

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-08-24—DAYS OF REJOICING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles are nearly upon us. Collectively, they are called the Feast of Ingathering<sup>1</sup>:

EXODUS 23:14-16 “**Three times you shall keep a feast** to Me [*the LORD*] 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.**

The Feast of Harvest, aka Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of Ingathering are both harvest seasons as evident by their titles. *Harvest* is the act of reaping or cutting a mature crop whereas *ingathering* is when the crops are gathered *after* they are reaped. Both require mankind’s works but the success or failure is dependent upon God. For that reason, the Feast of Ingathering and in particular, the Feast of Tabernacles, has a special emphasis:

LEVITICUS 23:39-41 ‘Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month [*Feast of Tabernacles*], **when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast [of Tabernacles]** of the LORD for seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. 40 ‘And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and **you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.** 41 ‘You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Of all the feasts, God only *commands* His people to REJOICE during the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the year. More importantly, they are to rejoice BEFORE Him! Why is the Feast of Tabernacles a time of rejoicing? Are the first two festival seasons somber occasions? No, in fact, the ancient Israelites kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread twice when Hezekiah began to reign after succeeding the wicked King Ahaz. Notice what happened after Hezekiah cleansed the Temple and restored the Levites and priests, the Law of God, and the festivals:

2 CHRONICLES 30:21-23 So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the **Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness [rejoicing];** and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, *singing* to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. 22 And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD; and **they ate throughout the**

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<sup>1</sup> Also Exod. 34:22.

**feast seven days**, offering peace offerings and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. 23 **Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness [rejoicing].**

The ancient Israelites rejoiced when they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread because Hezekiah brought them out from under the curses they were under with wicked King Ahaz. But GOD'S *command* to rejoice is only upon the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of the year:

DEUTERONOMY 16:13-15 “You shall observe the **Feast of Tabernacles seven days**, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. 14 “And **you shall rejoice in your feast**, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. 15 “Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your **God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.**

Here you can see that the blessing of God for the ancient Israelites was upon “all your produce” and “all the work of your hands.” Only if God blessed them would there be abundance at the end of the year when crops, vineyards, fruits, and olives are reaped and gathered into the storehouses. But God's blessings were dependent upon them obeying Him and the Law of the Covenant:

DEUTERONOMY 30:9-10 “**The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good.** For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, 10 “**if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes** which are written in this Book of the Law, *and* **if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.**

Receiving such a bounty meant that the ancient Israelites COULD rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles instead of having leanness. The Feast of Tabernacles was the time that God appointed for them to partake of the abundance of His blessings:

DEUTERONOMY 14:22-26 “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. 23 “And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24 “But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry *the tithe*, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, 25 “then you shall exchange *it* for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 26 “And you shall spend that money for **whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice**, you and your household.

It is easy to overlook the fact that the crops at the end of the summer were absolutely the deciding factor between lean and bountiful times. Without an abundant harvest and ingathering, it would be impossible to have a Feast of Tabernacles where they could have “whatever your heart desires.”

Today, however, few consider the amazing abundance that literally overflows the storehouses. There is so much food that no one gives it a second thought. It is estimated that the USA alone discards 60 million tons each year. Worldwide, the number is 2,500 million TONS. That is the equivalent of 20 MILLION MILLION (20 trillion—twelve zeros) quarter pound hamburgers each year. That is enough food to supply every one of the estimated 735 *million* starving people in the world with 100 HAMBURGERS every single day of the year! And that is just from the food that is WASTED or DISCARDED!! All of this incredible abundance was because Abraham was faithful and God promised to bless his descendants:

GENESIS 17:4-7 “As for Me [*the LORD*], behold, **My covenant is with you [Abraham]**, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 “**I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you**, and kings shall come from you. 7 “And **I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

GENESIS 22:15-18 Then the Angel of the LORD called to **Abraham** a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: “**By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD**, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— 17 “**blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants** as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 “**In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed**, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Only during the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1852 and the Great Depression of 1929–1939 did anyone in the USA, Britain, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, etc. die of hunger in recent history. Even WW2 was a time of rationing, not starvation. Whether someone is wealthy or in the economic lower class, all have abundant and affordable food. There is not a single grocery store that does not have fully stocked shelves. (Empty shelves during COVID were caused by intentionally choking off the distribution of food, not a lack of it.) No one goes hungry. Too many are so used to having “whatever your heart desires” throughout the year (not just once a year) that some will think it is catastrophic when a store runs out of beer, chips (crisps), and dip during the World Cup or Superbowl. God truly did “open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing **that there will not be room enough to receive it.**” (Mal. 3:10). The amount of food in the world is more than there are people to eat it (even if many still go hungry).

When the ancient Israelites were blessed with an abundant harvest and ingathering at the end of the year, they truly REJOICED because they had food for the next year. Today, that thought never even crosses our minds. Perhaps that is why the

ancient Israelites rejoiced during that Feast of Unleavened Bread when Hezekiah began his reign. During the reign of King Ahaz they were likely under the curses of God and knew that turning back to Him would once again bring blessings of abundance at the Feast of Tabernacles:

DEUTERONOMY 28:15, 17, 38-40, 42, 47 “But it shall come to pass, **if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you** today, that **all these curses will come upon you and overtake you**: ... 17 “Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. 18 “Cursed *shall be* the ... produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. ... 38 “You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. 39 “You shall plant vineyards and tend *them*, but you shall neither drink *of* the wine nor gather the *grapes*; for the worms shall eat them. 40 “You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint *yourself* with the oil; for your olives shall drop off. ... 42 “Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land. ... 47 “Because **you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything**,

Notice verse 47. The curses of Deuteronomy 28 come upon the nation that does NOT serve God with **joy for the abundance of everything!**

The Feast of Tabernacles coincides with the late summer harvest, a time when people will KNOW and SEE God’s blessing upon them. The Feast of Tabernacles is AFTER the ingathering of the harvest at the end of the year for people to “eat there before the LORD your God, and ... **rejoice**” in that abundance.

I hope that you, brethren, keep the Feast of Tabernacles being mindful of God’s immeasurable blessings of abundance. Who among us can say they have ever gone hungry because of a lack of food? The continuous abundance over the last 100 years could lead some to be blind to the fact that they have “whatever your heart desires” everyday of the year! In fact, God’s people today have never known anything but exceptional abundance; so much so, that there is literally not enough room to receive it all.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a time to REJOICE before God for these blessings. He wants us to partake of the abundant pleasures of this life with thanksgiving, praise, worship, and singing. All He asks is that we obey Him and come BEFORE Him at the Feast of Tabernacles, acknowledging that the exceeding abundance we have all year long is because of the works of HIS hands.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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