

Thanksgiving Today

(Examining the Days of Fasting by Zechariah)

Did King Hezekiah do the right thing? The worship of Yahweh the Mighty One of Israel was in shambles. Pagan worship abounded while the worship of Yahweh floundered. Hezekiah started out correctly, but did he overstep his bounds later in his exuberance to please Yahweh and the people? He was determined to restore the worship of Yahweh and even saw to it there was music and singing of the Psalms. So the service of the house of Yahweh again was set in order, according to 2 Chronicles 30.

Hezekiah had cleansed the Temple and invited Israel and Judah, as well as Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover unto Yahweh, the Elohim of Israel (2 Chron. 30:4-5). They had not kept the Passover for a long time, so proclamation was made from Dan to Beersheba, to come and join the families at Jerusalem for Passover.

For [there were] many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one [that was] not clean, to sanctify [them] unto Yahweh. For a multitude of the people, [even] many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the Passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Yahweh pardon every one, 2 Chronicles 30:17-18 (ASV used throughout).

The gathered company of Israelites rejoiced in restoring the celebration and feasting of Passover. The eradication of pagan (“leaven”) sacrifices and uncleanness was already started (2 Chron. 29:16), and the pagan altars were demolished and discarded in the brook Kidron (30:14).

And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of Yahweh: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to Yahweh Elohim of their fathers, 2 Chronicles 30:22.

Continued Blessings

So joyful and happy were these dedicated worshippers, they desired the blessings of Yahweh to continue. All the assembly then decided to keep another seven days of Unleavened Bread. They did not keep again the Passover which is a separate service preceding the seven days of the Feast.

And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept [other] seven days with gladness, 2 Chronicles 30:23.

The Israelites were overjoyed in being able to worship Yahweh as He had instructed Moses years ago. The decision was a human response to the joy and peace of mind in obeying Yahweh. Solomon himself would rejoice over the thrilling and joyful reassurance the people experienced:

So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel [there was] not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and

blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came [up] to His holy dwelling place, [even] unto heaven, 2 Chronicles 30:26-27.

Israel was commanded to keep only seven days of unleavened bread according to Yahweh's word (Lev. 23:6). However, due to the enthusiasm of the Levites and the people, it was decided to add seven more days of Unleavened Bread to retain the joy and memory of the first seven days of their joyful time. Did these Israelites break the law by adding seven more days to the seven Yahweh had already legislated? Not according to the above verses!

No Reprimand

Yahweh heard the blessing of the people and nowhere do we find a rebuke for making these additional seven days a time of worship. As we will see, certain man-made times of worship are acceptable to Yahweh. Hezekiah had 15 days of worship with Unleavened Bread and Yahweh heard it in His dwelling place with no rebuke!

There are those who criticize our keeping the Passover memorial with Unleavened Bread, and then observe the following seven days of Unleavened Bread, making a total of eight days of eating Unleavened Bread, which is correct as these are separate observances. Their error is they merge Passover into the days of Unleavened Bread partaking of the Passover on the 15th *Abib* and not the 14th as commanded. Nowhere does the Bible teach Passover is to be eaten on the 15th *Abib*, but on *Abib* 14 (Num. 9:1-5; 10-14). See our study, *Why Passover is NOT a High Day*.

Does Yahweh Condemn Recalling History?

Most Jews are acutely aware of the following four landmarks of their history, which were sad memories of the calamities that befell a people of Yahweh. Yahweh seems to be speaking with deep sympathy and adds a note of future hope. Four fasts are mentioned here, none of which is demanded of Yahweh, but these were carried out according to the will of the flesh through human demands:

Thus saith Yahweh of hosts; The fast of the fourth [month], and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace, Zechariah 8:19.

Bullinger's Companion Bible gives an excellent explanation of these four fasts and where found (page 1287, Zech. 8:19 note).

- The fourth month. The ninth of Tammuz (Jer. 52:6-7) when the city of Jerusalem was broken up (Jer. 52:12-13).

Note ***Gill's Commentary***: The fast of the fourth [month]; the month Tammuz, which answers to June: this fast was kept on the ninth day of the month, on account of the city of Jerusalem being broken up on that day as it is said (2 Kings 25:3-4; Jer. 39:2, 52:6-7), though Kimchi says this was on the seventeenth day of that month, as also says the Mishna; on which day a fast was kept likewise, for the breaking of the two tables of the law on that day: the reconciliation of this with the above Scriptures is attempted in the Talmud by observing, that the Scripture speaks of the first Temple, the Mishna of the second Temple:

- The fifth. On the tenth of *Ab* when the Temple and the houses were burnt (Jer. 53:12-13).

Gill: The fast of the fifth; the month *Ab*, which answers to July [now August], on the tenth of which the city was burnt (Jer. 52:12-13), but the fast on account of it was kept on the ninth day; see Zechariah 7:3 on which day the Jews say that both the first and second Temple were destroyed, Neither was taken, and the city ploughed.

- The seventh (third of *Tisri*, when Gedaliah was slain by Ishmael (Jer. 40:8; 41:1-2, 15-18).

The fast of the seventh; the month *Tisri*, which answers to September; on the third of this month a fast was kept on account of the murder of Gedaliah; see Zechariah 7:5 and on the tenth day of the same was the day of Atonement, which was the grand fast; see Acts 27:9.

- The tenth. Tenth of *Tebeth*. When the king of Babylon set his face against Jerusalem (Ezek. 24:1-2).

Gill: The fast of the tenth; the month *Tebeth*; which answers to December, on the tenth day of which the city of Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar; and this fast was kept on that account (Jer. 52:4).

