

“And this Gospel” shall be preached... Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

The Feast of Tabernacles

We in the Church probably have more money at our disposal at the Feast of Tabernacles to spend on ourselves and our families than any other time of the year. So some are beginning to look at the Feast of Tabernacles as a vacation primarily, rather than realizing its basic purpose.

The Feast of Tabernacles has a particular purpose for us.

Instituted by God

Let's turn back to Exodus 19 where God began preparing the people for the Ten Commandments. Beginning in verse 10: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments [this was for something significant], and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people . . . whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death" (RSV). And he warned them again in verse 15, ". . . Be ready by the third day . . ." And in verse 16, ". . . the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled."

God was getting their attention. He emphasized with His presence the importance of what He was going to give to the children of Israel.

Of course He gave them the Ten Commandments, but He had a lot more to add, which they were unwilling at that time to receive (Exodus 20:18-19). This additional knowledge He had to give to Moses to pass on.

God mentions the annual festival seasons in Exodus 23:14-16: "Three times [or three seasons] in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread . . . the feast of harvest [or Pentecost], of the first fruits of your labor . . . the feast of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in all out from the field the fruit of your labor."

And of course they were commanded eventually to go up to Jerusalem, to set aside 10 percent of their income, and, if necessary, if the way was too far, to turn that produce into money to use for the Feast of Tabernacles at the place where God had set His name.

And so "three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God." God through Moses taught the children of Israel something new, something significant, something that has a great deal of meaning for you and me, that goes way beyond the ability to spend 10 percent of our incomes and to have more physically at the Feast of Tabernacles. It has everything to do with our stability as a Church and it has everything to do with our stability as individuals.

Importance of the feasts

The Feast of Tabernacles is not just a vacation. If the Feast falls into that kind of mold in your mind, shake yourselves out of it because you're not going to get the benefit from the Feast that God intends you to have.

Those people of the nation of Israel did not understand God's plan at all. For Israel itself did not keep the Feast of Tabernacles or any of the annual Holy Days for very long. And that amounted to a national disaster — for the Holy Days are vital. Along with the weekly Sabbath they are at the heart and core of our worship to God, of our understanding of God's purpose for mankind.

Apart from these annual Sabbath days, you and I can not understand God's plan. We wouldn't have anything to tag various prophecies to. But we're able to look at the annual Holy Days and renew them, revive them and relive them year after year after year and

come to understand in greater detail, and individually to greater depth, the reason we're here, the purpose of life and the plan of God. We ought to be seeking as individuals and families to understand this segment of God's plan in this fall's Holy Days — Trumpets, Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Changed by Jeroboam

In I Kings 11:26 we find that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Solomon's servant, lifted up his hand against the king. And in verse 31, the prophet Ahijah said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am about to rend the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes." So here we are at the time of the division between Judah and Israel.

Jeroboam, new leader of the 10 tribes of Israel, began to worry about his people coming back to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles. He feared if they obeyed God's commands concerning the annual festivals they would look to Jerusalem again, and perhaps he would lose his rulership.

Instead of looking to God and depending upon Him to solidify the nation under his rulership, he began to look at it physically and carnally and to try to devise some way by which he could at least in figure keep the laws of God, but keep people from going to Jerusalem.

In chapter 12, beginning in verse 28: "So the king took counsel [about what he could do concerning the Feast in Jerusalem], and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt . . . And this thing became a [national] sin, for the people went to the one at Bethel and to the other as far as Dan . . ."

"And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah . . . in the seventh month.

Now this didn't mean that the nation of Israel was still keeping God's Festival, but at a different time. The seventh month was the time designated by God. You can't change the day and expect to come up with the same result. Never after this to my knowledge have the 10 tribes kept a Feast of Tabernacles to God.

But Judah kept those days, and there were periods of restoration in Judah. They still have a remnant of it in Israel today during the Feast of Tabernacles. Many Jews build temporary dwellings. You wonder exactly what they are when you first see the structures — usually a metal frame that looks like a child's dollhouse, to which palm fronds and other greenery are strapped. Some people even live in temporary dwellings if they're particularly conservative.

If all the rulers of Israel down to this day had maintained the understanding of the annual Holy Days and had kept them, even as there were revivals from time to time in Judah, where might we be today? It would certainly be a different world. History would have been rewritten so many different times and in so many different ways, it wouldn't be recognizable.

Restored in Judah

Mentioned in the book of Ezra and prominently in the book of Nehemiah are annual Holy Days. When God's Work is being done you will find these annual Sabbath days being kept throughout history.

