involved tabernacles (or booths). Listen to the words of Moses as he explained how to properly observe the "Feast of Tabernacles". Remember, this was written a thousand years earlier. **"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) This command is so obvious that it is hard to understand how anyone could miss it.

For forty years, as you know, the Hebrew people wandered in the wilderness. Since there were no cities or towns in the wilderness, each time they moved they had to erect a new little booth in which to live. Obviously, these temporary dwellings were crude 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, they were to live in booths 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. That's why this feast was called "The Feast of Booths". Modern Jews call this feast "Sukkot" which is the Hebrew word for a "booth" or "temporary shelter".

Nehemiah noted that they had not done this since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun. Some have suggested, without evidence, that either Nehemiah was mistaken, or some scribe had incorrectly inserted the "son of Nun" into the text. They cannot comprehend that something so clearly commanded was overlooked and neglected for a thousand years. Yet, for those who believe the Bible, there is no alternative. The Bible is to be believed! We therefore conclude that the Israelites had not correctly observed this feast since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.

This text is made even more incredible by the fact that during these thousand years 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 prophet and a man after God's own heart. Elijah and Elisha were fearless prophets who rescued the people from idolatry. Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the book of the Law during the reign of King Josiah. Isaiah and Jeremiah were godly men who called their nation to repentance. Yet, incredibly, the Israelites had not correctly observed the Feast of Tabernacles 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 decided on their own that they could worship God from inside the house just as well as they could from inside a

booth. Consequently, they replaced the command of God with their own ideas. This, as you know, precisely represents the original sin. God said not to eat of the tree and they decided to do what they wanted to do.

Over the course of time this act of disobedience regarding tabernacles apparently became a "tradition". It is not surprising that children and grandchildren came to interpret the Scriptures in the same way their parents did. They either concluded that the Bible didn't mean what it said, or that the message of Scripture no longer applied to them. The seventy years in Babylonian captivity, however, had awakened in the people a renewed need to obey God. They came to realize that their 70 years in captivity was directly associated with their disobedience. Remember, God had commanded them to let their land "rest" every seven years and they didn't do it. Apparently, for 490 years they had refused to obey God regarding the Sabbatical Year. That's why the captivity lasted 70 years so the land could enjoy its sabbaths (2 Chron. 36:20-21; Jer. 25:12). Note that when the people obeyed God in the days of Nehemiah, "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!

A more modern illustration of discovering forgotten truth involves Martin Luther. Luther was an Augustinian priest in the Roman Catholic Church. As you know, he sparked a reformation by discovering the long forgotten doctrine of justification by faith. It is not necessary in your Bible study, however, to discover some major doctrine overlooked by the masses. It is essential, however, that you discover in the Bible the secret to your own salvation.

We need to study the Bible like we are looking for a treasure. Thousands look for diamonds and other precious stones at a 911 acre state park in Pike County, Arkansas. For your information it is the only diamond mine in the world open to the public. 37.5 acres of this park are regularly plowed to help visitors in their search. Remarkably, on average, two diamonds are found each day. A special find was made in 2015 when Bobbie Oskarso discovered a diamond believed to be the largest diamond ever discovered in America. That diamond features a 147 facet, teardrop cut triolette shape (the first of its kind) and is both internally flawless and a "D" color. It is valued at \$1,000,000.

We have a saying that "diamonds are forever", but they are not! Like all other earthly possessions they will be left behind when we die. By comparison, salvation really is forever. It is an eternal treasure! Jesus compared salvation to a pearl of great price which is so valuable that you would be wise to trade your every earthly possession to obtain it (Matt. 13:45-46). This eternal treasure of your own salvation is waiting to be discovered on the pages of the Holy Bible! I am praying that you will search for it until you find it!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce