

God's Three Pilgrimage Feasts

As of this writing, we're at that time of year now where Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are only a short way off. Just over a month from now.

It seems appropriate, then, to examine how we keep these days. Did you know that God gives us almost exactly the same instructions for Passover / Unleavened Bread and Pentecost as He does for the Feast of Tabernacles?

Let's get started!

When I say "almost exactly the same instructions," that obviously implies that there IS some difference. The main difference is that God commanded the Israelites to dwell in booths or temporary dwellings during the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:42-44; Neh. 8:14-17; Hos. 12:9), whereas we find no such command for Passover.

But the reason God commanded Israel to dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles is most interesting: "All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:42-43).

When did God bring Israel out of Egypt? At Passover! The Feast of Tabernacles harkens back to Passover.

As we know today, Passover is the foundation of everything else, for Yeshua/Jesus died as our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) on the afternoon of "the Preparation Day of the Passover" (John 19:14), that is, Nisan 14th. Without Passover, then, nothing else would matter. Without Jesus' sacrifice, we'd be dead men walking. Unforgiven sinners awaiting the doom of eternal judgment.

Now, we already know that we're to keep Passover / Unleavened Bread by putting leaven (symbolic of sin) out of our homes and eating nothing leavened for seven days (Ex. 12:18-20; Ezek. 45:21).

In the leadup to Passover, we're also commanded to examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28) and repent of our sins. As 1 Cor. 5:7-8 tells us, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Does God expect anything else of us during this time? This brings us back to the beginning: God gives us nearly the same instructions for Passover and Pentecost as He does for Tabernacles.

Let's turn to Ex. 23:14-17, where God tells us,

14 Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year:

15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

16 and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

17 Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

The Feast of Harvest, of course, is another name for Pentecost, and the Feast of Ingathering is another name for the Feast of Tabernacles.

So God commanded His people, not just to assemble together on the Sabbath and seven annual Holy Days as we normally do, but also to appear before Him three times a year. This command is repeated again in Ex. 34:23: "Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel."

Again, in Deut. 16:16, "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed."

Does this mean God wants only men to appear before Him? No. Let's take a look at how God's Word shows us to apply this command.

This is how God tells us to worship Him when we appear before Him: "And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you" (Deut. 12:12).

Again, in Deut. 16:11, God gives these commands for celebrating the Feast of Pentecost: "You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide."

When God tells us to appear before Him at Passover / Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, He means all of us! We're to rejoice before Him and give thanks for all that He has done for us.

Why? If we continue reading where we left off in Deut. 16:11, the very next verse tells us: "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes" (Deut. 16:12).

"You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt." Again, it harkens back to Passover and God's deliverance. The things that happened to Israel "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11).

We were slaves of sin. God delivered us through the death of His Son as our Passover Lamb. This is why we rejoice before Him!

Throughout the Bible, we see that God's people did indeed gather together and appear before Him at His temple for Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The most common example that we have, though, is actually Passover.

In 2 Chron. 30, we learn that the people of Judah and all who "humbled themselves" out of Israel assembled before God for Passover and Unleavened Bread. "The whole assembly of Judah rejoiced, also the priests and Levites, all the assembly that came from Israel, the sojourners who came from the land of Israel, and those who dwelt in Judah" (2 Chron. 30:25).

In 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chron. 35, the people again assembled before God at His temple for Passover and Unleavened Bread.

In 2 Chron. 15:10, the people of Judah assembled before God in the third month. Why the third month? We aren't told specifically that it was for a Holy Day, but we do know that Pentecost is in the third month. Furthermore, the people rededicated themselves to God and "entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul" (2 Chron. 15:12).

In a prophecy found in Zech. 14:16-19, we find,

16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

17 And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.

18 If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Throughout the New Testament, also, we find Jesus, His family, and His disciples gathering together to appear before God the Father at these three annual pilgrimage feasts.

In Luke 2:41-43, we read, “His [Jesus’] parents went to Jerusalem **every year** at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem.”

What “custom of the feast” was this? Was it one that Joseph and Mary made up? Was it one that the Jews had invented? No! It was what God commanded, as we have already seen!

Again, when Jesus was an adult and had begun His ministry, we read, “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem” (John 2:13). Again, in John 6, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for Passover. In John 7, He went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. And, of course, at the end of His earthly life, when He was to be our Passover Lamb, Jesus again went up to Jerusalem.

In Acts 2, God poured out His Spirit on those assembled together in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. In Acts 20:16, the Apostle Paul “was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.”

Now, there is no longer a temple in Jerusalem, nor is one needed. Jesus Christ fulfilled not only the Passover sacrifice, but also all other blood sacrifices. “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11-12).

Therefore, we no longer need to assemble at the earthly Jerusalem. When we assemble together and appear before God on His Holy Days, we appear before Him, symbolically, at His heavenly temple in the heavenly Jerusalem.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24).

To wrap this up, I want to leave you with a few thoughts. A few questions for you to answer for yourselves.

We’ve seen that God gives us the same instructions for each of His three annual pilgrimage feasts, that He tells us to appear before Him and rejoice before Him at Passover / Unleavened Bread, at Pentecost, and at Tabernacles.

Given this, do you think it’s appropriate not to do so? Do you think it’s appropriate not to assemble before Him every day during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles? Do you think it’s appropriate to work during these days and treat them like any other day, as so many do?

Do you think that’s the spirit of God’s feast days? Do you think that’s how we rejoice before Him and give thanks for saving our lives and for all else that He has done for us?

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