Now of all these fasts, Yahweh, by the prophet, says, they shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; that is, there shall be no occasion for them; but, on the contrary, such plenty of good things, both temporal and spiritual, shall be had, that, instead of them, rather festivals should be kept with the greatest cheerfulness, joy, and gladness. So Maimonides says, that all these fasts shall cease in the times of the Messiah, with all others, which will be times of joy and gladness.

Therefore, love the truth and peace; love to speak truth, and execute the judgment of peace (Zech. 8:16) or express by words and deeds love to Messiah Who is the way, the truth, and the life; and also is our Peace, the Peacemaker, and Peace giver; and on these accounts, as well as on others, is greatly to be loved: likewise the Evangel, which is the word of truth, and the Evangel of peace; which contains nothing but truth, and is the ministry of reconciliation, and is to be loved on that account; and even peace with men is no further to be loved and sought after than as it is consistent with truth; and these being the principal things under the Evangel dispensation, these, and not fasts, or any other ceremonial observances, are to be attended to.

A Great Day is Coming

Yahweh admits in Zechariah that both the house of Israel and the house of Judah should do better as His people (8:13) and be a blessing to the world. No accusation of sin here, but a promise that these manmade days of fasting and sadness will be turned joyful days of gladness.

Zechariah 8:18-19 says, *The word of YAHWEH of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith YAHWEH of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.*

The Jews continue to observe these days they have themselves appointed as a time for fasting. We are commanded to fast only on the day of Atonement but Yahweh does not criticize the voluntary human addition of other days of fasting. He chides the people because they have not been exercising mercy and compassion, showing the fruits of their fasting by developing righteous character, beginning in Zechariah chapters seven through eight.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh [month], even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto Me, [even] to Me? Zechariah 7:5.

Note Gill's comments: No; it was to gratify yourselves in hypocritical will-worship. If it had been "unto Me," ye would have "separated yourselves" not only from food, but from your sins. They falsely made the fast an end intrinsically meritorious in itself, not a means towards Yahweh's glory in their sanctification. The true principle of piety, *reference to Yahweh*, was wanting; hence the emphatic repetition of "unto Me." Before settling questions as to the outward forms of piety (however proper, as in this case), the great question was as to piety itself; that being once settled, all their outward observances become sanctified, being "unto Yahweh."

Nevertheless, Yahweh promises He will yet take these memorial fasts of historical events, chosen by the people and make them memorials of joy and comfort. Lessons and understanding by others will be gained from them.

Limits on Praise and Worship?

Does Yahweh limit our setting aside times to thank Him for His bountiful goodness? Does Yahweh, at any time, criticize those who sincerely and gladly come to Him in thankful praise and honor in times other than His Moedim (Leviticus 23)? Is there any proscription against worship for those who do not yet know or understand the importance of His name, but praise and thank Him with their present meager knowledge and faulty understanding? What would Yahshua do?

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Yahshua walked in the temple in Solomon's porch, John 10:22-23.

Yahshua is walking in the area known as Solomon's porch at the time of the Feast of Dedication (or Lights), a feast that was annually observed by consent, in remembrance of the dedication of a new altar and the purging of the Temple, by Judas Maccabaeus. The cleansing of the Temple took place about 168 BCE, after the Temple had been profaned and the altar defiled by Antiochus Epiphanies. The Jews, in remembrance of this terrible time, continue to keep an annual memorial on the twenty-fifth day of the month *Chisleu*, about the beginning of December, and for seven days after. Scant oil supplies for one day alone allowed the lamp to burn for eight days. It is known today as "Hanukkah."

Note that the Messiah Himself did not condemn the Jews for keeping a man-made Feast to recall the cleansing of the Temple and altar. It has become a part of Jewish history and continues to be celebrated today.

Thanksgiving in American History

If America, as a nation, wants to give thanks to Yahweh for His goodness and blessing, can we in America likewise observe a *memorial* day of thanks that originally began as a day of thankful praise to Yahweh by those who had not yet come to learn His true name was Yahweh? Does not the examples of Old Testament approval of the four fasts in Zechariah and the tacit approval of Yahshua in the New allow us to keep a day of thanks in addition to the seven Moedim of Leviticus 23? Are we limited in our desire to give Him the thanks He deserves?

There is no apparent connection with Jeroboam's setting up an admitted replacement for Tabernacles. Thanksgiving appears to have begun as a genuine effort to thank Yahweh by sincere, pious believers as early as June.

In researching the origin of Thanksgiving, now observed in November, can anyone find any connection with heathen worship? This author finds none. Rather, there seems to have been a sincere group of believers who were grateful for their survival over winter wherein half the early colony had perished. Nothing we have found ties the observance of Thanksgiving to Rehoboam's late feasts in the land of Israel.

Just as ancient Israelites rejoiced in the goodness of Yahweh and added seven days of praise and worship of Yahweh, cannot we as a nation have a special time like Thanksgiving where we give our Creator thanks and praise?

What is wrong in dining with friends and relatives at a special time of thanks and honor to Yahweh. It may give an opportunity to use Yahweh's name and even open a discussion of His seven commanded feasts.

There is a word of caution, however. Observing the fourth Thursday in November as a day of Thanksgiving to Yahweh should in no way supersede or become more important or overshadow the seven annual Sabbaths of Leviticus 23. Thanksgiving day does not stem from paganism, nor does the Fourth of July celebration. We should be grateful that we live in America that was founded on Biblical principles where we can freely worship our Heavenly Father and give honor to His Son. Let those of Judah observe Hanukkah. We can also add an historical day to praise and thank Yahweh each November called Thanksgiving.

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