



"I'm convinced that there is nothing that can happen to me in this life that is not precisely designed by a sovereign Lord to give me the opportunity to learn to know Him."

—Elisabeth Elliot

08-Aug-25

The Sacred Assemblies (Part One)

Within God's instructions for His annual holy days is a rare and little-noticed but highly significant facet. While He commands that all [the holy days](#) and the weekly [Sabbath](#) should include "holy convocations" ([Leviticus 23:2-4](#)), a couple of them are additionally identified as "sacred assemblies" (or "solemn assemblies"). We have commonly used the terms "holy convocation" and "sacred assembly" interchangeably, but it turns out that they are not synonymous.

The Hebrew word translated as "sacred assembly" is *atzeret* (*Strong's* #6116). An *atzeret* is a holy convocation, but with a special purpose. The law specifically designates just two sacred assemblies—two *atzerote*, the plural of *atzeret*—and they are both at the end of week-long festivals. In one place, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread is commanded to have a sacred assembly ([Deuteronomy 16:8](#)), but it is the Eighth Day, which immediately follows the [Feast of Tabernacles](#), that is associated most often with a sacred assembly. Notice [Leviticus 23:33-36](#):

Then the LORD spoke to [Moses](#), saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. *It is a sacred assembly*, and you shall do no customary work on it. (Emphasis ours throughout.)

Similarly, Numbers 29 contains the offerings made on the fall holy days. The sacrificial instructions for the Eighth Day in [Numbers 29:35](#) read, "On the eighth day you shall have a *sacred assembly*. You shall do no customary work."

When Solomon dedicated the Temple, the chronicler records that ". . . on the eighth day they held a *sacred assembly* . . ." ([II Chronicles 7:9](#)). [Nehemiah 8:18](#) uses this same designation about the Feast in Nehemiah's time: "[T]hey kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a *sacred assembly*, according to the prescribed manner." Thus, Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the sacred assembly on the Eighth Day, and like everything else in God's Word, there is a very good reason for it.

The root of *atzeret* (*atsar*; *Strong's* #6113) supplies some additional themes that arise in the word's usage. This root contains the ideas of "closing," "stopping," "restraining," and "retaining," helping explain the purpose of the sacred assembly. In terms of "closing," the two sacred assemblies are the holy convocations held at the end of a multi-day feast.

Another element, that of "restraint," is present because the holy days are days without customary work, so stopping or restraining—holding oneself back from common activities—is already part of the day. In addition, the Feast of Tabernacles' command to rejoice is specified only for seven days—curiously, it does not extend to the Eighth (see [Leviticus 23:40](#); [Deuteronomy 16:15](#)). That difference implies a greater degree of solemnity and thus, a greater sense of restraint.

The sacred assemblies are also more solemn because of the idea of "retaining" found in the root word. [God](#) intends His people to retain His instructions, so they do not lose the lessons when they return to their everyday lives. Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles were pilgrimage feasts, meaning that the Israelites would travel from all over the land to where God placed His name. The *atzerote* would close the long feasts, but they were also designed to help the people retain, hold onto, or preserve what their worship at the feasts had taught them.

God's people need to retain what the feasts produce. Thus, the sacred assemblies contain an extra measure of gravity because God's intent in commanding them is to help people reflect on what they had experienced, make the right connections, and glean the right lessons as they return home.

The Eighth Day is especially fascinating because it not only closes the Feast of Tabernacles, but it also ends the annual sequence of festivals. The *Commentary on the [Old Testament](#)* by Keil and Delitzsch notes:

*The **azareth**, as the eighth day, did not strictly belong to the feast of Tabernacles, which was only to last seven days; and it was distinguished, moreover, from these seven days by a smaller number of offerings (Num. 29:35ff.). The eighth day was rather the solemn close of the whole circle of yearly feasts, and therefore was appended to the close of the last of these feasts as the eighth day of the feast itself.*

The Eighth Day is the last annual holy day until the calendar returns to springtime, when the sacred year starts over. We often struggle to remember what happened last week, let alone what happened earlier in the year. However, the placement of the Eighth Day, and the themes within its root, suggests that the entire progression of holy day observances is closed and their instruction should be retained in our minds.

In addition, the number eight in Scripture indicates new beginnings. Thus, the closing and retaining are coupled with a new beginning, which suggests taking what the worship of the past year produced and using it to begin again or to begin anew.

[Part Two](#) will consider how the Old Testament prophets used *atzeret* in their writings, revealing a stubborn fault in the people of Israel.

- David C. Grabbe

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From the Archives: Featured Article

[Are You Teachable?](#)

by Staff

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The next Bible Study (Friday 08-Aug-25) will be **Acts (Part Twenty-One)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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