Is It a Sin to Stay Home During Yahweh's Feasts?

By Larry and June Acheson

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Not everyone out there agrees that we should be commemorating the festivals that are commanded to be observed in Leviticus 23. For those who agree that we *should*, this study is for you. As always, we are composing our exposé, not as teachers, but as truth seekers desirous of learning and abiding by the Word of Yahweh.

Several years ago, June and I authored a study titled "Where Did the Apostles Observe the Holy Days?" Our study was directed at the teaching that the Apostle Paul, along with other believers, only went to Jerusalem for the three major feasts (Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles). We went to a lot of time and effort to prove something that should really be obvious to anyone who has read the New Testament: They commemorated the feasts wherever they happened to be, including Jerusalem, as well as such cities as Philippi (Acts 20:6).

Over the years, we have seen variations of this same false teaching, each with its own spin. One that June and I were recently exposed to is the belief that it doesn't matter *where* you go, so long as you go *somewhere* to join fellow believers in observing the feast days. According to this line of reasoning, not going anywhere constitutes a sin at best and an invitation to be cursed by the Almighty at worst. June and I take exception to this teaching, and after having borne with this mentality for too many years, we decided to present our concerns in writing. Whether you're among those who have criticized others for not attending a feast observance or if you are among those who have been told that you *must* go somewhere, I invite you to review my perspective.

Yahweh's Feasts are a great time for fellowship.

I would like to begin by stating that I agree the feasts should be commemorated each year. There's a reason why I use the term "commemorated," which I will explain later. One man who doesn't agree with this simple premise surprised us several years ago by stating that he would be willing to commemorate the feasts if someone would just show him *how*. This man seemed like an otherwise intelligent fellow, but for some reason he was unable to separate feast celebrations from the sacrifices associated with the feasts. This was surprising, in view of how he, like us, was a Sabbath keeper, and as Sabbath keepers, one of the arguments that we are occasionally exposed to is that if we "truly" observe the Sabbath, then we must *also* perform the sacrifices that were commanded to be offered on the day of the weekly Sabbath. I asked him if we should discontinue Sabbath observance, since we no longer offer the sacrifices associated with that day. He did not respond to my question and that was the end of our discussion.

June and I, like many Sabbath keepers, answer the man's argument by explaining that it was the *priests* who offered the sacrifices, not the common people, and now we are under a *new* priesthood (Hebrews 7:12), with Yeshua the Messiah being the high priest (Hebrews 8:11). Just as the common people observed the weekly Sabbath without necessarily participating in the sacrifices that were offered on that day, in the same way, Sabbath keepers such as June and I do not participate in any Sabbath sacrifices. Not only are we not priests, but it is also important to mention that the sacrifice for our sins, in the person of Yeshua the Messiah, has *already* been offered once for all.

If our fellow Sabbath keeping friend could have understood that the same reasons preventing us from offering sacrifices on the day of the weekly Sabbath *also* apply to feast observance, maybe he would have been more open to commemorating them. Commemorating the feasts, to June and me, is not all that complicated. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for example, we abstain from consuming all leavened products. On the days during which we are commanded to do no servile work, we do not work at our respective places of employment. On the other days, if we can be with others of like faith, we spend our time fellowshipping and studying the Bible. If we cannot be with others, which is sometimes the case, we stay home, and sometimes we even work at our places of employment. Therein lies the problem that several believers have brought to the forefront.

The Festivals are great times to rejoice in Yahweh's majesty with others.

Not Sinning … But Cut Off From Yahweh?

One individual, in particular, was quick to reprimand us for staying at home during the feasts. He made it clear that we are missing out on far more than the blessings associated with being with others of like faith; not only that, but in his estimation we are also short-changing ourselves financially. In other words, Yahweh pours out special blessings on those who attend feast gatherings—while either allowing unpleasant circumstances to befall those who don't, or outright sending a curse upon them. Our friend told us the story of a man who, while resisting his fervent admonition to spend the entire feast with fellow believers, was experiencing hardship and even unemployment. However, once he began observing the feasts with others, the job offers began flooding in and he is now earning significantly more than he had ever earned previously. Our friend would often tell his own personal story of how every time he was fired for refusing to work during a feast, he would later find a much better job.

Regrettably, this man began telling others that I recently lost my job because I chose to work during the 2009 Feast of Tabernacles instead of attending a feast gathering. This is additionally regrettable because of the fact that he put an unfair spin on the story, since he was well aware that I *resigned* from that job in protest of the unfair expectations that had been put upon me by a man whom I would describe

as being a ruthless manager. Our friend might answer that if I had gathered with others to keep the feast, Yahweh would have softened the heart of that manager, or so his line of reasoning might go. The desired effect is to think that anything unpleasant befalling anyone can only be the consequence of that individual not acting in line with this man's idea of obedience to the Creator's laws.

The following year, when I explained to our friend that we would not be attending a 2010 Feast of Tabernacles gathering, he made it clear that he would tell another acquaintance that I'm not attending the feast because I love my job more than Yahweh. He grimly added, "I can almost guarantee you're fixin' to lose your job."[1] We were beginning to wonder if, with friends like him, who needs enemies?

For the record, June and I have been commemorating the feasts for over 35 years, and for the majority of those feasts, we spent the entire time with like believers. Sadly, over the course of these past 38 years, I experienced several changes of employment, and as much as I would have loved to enjoy a lasting career with the same employer, that's not how things turned out. This is just the world we live in, a fulfillment of Yeshua's prediction of how the love of many, including employers, will grow cold. How often have we heard, "It's a cold world," knowing that this is not a reference to the weather? In my case, I'm not out to present myself as the perfect employee who was wronged by an unfair employer with each job change; yet I'm always glad to explain each situation, including the times when I resigned after having kept the feasts with other believers, such as when I decided to leave behind the farm life with my dad after the cold reception we received upon returning from a Feast of Unleavened Bread celebration in 1989. While my final employment change came about after having kept the feast at home, my previous changes of employment were after having attended feast gatherings. Those who concede that my feast attendance couldn't have impacted my employment status will now invariably look for some *other* "flaw" that has cut me off from their idea of Yahweh's blessings. That's just the Pharisaical way.

Employment-wise, many of us understand that it's a tough job market out there, and it's especially tough for those who, like me, did not have either the business savvy or resources to start their own businesses and are at the mercy of the corporate system. It is sad knowing that some folks, claiming to have the guidance of Yahweh's spirit, regard those who find themselves in this situation as floundering, disobedient rebels whose hearts are not *truly* bent on serving the Almighty. The cause of the problem, according to those who harbor this mentality, is disobedience. The effect is unemployment and/or financial problems.

This same cause-and-effect mentality existed during the first century, and I'm sure it traces back to the earliest days of mankind, when those who were well off looked down their noses at those who weren't, regarding them as being under a curse of some kind. A classic example of this thought process can be taken from the Bible. During the first century CE, Yeshua and His disciples encountered a man who was blind from birth. The disciples, certain that the man's blindness was the result of disobedience to Yahweh, asked Yeshua who had sinned that would cause the man to be blind. They wanted to know if it was the man himself who had sinned or if it was his parents.

Yeshua answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that the Almighty's works might be revealed in him."[2]

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[1] For this, my 2025 update, I am pleased to report that I remained at that same job until my retirement in 2024.
[2] *Cf.*, John 9:1-7.

Yeshua, in non-judgmental fashion, then proceeded to heal the blind man.

