

Let's Keep the Feast, But Let's Also Keep it Yahweh's Feast

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June and I just received the December/January newsletter from a major Sacred Name assembly. The cover story is entitled "Feast Memories," which offers the reading audience details about their Feast of Tabernacles observance. It must have been quite a feast -- there were approximately 350 brethren in attendance. We are glad they all enjoyed the feast, and we certainly rejoice that more and more folks are coming to realize the importance of honoring our Heavenly Father and His Son, not only by calling upon Them by Their true names, but also by obeying the commandment to observe the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as Sukkot. Nevertheless, we were surprised to read of a certain aspect of that feast that is not only unsupported by Scripture, but it seems to be very much outside the parameters of what Yahweh desires from His children during His feasts. Don't get me wrong: I understand we cannot specify, based upon Scripture, each and every thing that is either appropriate or inappropriate to do during Yahweh's feasts. For example, Scripture doesn't tell us whether or not it's okay to wash our laundry during Yahweh's feasts, nor does it tell us whether or not we can go for a bike ride or whether or not we can play games. There are just some things that we have to "reason through" based upon our understanding of Yahweh's character as revealed through His Word.

One thing all of us feast-keepers should want to avoid at all costs is fulfilling Isaiah 1:14:

Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear *them*.

Some people point to the above verse and deduce that the reason Yahweh "hated" the Jews' feasts is because they were observing them on the wrong days. However, there is nothing in the text to suggest such a thing. It is clear from the context of Isaiah chapter one that the Jews' hearts were no longer in the right place. Why else did He need to admonish them to "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" in verse 17? These were individuals who were certainly keeping the feasts, and they probably thought they were such nice folk for doing so. However, at the same time, they had turned a "blind eye" to the suffering and injustices imposed upon those deemed "less fortunate" than they were.

What Does Yahweh Think of Our Feasts?

Are we in danger of becoming as those Jews were? Yes, we are. We need to remember what a blessing it is to have the freedom to observe Yahweh's feasts, and we also need to remember to give back to Him, which includes helping to meet the needs of those who are not as blessed as we are (Matt. 25:40).

However, we also need to be mindful that there are other ways to observe Yahweh's feasts that indicate to Him that we aren't really keeping *His* feasts ... but rather *our* feasts, which make Him "weary to bear" with us. In other words, He would rather not even put up with what we call "feasts." As I mentioned earlier, it is not possible for us to come up with a list of each and every action that is either acceptable or unacceptable to do during Yahweh's feasts. June and I have been known to perform some

acts during the feasts that aren't found in Yahweh's Word, yet we don't believe they detract from the meaning of the feast. For example, one of life's necessities involves doing laundry, and we usually wash a few loads during the feast ... not because we enjoy doing laundry, but because it is something we all need to do, and it sure beats having to spend all day doing laundry when the feast is over. We also prepare our meals during the feast, except on days that coincide with the weekly Sabbath. We also wash and dry dishes, we sweep our tent and, when observing the feast with other believers, we participate in "camp cleanup." These are all things that no one in his or her right mind *wants* to do, yet it needs to be done, so we do it!

This brings me to an aspect of the feast mentioned in the aforementioned newsletter published by the Sacred Name assembly. I want to preface what I'm about to write with a commendation for this assembly, for I know they did many things right, and I also know they did their best to create many warm memories for those who participated. For example, they conducted seminars, they held daily Bible studies, they had communal meals, including a wiener roast (I'm sure the hot dogs were either beef or turkey!), and they even had a special "Praise and Worship Night." These are activities that June and I believe make for a wonderful feast time!

So what activity do I feel detracted from what should be the acceptable parameters of Yahweh's feast? I will quote the pertinent portion of the newsletter:

The afternoons were busy with lots of fun activities. Something new was added this year. A brother from Michigan, who was not able to come this year, donated a beautiful Henry Golden Boy 22 caliber long rifle for a "Turkey Shoot." Children from the ages of 6 to 16 were eligible to try out for the rifle. There were 30 very anxious children at the rifle range that day.

Was it appropriate to dedicate a day of Yahweh's ordained feast towards a shooting competition? I do not believe it was. If you disagree, that's your prerogative, but here's my reasoning: To begin with, I have no problem with shooting turkeys, although I don't believe that is what was actually done at the "Turkey Shoot" conducted by that assembly. I will admit that I have never shot a gun in my life, and I hope I never have to ever do such a thing, but at the same time, I strongly support the right to bear arms and the right to go hunting for turkey, deer, pheasant ... anything classified by Yahweh as "clean for food," so long as it is for just that ... providing food for your family and/or others ... not for sport. My concern, then, has nothing to do with whether or not it was appropriate to conduct a "Turkey Shoot." My concern has *everything* to do with whether or not it was appropriate to conduct a "Turkey Shoot" during one of Yahweh's feasts.

Staying "In Line" or "Crossing the Line?"

We already know of how concerned we should all be regarding whether or not the feast we find ourselves observing is "Yahweh's feast" or simply "our feast," in which our hearts have become (or are in the process of becoming) detached from the attitude that Yahweh wants His children to have. When our hearts are in tune with Yahweh, we become more like Him. We think and act like His children, not like "red-headed stepchildren," so to speak. It is when our hearts begin to stray from Yahweh that we begin to take liberties that we most likely wouldn't have taken before. Things that we once would have never considered doing gradually become "no big deal." Is holding a "Turkey Shoot" competition an example of hearts beginning to stray from Yahweh? Well, of course, only Yahweh knows our hearts, so I don't mean to presume to know the hearts of those within that assembly who conceived and approved of the "Turkey Shoot." Nevertheless, I do believe they "crossed the line," whether they agree with me or not.

