

RUSSELL SANDERS
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THE JOY OF THE LORD

We have often sung the song ***"The Joy of the Lord is My Strength."*** We also speak it occasionally. The song itself is unfortunately taken to ridiculous and unbiblical shenanigans such as "if you want joy, you must clap for it" or "jump for it" or other such demonstrative actions. That has nothing to do with the "Joy of the Lord."

The saying comes from Nehemiah 8:10, ***"for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*** It is the Hebrew Word "chedrah" which is used only twice out of the ninety times "joy" is used in the Old Testament. The other place is Ezra 6:16 where it says that those Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity and had just completed the rebuilding of the Temple and gathered together, that they ***"kept the dedication of this house (temple) of God with joy."***

The occasion of joy in Nehemiah 8:10 came when the priest Ezra brought out the "book of the law of Moses," which was their "bible" of that time. He then read it to the congregation who were hearing the written word of God for the first time in their lifetime. The people wept when they heard how they had transgressed the law of Moses.

However, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites said to them in Nehemiah 8:9-10, ***"this day is holy unto the LORD your God. Mourn not, nor weep...go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our LORD, neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."***

Nehemiah 8:12 tells us that their joy ***came "because they understood the words (of the Lord) that were declared unto them."***

Joy: a glad feeling; a state of happiness, especially the bliss of heaven.

The "joy of the LORD" is a state of peace and contentment that comes from knowing the word of the Lord and that His word is true and for us and is within us. It is not mirth, giddiness, laughter, or exhilaration. It is our gladness that we are in Him. That glad confidence gives us strength. That is the meaning of "joy" in these two passages. It is found nowhere else in the O.T. In the N.T. it comes with the peace we have in Jesus for He is the "living word" within us.

Ira Stanphill's song ***"Happiness is the Lord"*** sums it up in the chorus:

"Real joy is mine, no matter if teardrops start; I've found the secret, it's Jesus in my heart."