Some modern-day religious prognosticators would ask Yeshua something like, "*Who sinned, was it Larry or June, that Larry is not employed?*" In the case of my latest job change, the answer that some folks predict Yeshua would give is that **I** am the one who sinned, and the sin was not going somewhere to observe the Feast of Tabernacles with other believers. To complicate matters, the friend whom we mentioned earlier presented us with a contradictory understanding with regard to our apparent "sins." During one of our conversations centered on this very topic, after enduring his lengthy rebuking session, I asked him if he could point out my specific sin. He answered, "I never said you're *sinning*; I said, 'You're cutting yourself off from Yahweh's blessings.'" I couldn't help but wonder if he was blending *prosperity gospel* with Pharisaical underpinnings.

Our friend never explained the obvious conundrum involved with determining how and why Yahweh would withhold blessings from someone who isn't sinning. Since "sin" is defined as the breaking of our Creator's laws, the apparent contradiction is determining how someone could obey the Father, yet be cut off from His blessings. Certainly, if a man obeys begrudgingly, his heart is *clearly* not in the right place, and I could understand that such an individual might not reap the same spiritual blessings enjoyed by those who obey out of their heartfelt desire to please the Father.[3] When it comes to judging someone's heart, I am persuaded we need to be careful. We've all heard about the dangers of "judging a book by its cover," which essentially means judging by appearance. How many times have we mentally sized up an individual as either not being very intelligent or maybe just not someone whom we would want to consider as a friend. Later, when we actually became acquainted with the person, we realized we had *totally* misread and misjudged him or her. In the same way, if I obey the Father, but do so begrudgingly, this bad attitude will likely be obvious to all. However, if I willfully *obey* the Father, but not in a manner consistent with how someone else *feels* I should obey, this should not be perceived as insincere or begrudging obedience, nor is anyone justified in determining that I have "cut myself off from Yahweh's blessings." Thankfully, it is *Yahweh* who knows our hearts, not those who are prone to thoughtlessly pass judgment.

My friend never explained how an obedient child of the Father is nevertheless cut off from Yahweh's blessings, but I'm sure the above rationale fit his spiritual paradigm. In our conversation, he made it clear that, in his opinion, June and I are not "toeing the line" as diligently as we should. Nevertheless, if one is obeying and *not sinning*, it does seem premature and borderline haughty to conclude that such an individual is "cutting himself off" from the Creator's blessings.[4]

Scripture seems to present a paradox when it comes to determining whether or not someone has been blessed by the Almighty. On the one hand, passages such as the one found in Deuteronomy 28 depict the blessings that follow obedience. Consider, for example, the promise found in Deuteronomy 28:11-12:

[3] While I encourage obedience as the fruit of the love we have for our Heavenly Father, nevertheless, Yeshua made it clear in the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32) that it's better so obey begrudgingly than not at all.

[4] Sadly, our friend passed away in 2016. In fact, I came to realize that with this 2025 update, none of the individuals referenced in this study, apart from June and me, are still living. Before he passed, our friend told me, "I believe Yahweh is so full of mercy, we cannot *begin* to comprehend it." I fully agree with his conclusion, but let's not take Yahweh's mercy for granted. It came at a high price.

> [11] And Yahweh shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which Yahweh sware unto thy fathers to give thee.
> [12] Yahweh shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.

The above verses constitute a *portion* of the blessings promised to those who would obey Yahweh. Do the same promises given to ancient Israel apply today? We must remember that, in spite of their commitment to obey Yahweh's law, Israel eventually abandoned that law. In fact, the law was apparently lost and all but forgotten when, during the reign of King Josiah, it was accidentally found while the priests were making repairs to the temple (2 Chron. 34). We can certainly expect blessings for obedience to Yahweh's laws; after all, that is why He gave them to us in the first place.[5] However, we would never counsel anyone to expect to be given a raise at work for announcing that he or she will no longer work on the Sabbath, nor should you necessarily expect a better job offer to come along if you should be released from employment for deciding to keep the Sabbath. Consider, for example, the Jewish soldiers who fought against Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2nd century BCE. What blessings did they obtain for refusing to fight on the Sabbath?[6] Those who know the historical record know that those soldiers were all mercilessly killed, even though they would not even defend themselves on Yahweh's Sabbath day.

The Jews of Malachi's day, in spite of their determination to obey Yahweh, were not experiencing the blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28. Some of our current acquaintances within what is known as the "Sacred Name Movement" would be quick to point out that those Jews *must* have been doing a few things wrong; maybe they weren't keeping the feasts in the prescribed manner. They must have been doing *something* wrong that would preclude them from experiencing the fullness of Yahweh's blessings. However, instead of offering them criticism for any shortcomings, Yahweh told them to be patient—that a day of reckoning is coming. Let's read this account from Malachi chapter three:

> [14] Ye have said, It is vain to serve the Almighty: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts?
> [15] And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt the Almighty are even delivered.
> [16] Then they that feared Yahweh spake often one to another: and Yahweh hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon his name.
> [17] And they shall be mine, saith Yahweh of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.
> [18] Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth the Almighty and him that serveth him not.

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[5] *Cf.*, Deuteronomy 10:12-13.
[6] *Cf.*, Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, ch. vi, sec. 2. See also the apocryphal book I Maccabees 2:27-38.

Please notice that in His response to those who "walk mournfully" before Yahweh, yet are not as blessed as those who "work wickedness," Yahweh did not scold the mournful Jews for not being mournful enough, nor did He point out any shortcomings that would cause Him to want to withhold His blessings from them. No, instead of chastening them, He *encouraged* them, explaining that the day will come—in the future—when He will separate the righteous from the wicked.

When life hits you like a brick and things just don't go the way you were hoping, who do you want on your side—a Heavenly Father who tells you to be patient and remain faithful, or a friend who picks your life apart, putting you under his analytical microscope in order to determine why you're not blessed?

Again, in view of the observations we have made of the typical responses we have seen—and read—from various ones associated with the Sacred Name Movement (we're sure it's not limited to any group of people), the anticipated response to the Jews of Malachi's day would *not* be for them to await the future day of reckoning. Rather, it would be for them to examine their lives and lifestyles to see what it is they've been doing wrong!

Someone is bound to bring up the fact that, according to the Bible, we really do reap what we sow.[7] If Yahweh tells us to do something, we can be assured that a blessing is in store for those who hearken to His voice. We may not understand what that blessing is at the time, but those who obey Yahweh *will* be blessed. The question becomes, "Is it a sin to not attend a feast gathering?" Our friend would non-sensically answer that it's not a sin, yet you will be cut off from Yahweh's blessings if you don't go.

Going to "A Place" Where He Has Placed His Name?

In my own personal situation, it was only our aforementioned friend who attempted to put me on a guilt trip for not always going *somewhere* to keep the feasts. However, in 2010 *another* friend named Frank Brown essentially exhibited the same approach, only more severe, towards those who stay at home for the feasts. Here is what Frank wrote in his bi-monthly newsletter *Search the Scriptures*:

> These [Feast] days have been in existence since Creation week, were kept by Yahweh's called out ones, both in the Old Testament and in the New, and will be kept in the 1,000 year Kingdom reign. To claim that we don't have to keep them today, is to make Yahshua's words in Matthew 5:17-19 into a lie. To claim that we can keep them at home, and do not have to go to a place where Yahweh places His Name, is to promote a lie. He has commanded that we must travel to a meeting place of His choosing three times or "seasons" in the year. These three Feasts are called "Pilgrim Festivals" because we must travel when able, to a site where He has placed His Name. Prison inmates are excepted, as are women and those too infirm to travel.[8]

Although Frank didn't preach the same "prosperity gospel" message as my previously-referenced friend, he would nevertheless have lumped June and me in with those who "promote a lie." This is a serious charge that I cannot let slide. Maybe Frank wouldn't have gone so far as to suggest that I may lose

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[7] *Cf.*, Galatians 6:7-9.