Oh, I'm sure the organizers of the "Turkey Shoot" anticipated that a few "naysayers," like me, would surface. Maybe they justified their decision by reasoning that it's fun, it's harmless (so long as they point the gun in the right direction, of course), and it keeps the kids from becoming bored. After all, if the kids get bored, then they won't want to keep the feasts when they grow up!

Well, then along comes someone like me, who reasons, "If we must fill our kids' feast needs with activities to keep them from being bored, ... if those activities cannot be Bible-centered, then there's a problem." Now I'm not saying we should be holding Bible studies and playing Bible trivia 24/7. If I thought such a thing, then I wouldn't have given my nod of approval to the wiener roast and the praise and worship in music and song. Some of my fondest feast memories are of the discussions we would enjoy with others while sitting around the campfire. Fellowship is certainly important and the discussions we enjoyed with others, whether it was around the campfire or somewhere else, made for a more meaningful feast. Of course, we can understand that the youth want more than "food, fellowship and Bible studies." They want other activities to stimulate their interests; otherwise, it's "too boring."

We used to attend feasts with an assembly that stimulated the youths' interests with different activities that, in my opinion, were "acceptable distractions." I'm not saying I necessarily approved of them, yet I couldn't say they were "crossing the line," either. For example, one afternoon the adults might chaperone an afternoon of bowling. The next afternoon they would take the children rollerskating. Another afternoon would include some zany activities, such as a "three-legged race," the egg toss, a softball throwing contest, etc. These activities promoted togetherness and camaraderie while not detracting from the overall sense that "this is Yahweh's feast we're observing." It also kept the kids from becoming too bored.

So what about the "Turkey Shoot" I read about in the assembly's newsletter? What's so different about having a "Turkey Shoot" versus going bowling? Both are distractions and neither have anything to do with Scripture! Well, I believe there is a significant difference between the two activities, and I believe the difference should be obvious to all. One activity involves rolling a ball down a nicely-varnished floor in an attempt to knock down ten objects known as "pins." Its origin can at worst be traced to people wanting a harmless, yet entertaining, distraction. What about shooting a gun, though? Can we say the same thing? No, we cannot. The gun, as we all hopefully know, was invented as a weapon. Thus, when we sponsor any form of target practice involving a gun at any of Yahweh's feasts, we are sanctioning the intentional discharge of a weapon. As we should also know, weapons were invented to kill both animals and people. That is their purpose.

A Glimpse of Yahweh's Kingdom?

Does Yahweh want His people to dedicate any portion of His feast to an activity that involves the firing of a weapon ... even if it's "just for fun" and no one, not even an animal, is hurt? Obviously, some folks will answer, "He doesn't mind if we do such a thing," and that is certainly their prerogative, but I certainly disagree. In the same book of Scripture where we read about observing feasts that Yahweh hates, we read about a kingdom that will one day come about on the earth. This kingdom will be vastly different from the one we're currently having to experience and endure. In this future kingdom, a man known as the "Branch of Jesse" will rule the earth. In speaking of the "Branch of Jesse," Isaiah was inspired to write:

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. (Isaiah 11:4-5)

In the very next verse, we read of how *peaceful* this kingdom will be:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

This is a glimpse at what things will be like in Yahweh's kingdom -- a time that many of us pray for every day: "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

Many feast-keepers regard the feasts as glimpses of what things will be like in Yahweh's kingdom ... a time of togetherness, of fellowship, of worship, of unity and peace.

In fact, on an ironic note, the assembly that published the newsletter about their "Turkey Shoot" activity *also* regards the feasts as being a glimpse of Yahweh's kingdom. Let's review the very first paragraph of their newsletter:

What a joyous Feast of Tabernacles we had this year. It was perfect in so many ways and a small glimpse of the Kingdom. (This is from the same article, entitled "Feast Memories," in which the "Turkey Shoot" activity is later described).

It would appear, based upon the above author's recalling the fond memory of the "Turkey Shoot," that firing weapons should be considered a part of that "glimpse of the Kingdom." We are inclined to disagree, at least based upon another "glimpse of the Kingdom" offered by the prophet Isaiah:

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the Almighty of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:3-4)

In the "glimpse of the Kingdom" that June and I see, we do not see anyone firing weapons, even for sport. There will be no need for weapons because peace and the pure worship of Yahweh will rule the day. Therefore, if I'm seeking to incorporate a "glimpse of the Kingdom" into any feast I observe, it most definitely will not involve any activities in which weapons are involved. I believe we should strive to really make our feasts *Yahweh's feasts*, and that we should strive to make them feasts where Yahweh Himself wants to be among us.

A Point Involving Playing "Money Games" on the Sabbath

I remember many years ago being asked by, of all people, a child, to produce a study on the topic of whether or not it would be okay to play "money games" on the Sabbath. For those within our circle of believers who agreed with us that Yahweh forbids buying and selling on His Sabbath day, I was able to get my message across without any difficulty or disagreements. My point was, "If we understand that it is wrong to buy and sell on the weekly Sabbath day, then why would it be okay to *pretend* to buy and sell on the weekly Sabbath? Shouldn't we abstain from every appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22)?" Accordingly, if we understand that Yahweh does not want us to kill others, why would we want our children to *pretend* to do so? Isn't that a subtle form of approval? Particularly during Yahweh's feasts, those of us who understand and agree that during this time we are given a glimpse of what things will be like while in His coming Kingdom, we can appreciate that Yahweh's feasts are not a time to place our focus on things that will *not* be a part of that Kingdom. We know that swords and spears will not be there, and I'm persuaded that rifles will also be missing. Praise be to Yahweh for that! May His kingdom come soon!