That's why we keep them today. Not just to blithely go through 10 percent of our incomes, to enjoy steaks, or to relax on the beaches of Hawaii — those things

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don't make any difference — the purpose of these festivals is spiritual.

(The speaking schedule is the important thing. And it's going to be every bit as good at Wisconsin Dells, Wis., as it will at any of the resort sites. We'll make sure of that regardless of how many ministers are there, whether many churches are assigned to an area or few.)

To do the Work, to finish and complete the Work that we have in this age, we've got to cling to these days and be blessed, just as occurred throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah when they kept those days.

Returning from Babylon about 538 B.C., Zerubbabel and Joshua and their company began to restore the worship of God on the site of desolated Jerusalem. When the foundation of the temple was laid, they had just kept the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:1-8). But apparently for another 15 years nothing more happened. About 520, the prophet Haggai stirred them up and, lo and behold, right after the Feast of Tabernacles the temple was suddenly completed (see Haggai 2).

Later Ezra came (about 465 B.C.) and found they had let down again. They had begun to intermarry with Gentile nations around them and lost some of the knowledge of God's law. Finally Nehemiah came because the city walls were still unrepaired. The temple was there but they hadn't done anything more. They had lost interest in the work they had been commissioned to do, which God had opened the door for them to do, because the people vacillated, weren't close to God anymore.

They prospered only when they had strong spiritual leaders (such as Haggai and Zechariah) for a decade or two.

Nehemiah preached to encourage them. And the wall was built in just 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15).

Feasts kept by Nehemiah

" . . . And when the seventh month had come, the children of Israel [the people of Judah were now beginning to call themselves Israel] were in their towns. And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel" (Nehemiah 7:73; 8:1).

Now you don't find this kind of sudden wholehearted spiritual turnaround without teaching, admonition, encouragement and example. It was caused by Ezra and Nehemiah. Verse 2: "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month," the Feast of Trumpets. "And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday . . ."

Do you see an amazing similarity between the Church of God, our services today, and the kind of services held by Ezra and Nehemiah? Don't we meet from morning until midday?

Beginning in verse 5, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood."

"And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

And then in verse seven, ". . . [he] helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense" — the meaning, with interpretation, discussing it, preaching, giving a sermon — "so that the people understood the reading."

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The Feast

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“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, This day [the Feast of Trumpets] is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.”

People prepared for Feast

They had been prepared for the Feast by Ezra and Nehemiah. They had participated successfully in God's work. Their ears, their minds were opened to hear what God had to say. And when they heard the words of the law as a group — for some of these people it was the first time — they wept.

“Then he said to them [as is true in the fall festival season], Go your way, eat the fat [not the actual fat, but the meat from fat animals] and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared . . . We do the same thing. We have extra second-tithe assistance for people who have nothing prepared because of some problem or other. “For this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (verse 10).

And so then on the second day they continued to read, Nehemiah 8:14: “And they found it written in the law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month . . .” And they did it. One of the greatest Feasts of Tabernacles in the history of Israel or Judah.

“ . . . For from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun [all the way back to the entrance into the promised land under Joshua] to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing” (verse 17).

“And day by day, from the first day to the last day” — and we do the same thing — services every day, though some people think we should just go to services on the annual Holy Days and party and feast during the rest of the time with 10 percent of our income.

The purpose for the Feast is the services, then party and fellowship in the afternoon or the evening with great gladness. Put those services first. Don't stay up so late that you wake up the next morning too tired to get up and to go to services.

“ . . . They kept the feast [notice how it is stated] seven days.” The Feast of Tabernacles is a seven-day Feast. “And on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance” (verse 18). And we do exactly what Ezra and Nehemiah did, now

so many hundreds of years ago.

20th-century Feast

Now turn back to Revelation 3 to the eras of the Church. Notice in verse 8 what characterizes this, our period of time: “I know your works [there are works for us to do]. Behold I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut . . .” There are obstacles, but we are able to overcome them by God's Spirit in us, and the fact that regardless of what the opposition is, God will prepare the way or open the door and enable us to do what is to be done.

This year the Feast of Tabernacles will be observed at over 70 Festival sites in English, French, German and Spanish. Also this year for the first time, Mr. Armstrong is going to be speaking via 16-mm. film at every Festival site on earth. It's being translated from English into German, French and Spanish, so for the first time he will speak to virtually all of the people in the Worldwide Church of God.

God says, “I know that you have but little power.” Sure, so did Ezra and Nehemiah as individuals. So did Zerubbabel, so did Haggai and Zechariah. But they had God's blessings because they clung to God's laws, and they kept those festivals.

“And yet you have kept my word and not denied my name.”