[8] From *Search the Scriptures* Newsletter, Frank Brown, editor, Clarksville, AR, Sept.-Oct. 2010, p. 2. Sadly, Frank passed away in 2013. In spite of our differing understandings of Scripture, I consider Frank to have been a man of great integrity with a heart for service to Yahweh.

my job for staying at home during the Feast, but in a roundabout way, the same effect is achieved with his reading audience—at least with those who aren't willing to dig deeper. *After all, what kinds of blessings are poured out on those who promote lies?* In fact, if we are indeed "promoting a lie" by claiming that we can celebrate the feasts at home, it's possible Frank held a much *gloomier* view of our future (Rev. 21:8) than our friend who preached the dogmatic Pharisee and "prosperity gospel" combination.

Having identified the notion that commemorating Yahweh's festivals at home is tantamount to promoting a lie, we need to carefully examine the approach of those who teach that we, here in the 21st century, are required by Yahweh to travel to "a meeting place of His choosing three times in the year." I'm aware of another group that teaches this same thing, so this belief is not uncommon.[9] Do those who have criticized June and me for staying at home during the feasts and, worse yet, working at our jobs, have legitimate and justifiable reasons for doing so?

I highlighted one sentence within the above quote because it contains what amounts to the primary cause for concern. Frank Brown claimed that we are required, in this day and age, to go to "*a place*" where Yahweh places His name. What proof text did he offer validating such an authoritative statement? He offered nothing. We are left to trust that he knew what he was talking about.

If we *really* wish to appeal to Scripture for answers, we will find that there is no verse suggesting that believers go to "**a** place" where Yahweh places His name. In every case, it is ***the*** *place* where He places His name. Displayed below is Deuteronomy 16:16:

> [16]¶ Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before Yahweh thy Almighty in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty:

Please notice that Yahweh did *not* specify "**a** place" which He shall choose; rather, it is "**the** place" which He shall choose. Also notice that Yahweh did not specify "places" (plural) which He shall choose; again, it is "the place" which He shall choose. From the days of Joshua son of Nun through the reign of King Saul, Yahweh's tabernacle abode in more than one city, but never at the same time. Finally, it made its way to Jerusalem.[10] Jerusalem is "the city which I have chosen me to put my name there" (1 Kings 11:36, KJV). Scripture does not record a subsequent location to Jerusalem as having been chosen, yet there is no shortage of men who would beg to differ. Unless someone can succeed in showing me otherwise, there is only *one* place that can rightly be called **the** place, and that place is Jerusalem, Israel.

By now you may be puzzled by what may appear to be a contradiction of some things I have written. I have already stated that I believe the feasts should be commemorated, yet I have also stated that they

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[9] For example, an anonymous author from a group known as Congregation of YHWH, in their online article "Feast of Tabernacles," wrote, "He [Yahweh] did not say that if it was a long way they could just stay home; that they were excused from the ordinance." The comment was given as part of the author's analysis of Deuteronomy 14:24. His interpretation certainly applied to those ancient Israelites living in the land of Israel; the author, however, applies this same principle to modern-day feast celebrations here in the USA. He offers no commentary about why USA residents are no longer required to go to Jerusalem to keep the feasts.

[10] Other places identified in Scripture are Mizpah (twice: Judges 20:1, I Samuel 7:5-6), Shiloh (I Sam. 1:3), Kiryath Yearim (I Sam. 7:2) and Hebron (2 Sam. 5:3-5).

may only be properly kept in *the* place chosen by Yahweh. Since I have celebrated many feasts with like believers, yet I have never been to Jerusalem, I believe an explanation is in order.

Sometimes it's great to just relax with friends.

I would like to preface my explanation by clarifying that, in all our years of commemorating the feasts, June and I have never told anyone they must go somewhere to celebrate them. If we conducted the annual festivals the way the ancients did, we would go to Jerusalem, where we would join the festivities and watch as the priests offered sacrifices on the altar. Today there is no altar and there is no Temple. Some well-meaning believers, persuaded that we should at least offer a lamb for Passover, promote not only removing all leavening from our dwellings in advance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which I agree should be done), but *also* slaughtering a lamb on Abib 14 in whatever location they might happen to celebrate the feast.[11] Where did this teaching originate? Is it Scriptural?

The "Where two or three are gathered in Yeshua's name" Claim

Interestingly, I don't remember ever reading literature from any assembly in which they explain *why* believers must attend a festival gathering of like-minded brethren. The best *implication* I have gleaned from conversations I have had over the years is that, in accordance with Matthew 18:20, wherever two or three are gathered in Yeshua's name, there He is in the midst of them, which, in turn, means Yahweh's name is placed there. Such an interpretation of Matthew 18:20 fails for several reasons. First, if Yeshua taught and expected His disciples to believe Yahweh's name was, at that moment in time, placed wherever two or three are gathered, then He contradicted what Yahweh told King David, as related by King Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6:5-6:

> 5 Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel:
> 6 But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel.[12]

Those who teach that in these modern times Yahweh's name is wherever two or three are gathered must believe that Jerusalem is no longer "the" place to go. They must also believe Yeshua taught His

[11] I address this belief in my study titled "Should We Kill a Lamb for Passover?"
[12] See also Psalms 132:13-14 and Zechariah 3:2.

disciples the same. This is especially troubling in view of the fact that the Temple and altar were both still standing when Yeshua made that remark.

For context, we need to bear in mind that Yahweh's people were told *not* to sacrifice the Passover lambs within their cities ("gates"), but rather in the place where Yahweh chose to place His name. Here's what we read in Deuteronomy 16:5-6:

> 5 Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which Yahweh thy Almighty giveth thee:
> 6 But at the place which Yahweh thy Almighty shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt.

If Yeshua truly intended for His disciples to believe that, beginning with His instruction in Matthew 18:20, believers could then keep the Passover in the city of *their* choosing, including offering the sacrificial Passover lamb, then let's face it: He taught against Torah.

I don't believe He did such a thing.

So what did Yeshua mean when He said, "Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them"? Well, hopefully we all understand that we don't need to have other believers in our presence for Yahweh to be in our midst. I could cite many ancient believers who were all alone, yet Yahweh was with them. We could start with Enoch. We could include Abraham, Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist. To best understand what Yeshua was referring to in Matthew 18:20, we need to read the entire passage *in context*, i.e., verses 15-20. In this passage, Yeshua instructed His disciples that if a brother sins against another, the victim needs to go to the offending party in private to tell him his fault. If the man doesn't repent, then Yeshua advised taking one or two witnesses "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established," as per Deuteronomy 19:15. If the man *still* doesn't repent, then the witnesses are to bring the matter to the attention of the assembly, and the man is to be treated as a heathen and a publican. Yeshua essentially summed up the instruction by stating that if the two witnesses agree, then the matter is settled in heaven:

> 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.
> 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

The question of exactly what Yeshua meant by "two or three gathered in His name" is expertly summarized by the editors of GotQuestions.org:

> The process of church discipline calls for "two or three," and this seems to be the best application for this verse. The two or three who gather in Jesus' name are not coming together in a prayer meeting or a worship service but in a matter of church discipline. The two or three witnesses have confronted the sinner in a spirit of humility (see Galatians 6:1), and the sinner has not repented. So the two or three take the matter to the Lord in prayer and then confidently move forward with the process outlined in

> Scripture, knowing that they are not being bullies or busybodies, for God endorses their efforts—Jesus is "with them."[13]

We can thus see and understand that applying Yeshua's "where two or three are gathered" remark to feast observance is an exercise in futility, insofar as Yahweh and Torah are concerned. It's simply unscriptural. Teaching that we must now go to a feast site where at least two or three are gathered because that's where Yeshua will be is simply over-reaching, forcing an interpretation that just isn't there.

Commemorating Versus Keeping

Commemorating the feasts is, from my perspective, something we should all *want* to do, even if certain situations may occasionally arise that prevent us from observing them as we'd like. Please don't get me wrong: There are certain days during the year, *in addition to* the weekly Sabbath, on which the Almighty commands us to abstain from work. These include the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as the eighth day. Regardless of where we are, June and I do not work on those holy days. I am persuaded that if Yahweh declares a day to be holy, then that day is indeed *holy*; we should sanctify His holy days as such, and since the days I just mentioned have been declared by our Creator to be holy, June and I do not work on those days. It's that simple. Moreover, I am persuaded that we are obligated to remove leavening from our homes in advance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These are all things that can be achieved by *anyone*, regardless of where they live on this planet.

Whether or not we should work on the holy days, then, is *not* the topic I am addressing in this study. The question is, "Is it sin if we stay at home during a feast?" Or perhaps a better question would be, "Are we obligated to go anywhere for Yahweh's feasts if we're not living in Israel?" According to Frank Brown's newsletter article, if we promote observing a feast at home, we are "promoting a lie." If that isn't "sin," it's close enough!

For those who wonder why I refer to "commemorating" the feasts instead of "keeping" them, there's a reason for this specific verbiage. The Hebrew word translated "keep," as in "keep the Passover," is the word *asah*, which is word #6213 in *Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*. This word can be translated in a variety of ways, such as "make," "prepare," "keep" or "offer," as in *offer* or *prepare* the Passover lamb. Displayed below is Numbers 9:3 as it appears in *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*, produced by the Jewish Publication Society:

> 2 Let the Israelite people offer (*asah*) the passover sacrifice at its set time:
> 3 you shall offer (*asah*) it in accordance with all its rules and rites.

This understanding of the Hebrew word *asah* demonstrates that "keeping the Passover" includes offering and preparing the Passover lamb. Since I understand what "keeping the Passover" *truly* means, combined with my understanding that the *only* place this can be properly performed is in Jerusalem, I try to avoid using this common verbiage. Instead, my family and I strive to *commemorate* the Passover each year. Yeshua, our Passover, has been sacrificed and accepted by the Father, which we know by His resurrection from the dead. We do not *duplicate* that sacrifice; we *commemorate* it.

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[13] GotQuestions.org, "What is the meaning of 'where two or three are gathered' in Matthew 18:20?" © Copyright 2002-2025 Got Questions Ministries. All rights reserved.

An Example from New Moon Observance

One way to illustrate why it is *not* a sin to stay at home for the feasts is to provide an illustration using New Moon observance. Please bear with me on this one! Over 20 years ago, an acquaintance succeeded in temporarily persuading me that we should not work on the day of the new moon. He only had *one* verse of Scripture that he could use to present his case, but at the time that one verse was sufficient. The verse I'm referring to is Amos 8:5, where Yahweh, through the prophet Amos, scolded the wealthy, yet ruthless, merchants who could not wait for the Sabbath or the New Moon to be gone so they could sell their grain. Without really conducting a thorough examination of Amos 8:5, one could easily be persuaded that the reason the merchants couldn't buy or sell grain on the day of the new moon was because the markets were closed for New Moon Day. June and I have since conducted sufficient research to determine that such was not necessarily the case[14], but the key component that is *really* needed to validate treating the day of the new moon as a holy day is a commandment found within the first five books of the Bible, otherwise known as the *Torah*. Spoiler alert: It's not there.

I struggled with my decision to request New Moon Day off from work, but my friend persuaded me that, even though there is no direct Torah command, Amos 8:5 provided an "approved example" from Scripture demonstrating that we should abstain from business-related work on the day of the New Moon. Thankfully, my manager at that time was a true gentleman who would let me take a day off from work without asking too many questions. In fact, in this particular situation, he didn't ask *any* questions. When I requested a day off, he answered, "Of course! Take off whatever day you need!"

So I took off the day of the new moon. It was great! Of course, any day spent studying Yahweh's Word is restful and stimulating. However, as I later reflected on the necessary consequences of my decision, I realized I would eventually be requesting *nine days* off from work that year for new moon observances, and that was in addition to the days I would be taking off for feast observances. All told, this was essentially the equivalent of four weeks of vacation. Many companies out there will not allow their employees to take off that much time from work, at least not until they have worked there for several years. At that time, I was allowed two weeks of vacation, which generally covered me for feast observance purposes. While I could take off additional days without pay, I knew it would be frowned upon, especially when it came to an additional *nine* days off. I knew I would eventually need to explain why I needed those random days off from work.

My manager at that time was an inquisitive man, who expressed an interest in knowing what I believed and why. We enjoyed many informal discussions about the weekly Sabbath and the feast days; although he didn't seem ready to take the next step in observing them himself, I will at least commend him for being as intrigued as he was. Many folks couldn't care less.

Knowing my manager's inquisitive nature, I mentally "played out" the scenario that might well have transpired if he had wanted to know more about my random days off from work. Our potential conversation might have gone something like this:

> **Larry:** Hey, Patrick, it looks like I'll need to take a day off from work next Wednesday.

[14] For additional information, please read chapter 15 of our study *Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths*. This chapter is titled "Is There a 'No Trade' Restriction on the Day of the New Moon?"

Patrick: Next Wednesday? Sure, no problem—but out of curiosity, may I ask what you have going on?
Larry: Sure! My wife and I have begun observing the New Moons. We follow the ancient calendar, and we found that the believers of old did not work on the day of the new moon.
Patrick: Really? I didn't know about that. I know you told me they would look for the crescent moon after sunset to begin the new month, but I don't remember anything about it being kept like a Sabbath day.
Larry: Well, it wasn't really kept like the Sabbath—*some* work was allowed that day, like housework, stuff like that—just no business transactions were allowed to be conducted on New Moon Day, which is why I won't be able to come in this coming Wednesday.
Patrick: So you'll see the new moon this coming Wednesday?
Larry: Well, no, we will actually see it on Tuesday evening after sunset—it should be high enough to be seen that night, and the next 24-hour period will be New Moon Day, which will be the first day of the Scriptural month.
Patrick: So you've just now begun taking off for New Moon Day?
Larry: Yes.
Patrick: I'm curious—you've been observing the weekly Sabbath for several years now—is there a reason why you are *just now* starting to observe New Moon Day each month?
Larry: Well, yes—it's a little more complicated—there's this one verse in Amos 8:5 where we read about the wicked merchants who suppressed the poor of the land, and they couldn't wait for the New Moon to be gone so they could sell their grain to make more money ….
Patrick: Hmmmm. But isn't there a verse where the people were *commanded* to not work that day?
Larry: Well, no—that's a great question—you might call this a case of "approved example"—it was <u>understood</u> by the Jews of Amos' day that no buying or selling should take place on the day of the new moon.
Patrick: But if it was understood that no buying or selling should take place on that day, then shouldn't there have been a *command* to not do it? I mean, I'm not trying to question Amos' status as a prophet, but shouldn't there be a *command* to do or not do something before it can be considered a sin?
Larry: Well, I see your point, but at the same time, there is no question that those people regarded the day of the new moon to be a day on which no business transactions were permitted, so I'm just trying to follow along with the understanding presented in Scripture.
Patrick: Okay, but I hope you understand why I'm confused—I understand why you don't work on the Sabbath, and you showed me where certain other days are also commanded to be holy days, but it seems like something isn't quite right when you tell me you're taking off for days that the Creator didn't *specifically command* to be days when you cannot conduct business. I mean, wouldn't it have been such a simple matter for Him to have just come out and said, "By the way, ye shall not buy or sell on the day of the new moon"?
Larry: Yes, I can't argue with that, but I hope you can see why I believe the ancient believers just understood that no work was to be done on that day.

Patrick: Well, not really—but hey, I'm not trying to criticize your beliefs ….

Knowing that my manager (Patrick) had a healthy curiosity of what I believed and why, I knew that a close variation of the above potential conversation could very well have taken place if I didn't come up with anything more substantial than Amos 8:5 to support not working on the day of the new moon. Throughout the upcoming month, the above mock conversation played itself over and over in my brain, and it all boiled down to one core problem: *There is no Torah command forbidding business transactions on the day of the new moon.*

You may be wondering what the above potential scenario involving the new moon has to do with whether or not we are required to attend a "feast site" during Yahweh's appointed feasts? **Plenty**! Here goes:

Just as I reasoned that I would not be able to satisfactorily justify a requirement to be off from work on the day of the new moon, the next question is, "If my employer should ask why I am required to be away from work for an entire *week*, would I be able to give him a solid, reasonable answer from Scripture?" That is one of the questions I am addressing within the scope of this study. We have already seen that men claiming to be servants of the Most High will pre-judge you as having been cut off from Yahweh's blessings for not attending a feast gathering, even though they concede that your absence does not actually constitute *sin*. We have seen that *other* men, likewise claiming to be servants of the Most High, will arbitrarily tweak the wording of Scripture so as to read "**a** place" where Yahweh places His name instead of "**the** place." This line of reasoning, of course, presumes that Yahweh has designated *other* cities across the globe as "feast sites." Hopefully, we all know better. Nevertheless, in view of how one man redefines the criteria required for being eligible for Yahweh's blessings *and* of how an author distorts the plain wording of Scripture, I can only wonder what *other* distortions and redefinitions we are left to contend with.

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to have ready answers when others question or challenge our beliefs. Here's what he wrote in 1 Peter 3:15:

> 15 But sanctify the Messiah *as* Sovereign in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in your with meekness and fear.

When anyone, especially an employer, asks why you feel it's commanded that you take off an entire week or more from work, will you be able to justify your conviction with Scripture? Will you be able to validate an explanation that we're commanded to go to "**a** place" where Yahweh has placed His name?

Has Jerusalem Been "Unchosen"?

According to the author I cited earlier, Frank Brown, one can (and *must*) go to *any* designated feast venue where like-minded believers are gathered and regard it as "**a** place" where Yahweh has placed His name, and if someone else goes to a similar feast observance elsewhere, it would simply be "**another** place" where Yahweh has placed His name. Since the *only* commanded place to go for the feasts is "**the** place" where Yahweh has placed His name, and since no one has ever demonstrated that other places have since been "chosen" since the "choosing" of Jerusalem, I am left to believe that **none** have. Jerusalem is *still* Yahweh's chosen city. Nowhere else will do. Some will contend that Jerusalem's status

as a chosen city changed when it and the Temple were destroyed by Rome in 70 CE. Of course, they would need to demonstrate how this reasoning is true from Scripture.

As it turns out, there is an example from Scripture in which Jerusalem, although left desolate and without a temple, did *not* become "unchosen." The time period I am referring to is the 70-year Babylonian Captivity. The prophet Daniel lived in Babylon during that period of time. You might expect to read something in the book of Daniel indicating that groups of resettled Jews would gather together in Babylon to celebrate Tabernacles or one of the other feasts. However, *none* of the feasts are mentioned in the book of Daniel. This certainly doesn't mean that no one gathered during those times, but if it was something they *had* to do, I would expect to read something to that effect in the book of Daniel. It's just not there. One might argue that the word "Sabbath" doesn't appear in Daniel, either. However, the weekly Sabbath is certainly *implied* in Daniel 7:25, where the angel tells Daniel of a "little horn" that would one day rise up and think to change "times and laws."

The "times and laws" referenced in Daniel 7 must be inclusive of the weekly Sabbath. Moreover, "times and laws" must also include the festivals—*including the law that they be kept in the place where Yahweh chooses to place His name*. Could it be that teaching others that "**the** place" has now become "**a** place" constitutes a partial fulfillment of Daniel 7:25? Isn't tweaking "**the** place" to "**a** place" a *change*? At the very *least*, it must be considered a violation of the command to not add or take away from Yahweh's Word (Deut. 4:2, 12:32, Prov. 30:6). We could also mention that if we want to get "technical," the commandment pertaining to *Sukkot*, better known as the Feast of Tabernacles, *specifically* pertains to *native-born Israelites* (Lev. 23:42). If we enjoin *non-Israelite-born* believers to dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles, we are once again *adding to the Word*. That all of the feasts were intended for Yahweh's people dwelling in the land of Israel is directly implied by the introductory phrase "*When ye be come into the land which I give unto you …"* (Lev. 23:10). At best, those who are not Israelite-born can only hope to *commemorate* the feasts the best they can, which we fully support doing to the best of our abilities.

Some individuals whom we have met over the years, if they had been captives in Babylon, would have insisted that their brethren join them in observing the feasts, including gathering in a centralized location for the entire duration of the festival. However, the evidence from Scripture strongly suggests that Jewish believers in Babylon did *not* gather for the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. According to the book of Nehemiah (chapter 8), when the captives returned to Jerusalem, they found where it is written in the law that they should dwell in booths "in the feast of the seventh month." Do you wonder why it wasn't until their return from captivity that they made this discovery? If they had been dwelling in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles while in Babylon, they would not have *later* discovered that they were commanded to do so.

What's more, Nehemiah's account of the Tabernacles observance indicates that the Jews, as a people, had not dwelt in booths during that feast since the days of Joshua son of Nun. Consider the implications of this truth: The Jews, under the leadership of such greats as Samuel, King David, Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah, had not dwelt in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles. Let's read this account from Nehemiah chapter 8:

> [14]And they found written in the law which Yahweh had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

> [15]And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.
> [16]So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of the Almighty, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.
> [17]And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Yeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.
> [18]Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of the Almighty. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

The above text plainly reveals that, since the days of Yeshua son of Nun, the children of Israel had not dwelt in booths during their Feast of Tabernacles observances. This is not to say that we support such a *non-practice*. Nevertheless, if we find ourselves living in a foreign land far from the place where Yahweh has placed His name, we should receive far less rebuke for not dwelling in booths than those who, despite living in the heart of Jerusalem, *did not* dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The evidence supports the understanding that Judaism, while in Babylon, did not observe the feasts. While I would like to think that they at least ceased from their labors for the holy days, even this cannot be verified. Although the United States of America is far from the land of Babylon, many recognize it as *spiritual* Babylon. Sadly, June and I share that understanding. We would like nothing better than for this nation's leaders to declare and implement national observances commemorating the feasts of Yahweh, complete with provisions requiring employers to, as far as possible, allow employees time off from work in order to celebrate them in their entirety. Even with such an increased level of awareness and popularity for these feasts, we understand that there are some professions where it would be more difficult to make those arrangements, such as the medical profession and law enforcement. This would be especially true if everyone saw and appreciated the blessings reaped from observing Yahweh's feasts! Can you imagine what it would be like if *everyone* asked to be off for a feast observance?

Nevertheless, the truth of the matter is that we reside in spiritual Babylon, where even the religious leaders, i.e., those who should know better, teach that the laws concerning feast observance are obsolete and "have served their purpose and are no longer necessary." Living under such a broad umbrella of confusion (and sometimes intolerance) creates immense problems for anyone who is not self-employed, and likely for many who are. Taking off a day here and a day there for the observance of holy days is one thing, but taking off for eight and sometimes ten consecutive days is an enormous obstacle for those who have not accrued the necessary vacation time. Adding to this challenging situation is the fact that we no longer live under a system where an employee typically works for the same company for 40-plus years until retirement. My personal observation is that it is becoming uncommon for an employee to work for the same company longer than 15 years. It is well-known that some companies, upon noticing that certain employees are approaching retirement age, decide it's time for some "cutbacks" or "restructuring." They have determined that severing these employees from their payroll will save their company untold millions

of dollars. Never mind that the employees they released are left with a bleak future in which their very survival is threatened.

Back when a loyal employee meant something to a company, taking time off from work for special occasions was generally understood and even taken for granted because *everyone* likes a vacation once in a while. Since most employees ask for vacation time during the summer months or in late December, I found that managers were actually appreciative of the balance added by those few who would rather take off in April or October. I remember when a Human Resources manager informed me, years after the fact, that the reason they decided to hire me was because I had specifically offered to work on the days when many employees would ask to be off, such as December 25th. But when potential qualified employees find themselves in the job market more often than they'd like, the sad truth is that with any new job, the employee must work for a certain length of time before vacation time—*feast time*—is accrued. That is the sad reality I was faced with in 2010. As much as I would like to spend an entire eight-day period with like-minded believers, the fact of the matter is, I had not accrued a sufficient amount of vacation time that would have allowed me to do so. Here in spiritual Babylon, the fact that I did not have enough vacation time to take off from work is regarded as "too bad, so sad" by those who are in control of my employment future. If we were in the land of Israel, and in a nation committed to adherence to Yahweh's laws, it would be a "given" that most employees, unless absolutely necessary that they work, take off for the feasts.

However, we do not live in Israel, nor does this nation give any heed to the Creator's laws concerning the feast days. As such, we are faced with determining whether or not Yahweh requires His people in this strange land to gather during His appointed feasts. As we mull over the pros and cons, we really need to consider how simple it would have been for Yahweh to have mandated that no regular work be done at *any* time during His feasts. Such a commandment would have made it a sin to conduct business transactions and the like for the duration of His festivals. However, that's just not the way He worded things. As such, it should not be considered a sin to work during the feasts, so long as it is not during a day on which we are commanded to not work. If we were commanded to not work at our jobs or otherwise conduct business transactions during the feasts, it would be easy to understand that we are expected to assemble with like believers during that time. As we are about to see, it would also make it easy to explain to our employers why we must be absent from work.

Enjoying a late evening campfire in front of our backyard sukkah.

In similar fashion to the one in which I was challenged to observe New Moon Day each month, I was challenged to attend feast gatherings instead of celebrating them at home. Just as I created a potential conversation between my manager and myself to discuss taking off from work on the day of the New Moon, so have I done with regard to taking off from work for the entire duration of the Feast of Tabernacles. What follows is a potential conversation between myself and my 2010 employer about my taking this extended time off from work, even though I had not yet accrued sufficient "vacation time."

Before supplying the potential conversation between myself and that manager, a little background information may help you to better understand that this manager was no "slouch" when it comes to his knowledge of the Bible. He is an ex-Mormon who, to my surprise, was very familiar with the beliefs of Judaism. In 2010, June and I observed the feasts a month later than normative Judaism. Previous employers had asked me why I was at work on such days as *Rosh Hashanah* (the Feast of Trumpets), and I would explain how and why June and I aren't "on the same page" as normative Judaism. It was due to this discrepancy that a co-worker would jokingly refer to me as "the radical Jew."

My 2010 manager didn't need me to explain my difference with modern-day Judaism—he readily understood that we have a calendar disagreement with Judaism and was aware of groups that go by a different calendar. This is something that very few employers would recognize, much less comment on. With that contingency in mind, I foresaw some potential difficulties if I were to request time off for the entire Feast of Tabernacles. Here is how that potential conversation might have gone:

> **Larry:** Hey, it looks like I'll need to take off a week from work starting a week from Sunday.
> **Employer:** A week from Sunday? Well, I'm afraid that will be out of the question—you haven't accrued enough vacation time.
> **Larry:** That's okay, you don't have to pay me for it—but I really cannot be here during that particular week.
> **Employer:** Okay, I understand how you feel, and obviously we cannot prevent you from being away if it's that important—but we would not be able to guarantee that we can hold your position open if you're away without any approval. Even if we can keep your job open, this would go in your file as an unauthorized absence. Can you at least explain *why* you need to be away for an entire week?
> **Larry:** Sure, I will be observing a Biblical festival known as the Feast of Tabernacles, which lasts a total of eight days.
> **Employer:** The Feast of Tabernacles? I've heard of that feast—isn't that one of the three pilgrimage festivals where the Israelites could only go to one place—to the place where the Almighty placed His name, as in Jerusalem? Are you going to Jerusalem?
> **Larry:** Well, no, I would *love* to go to Jerusalem, but it costs too much for my family and me to travel that far! However, we have been invited to attend a feast site here in Texas, which is much closer!
> **Employer:** So you're saying Jerusalem is no longer the chosen place where the Almighty has placed His name? Is that what you're saying? I mean, I was thinking that feast is only for people living in the land of Israel. Since we're obviously not living in Israel now, you're *exempted* from having to go—unless you can show me that this place here in Texas is *now* the place where He has chosen to place His name.
> **Larry:** Uh … well, I need to explain that since the Temple has been destroyed, Jerusalem is no longer the chosen place, so the feasts can now be celebrated *anywhere* around the world wherever two or three are gathered in His name.
> **Employer:** Okay, this is really not making sense to me because I know Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed around 2,000 years ago, but no one ever suggested that this means some city or cities ever replaced Jerusalem as the place where the

Creator placed His name. Can you show me any Scriptural examples of where believers gathered to observe any of the three pilgrimage feasts anywhere but in Jerusalem?

Larry: Well, no, but that doesn't mean they *didn't.*

Employer: It doesn't mean they *did*, either! And doesn't it seem a little strange to you that for something as important as feast observance, there isn't any record in the Bible of anyone observing those feasts anywhere but in Jerusalem? Why do we not read of any such observances in Babylon during their 70-year captivity? Why do we only read of their next observance as being in Jerusalem *after* their return from the Captivity?

Larry: I see your point, but like I said, just because there isn't any record of observances outside of Jerusalem doesn't mean there weren't any. More importantly, there *are* records of feast observances outside of Jerusalem in the New Testament!

Employer: Really? I wasn't aware of any such observances. *Where* in the New Testament?

Larry: Well, in Acts 20:6, we read about the Apostle Paul and other believers observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi!

Employer: I'm aware of that verse—isn't that where we read that they sailed away from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread? I was under the impression that feast was only mentioned as a time reference. Does it say that they actually *observed* the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi? And if they did such a thing, couldn't it have been a voluntary commemoration of that feast, which anyone can do anywhere? I mean, the Apostle Paul wasn't born in Israel, and neither were any of the Philippians. Their attendance wouldn't have been compulsory, but *voluntary*, if I understand the law about keeping the feasts.

Larry: That's another valid point, but once again, I need to explain that just because it doesn't say they literally observed that feast doesn't mean they *didn't.*

Employer: Understood, but now I need to go back to *my* earlier point of how strange it is that we don't ever <u>read</u> of any believers—Old Testament or New Testament—observing the three pilgrimage feasts anywhere but in Jerusalem. I mean, those feasts are pretty important, and they *are* mentioned as being observed in the New Testament, so I don't question that, but you seem to be reading into the text with the belief that they kept them in places *other* than Jerusalem. If it's so important for us to believe that the feasts can now be kept—in fact, that they *are commanded* be kept, even if it's somewhere *other* than in Jerusalem, then don't you think the Creator would have inspired the New Testament writers to record those observances? Soooo, with all that in mind, if you want to move to Israel, then we can have this discussion and I would understand your taking off for the entire feast as a requirement. Of course, I realize that if you moved to Israel, you would no longer be working here anyway! But for *now*, outside of Israel, the best you can do, as I understand the Scriptural command, is have a token observance or commemoration of those feasts. And I have no problem with you going somewhere to do that for an entire week—*as soon as you've accrued your vacation time*.

Of course, there are various side arguments that I might have presented in the above potential conversation, but the bottom line is, there are no New Testament verses indicating that any believers went

anywhere other than Jerusalem for a commanded feast observance. I might have brought up the fact that the Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, says, "Let us celebrate the feast."[15] Was this an admonition for the Corinthians to go to the place where Yahweh chose to place His name, or was it an exhortation to commemorate the feast as a celebratory remembrance wherever they found themselves? For the answer, we recommend reading the entire chapter in context.

Who Is Commanded to Dwell in Booths?

In the potential conversation that I composed above, the employer commented that he was thinking the Feast of Tabernacles is only for people living in the land of Israel. He could have been even more specific if he had wanted to. He *could* have informed me that only the native-born Israelites are commanded to dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles. When we read the commandment regarding the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23, a seemingly minute phrase stipulates that the part about dwelling in booths *only* applies to those born in the land of Israel:

Looking out the backyard sukkah door.

> 39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto Yahweh seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.
> 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before Yahweh your Almighty seven days.
> 41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto Yahweh seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.
> 42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:
> 43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your Almighty.

[15] *Cf.*, 1 Corinthians 5:8. The Greek word translated "keep" in the King James Version is *heortazōmen* (word #1858 in *Strong's Greek Dictionary*), which is better translated "celebrate." According to *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, this word is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *châgag* (חָגַג, word #2287 in *Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*), a word that means "celebrate" or "dance." If Paul had intended for the Corinthian brethren to understand "keeping the feast" as inclusive of killing a Passover lamb, he would have used the same Greek word used in the Septuagint translation of Numbers 9:3 (ποιησεις), *poiésis*, which carries the meaning "to prepare, make ready").

If we are to take Yahweh at His Word, which is always the best way to do things, we should understand that no one has just cause to tell anyone who isn't Israelite-born that he or she is commanded to dwell in a booth during the Feast of Tabernacles. Yet, we are acquainted with individuals who insist that this commandment now applies to anyone and everyone who desires to obey Yahweh. Please don't get me wrong—I have participated in the construction of many booths, and I hope to participate in the construction of many more, but not because I, a *non*-Israelite-born American, *have* to; rather, it's because I *want* to.

Beware of the "Prosperity Gospel" Mentality and Learn the Lesson of Matthew 23:13

I'm hopeful this study will go a long way towards quieting those who, like the friend mentioned early on, will assess the blessings or curses experienced by others based upon a perception of their levels of obedience. I believe the Pharisaic "Prosperity Gospel" mentality has caused great harm to those who, despite their efforts to pursue a righteous lifestyle, were nevertheless shot down by well-meaning, yet unreasonable, zealots. The modern term is "misplaced zeal."

This is me, enjoying the restful relaxation of a campfire during our Sukkot observance—at home in our backyard.

Neither June nor I can possibly know your heart like Yahweh does, nor can you know our hearts like Yahweh does. All we can say is, we love Yahweh and His ways, and we love commemorating His feasts with fellow believers in a spirit of peace with a worshipful attitude. Yahweh knows that if we could see from His Word where all of His people are required to attend feast gatherings and must *not* stay at home or work at their regular jobs during any part of His feasts, then we would gladly comply. But even if someone *can* show us such a requirement from Scripture, isn't there something wrong when it has to be by interpretation instead of being produced from plain wording?

An additional perspective stems from Matthew 23:13. This is where Yeshua upbraids the scribes and Pharisees for shutting others out of the Kingdom. He states that they themselves are not going to enter it, and when others *try* entering, scribes and Pharisees stop them as well. The lesson here is, we need to be humble, helpful servants, *not* spiritual inhibitors. We also need to be true to the Word. It is relatively easy when one is self-employed or retired to celebrate the feasts for a full week in this day and age. Some individuals out there are even known to brag about how righteous they are when it comes to feast observance. However, when one is employed by a non-Torah-observant individual or company, taking off for Yahweh's feasts can be a challenge. We need to remember that. If our convenience is someone else's hardship, berating the other person's "lack of faith" will hardly ease the hardship, nor will it enhance our relationship with that individual. Moreover, when we stipulate requirements that cannot be validated by Scripture, think of the people who are going to spiritually throw

up their hands and say, “There is NO WAY I will *ever* be able to measure up to that standard!” In short, we need to exhibit more empathy and less vanity.

Do we want to be responsible for those who, in not knowing how to respond to the Pharisaical Matthew 23:13 approach, not only give up on meeting a standard that wasn’t even achieved by such ancients as King David, but they *also* completely abandon faith in a Creator? Sadly, this has happened many times throughout the chronicles of history. In our efforts to persuade others to attend feast gatherings, even if it means losing their jobs, we may actually achieve the opposite of the desired effect and cause those who would ***like*** to someday attend feast gatherings (such as when they accrue vacation time) decide to not even *start*. If we persuade others that it is a sin to celebrate the feasts at home, even though their jobs are on the line if they *do* take off the entire week, the sad result may be a rejection, not only of us, but of our Creator as well, due to the perception that He has created standards that they cannot possibly measure up to. Yes, that is the impression that others will be left with if we aren't careful.

June provided me with a personal example of how potentially harmful it can be when those who otherwise seem to know Scripture (including the Creator’s name) misinterpret, misapply and wrongly impose their interpretations on others. In June’s example, a man who referred to the Creator by His name Yahweh, yet misapplied Scripture, is the reason it was (years later) so difficult for me to persuade her that we should call on that name. The following is June’s story in her own words, a narrative that begins while she was still a student attending high school:

Why I Did Not Want to Call on the Name "Yahweh"

By June Acheson

When I, June Acheson, was a teenager, my sister and I started attending Bible studies held in a home. The group holding these studies was not associated with any organized "church." It was while attending these studies that we began to really study the Bible instead of just reading it. Like any religious group, there was eventually a split in the leadership and some of the group relocated to a town about 60 miles away. They moved to the town where both my sister and I would later attend college.

My sister is a year older than me and therefore was the first to move to college. If memory serves me correctly, she only attended for one quarter (about 3 months). During that time, she met with the group that split off and quickly became very dissatisfied with college. It was while meeting with them that she learned of the name Yahweh and began referring to Him with that name. She moved back home for a little while, but my parents were not too happy about her dropping out of college. While home, she tried to convince me that I, too, should call upon our Creator by His name. I tried to persuade her that she was wrong. The group she met with while at college eventually moved to the St. Louis area, and it did not take my sister long to move down there as well. She moved in with one of the families.

My parents lived in a very small, remote Illinois town and there were not many job opportunities; part of my sister's explanation for moving was to be more able to find a job. After she had been there for a few months, we could tell by her random calls home that things were not going well. Yes, she did find a part-time job at a department store, but some things that she was being taught by the group caused her to be afraid for her life. You see, deep down inside, she really was not happy and wanted to return home. However, she was being taught that this group was "it" and that if anyone decided to leave, then they would very likely die. For example, she was told that if she were to leave via a plane, it would crash while flying over them. Being a single, lonely, young female, she bought this line of reasoning hook, line and sinker. It took some convincing by my parents that they could drive down to St. Louis to get her and that everything would be okay. She finally consented and the next fall she returned to college, this time with me. However, my sister was different. Her experience had colored her perspective of the Bible and our purpose for being here. She still knew that our Creator's name is Yahweh, but due to her experience with that group, she had lost her zeal for studying the Bible – and being obedient to what it says.

This is why, even eleven years later, when my husband, Larry, tried to persuade me that our loving Heavenly Father has a name and that it is Yahweh, I did not want to listen to what he was saying. I was already keenly aware of the name "Yahweh" – and what the people who used that name were like (based on a mistaken impression that I had been given, thanks to a man who had wrongly imposed his misinterpretation of Scripture on others). As a result of the impression I had been left with, I did not want to have anything to do with the name Yahweh – not only because of how other truths had been distorted by those who called on that name, but also because of how this man's deception led my sister to abandon her faith altogether. I now praise Yahweh for having a husband who was patient enough with me that I could finally see that although *one* teaching promoted by a group may be false, this doesn't mean that *all* of their teachings are false. Many never learn this lesson. If I hadn't come to that realization, I would likely have continued in my rejection of the name Yahweh, and would never have wanted to associate with anyone who calls on that name. This is why it is so important that we be very, very careful about what we believe before imposing that belief on others. Do we want to be responsible for someone rejecting truths that we have to share – all because we wrongly imposed a false teaching on them?

I am persuaded the religious leader described above in June's commentary would receive the same rebuke from Yeshua that the scribes and Pharisees received in Matthew 23:13. That cult leader, with his arrogant, misguided display of authority, may very well serve as the reason why June's sister no longer called on the name Yahweh, nor did she ever again discuss the Bible with June.[16] He was effectively shutting himself out of the Kingdom and preventing others from making it in as well. This is not to say that we are passing judgment on who will make it into the Kingdom and who will not. Yeshua has that authority, not us. Nevertheless, if we take Yeshua's rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees to heart, we should understand the grave danger in authoritatively and dogmatically asserting ourselves as representatives of the Almighty while simultaneously setting unreasonable standards for others to attain—standards that Yahweh Himself has never established. As Yeshua said elsewhere, if the blind lead the blind, *both* will fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:14). Before imposing our Scriptural interpretations on others, let's make absolutely certain we have Yahweh's full support. Let's steer clear of the ditch.

Many, upon realizing they cannot meet the standards put in place by religious zealots, stop trying altogether. June and I understand this truth all too well. We once associated with a cult, initially unaware of the supreme influence the leader had on its members. Later, after one too many "red flags" snapped us out of our paradigm and shocked us into reality, we wrote letters to elders expressing our concerns. Our letters were ignored. Later, our warnings to our closest friends were also ignored; in fact, by that time, we had been marked, ostracized and informed that Satan had entered our hearts. Twenty years later, I contacted some of those old friends, just to see how they were doing. They had all long since departed from the group, having eventually come to the same realization that June and I had. One guy built a website dedicated to exposing the group's false teachings; another man's wife became one of the overseer's wives. While we were encouraged that they had awakened to the overseer's deceptive ways, the rest of the story is that many of those friends no longer believe in a Creator.

I would ask those who teach others that we must go to "a place" where two or three are gathered for a full week of feast observance if they've considered the information presented in this study. I would ask if they feel comfortable enough with their teaching knowing they've caused "babes" in the faith to decide the cost of Torah obedience is just too high—resulting in their abandoning that faith.

It is for these reasons that I believe we need to use another approach—an approach wherein we focus on the *blessings* of commemorating the feasts with others instead of the *curses* if we don't. Do we want to be accountable for those who, as a result of our invented standards (without the sanction of Yahweh's Word), abandon their faith in a Creator? Wouldn't it be better to present our reasons for believing as we do (complete with Scriptural backup) from the perspective that the *greater blessings* are experienced when we commemorate the feasts with others of like faith?

Conclusion

We have seen that Yahweh chose Jerusalem as His spiritual dwelling place here on earth. *That* is where He placed His name. King David understood this truth, as did all of first-century Judaism. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that this understanding has changed. I actually find it ironic that, within a movement wherein all seem to agree that the precepts of Torah are still binding on all believers—*an agreement that nothing in Torah has changed*—certain leaders are nevertheless found teaching that it's now permissible to sacrifice the Passover lamb "within any of our gates"; others teach that unless you

[16] Sadly, June's sister passed away in 2024.

attend a feast gathering with at least two believers, then you are sinning against Yahweh. I have shown that applying Yeshua's "where two or three are gathered in My name" principle to where Yahweh chooses to place His name is simply a subversion of His intent. The "where two or three are gathered in My name" comment was intended as Yeshua's stamp of approval for necessary discipline within the community of believers. He is "with them," as in "He has their back." It was not intended as a green light for slaughtering a Passover lamb at various designated feast venues. Moreover, attendance at a feast venue with like-minded believers, while clearly the best option, should not be treated as mandatory. In this land, far from Israel, those who set apart the holy days of a festival within the confines of their homes should not be regarded as rebellious, nor regarded as inferior to those attend feast gatherings elsewhere.

As an aside, during the last four years of my employment before retiring in 2024, I took off the entire week for both the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, not because I felt it was required of me, but because after my trustworthy assistant, Bruce, passed away, my employer was content to *not* replace him. My absence during the feasts *forced* my manager to hire a new assistant, but once I returned from my vacation, they would promptly transfer him or her to a different department, so the cycle kept repeating itself. When my original assistant passed away, I often found myself working extra-long hours without pay in order to keep up with customers' demands. Our current, broken corporate system allows employers to demand more work from fewer employees, creating undue stress for hourly employees, who are *still* expected to be finished by the time their shift ends. To compensate, I would often work well into the night so I could start fresh the next morning. All along, I knew I was expected to fulfill all requests on a daily basis, but if I dared state, "I had to work past 5:00 PM yesterday," I could have been terminated because under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), employees working outside their shift are required to be paid overtime pay. My employer made it clear that we were NOT to work outside our shift, (i.e., "No overtime allowed"), thus creating an unfair double jeopardy in my situation. I either had to double my speed or face termination. *Or just get the work done, regardless of the unfair time restrictions*. I'm an Ecclesiastes 9:10 guy, so I made sure all client requests were processed "same day," regardless of when my shift ended. The current corporate trend allows this sort of employee abuse to go on unchecked.[17] I had suggested that my employer needed to hire a third-party consultant/analyst who could determine that additional employees needed to be hired so as to not over-burden staff members who are doing the work of two, sometimes three employees. My manager chuckled at the suggestion. But I digress.

So yes, I took off entire weeks for feast celebrations those last four years, and there were many other years where we did the same thing, even though I maintain it would not have been sinful for me to have stayed home and worked during the non-holy days. Rather than taking an approach wherein we criticize or otherwise reprove those who do not always attend feast observances outside of their homes, I believe a more balanced approach is to regard the feasts as opportunities for fellowship and worship, while reflecting on the yet future time when all of Yahweh's people will be gathered together for a *perpetual* feast. Who, in their right mind, would want to pass up such a festive occasion?

[17] I actually reached out to our local state representative, Mihaela Plesa, a year before deciding to retire, just in case she might come up with a solution. She was too busy to respond, but her associate replied, "I am not sure there is much that can be done on our end, but I can give you information for our local Legal Aide office. If you expect that your employers are requiring/expecting you to work off the clock without pay, you should talk with Legal Aid or an attorney." That suggestion was worthless because my employer was not actually doing anything illegal; at least I'm not aware of any law prohibiting employers from giving *one* employee a daily workload sufficient to keep *two* employees busy. To give some insight into the added stress of getting more work out of fewer employees and the accompanying pressure to work faster to keep up with demands, one of my managers actually told me, "Larry, I would prefer that you work faster and make more mistakes."

I support meeting with like-minded believers for feast observances, not because we are required to go there at the risk of losing our jobs or missing out on other blessings that Yahweh might have in store for us, but rather to enjoy the fellowship of others and to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity to worship and praise our Heavenly Father and His Son at the same time. It is my desire to, insofar as possible and as circumstances allow, attend such feast observances. If June and I are unable to make it, we do not see a Scriptural mandate that we must go *somewhere* or risk being on the short end of Yahweh's blessings. Since we are not living in the land of Israel, we can only do the best we can in a strange land that does not have Yahweh's laws in mind. Regardless of where you go—*or don't go*—for Yahweh's feasts, we wish you His richest blessings.