



"History is a vast early warning system."  
—Norman Cousins

15-Aug-25

## The Sacred Assemblies (Part Two)

In [Part One](#), we saw that the phrase "sacred assembly," found in the instructions for both the Last Day of Unleavened Bread and the Eighth Day ([Deuteronomy 16:8](#); [Leviticus 23:36](#)), is a translation of *atzeret* (*Strong's* #6116; plural *atzerote*). The word's root, *atsar*, contains the ideas of "closing," "stopping," "restraining," and "retaining," aiding us in understanding the purpose of the sacred assemblies. These holy days close weeklong festivals in which we refrain from engaging in everyday activities and learn important lessons that [God](#) wants us to retain.

The *atzerote* show up in the Prophets in significant ways, further illustrating God's intent for them. They comprise part of God's charge against Israel and Judah in their respective uses of [the holy days](#). [Amos 5:21](#) records God telling the northern kingdom of Israel, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your *sacred assemblies*" (emphasis ours throughout).

This verse is constructed interestingly. God begins by mentioning the feast days in general, but then He narrows His focus to the sacred assemblies—the *atzerote*. He could have mentioned the holy convocations instead, which

would have encompassed the first days of the longer feasts, as well as Pentecost, Trumpets, and Atonement. Instead, He draws attention to the sacred assemblies that close Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles.

[Isaiah 1:13](#) is a similar verse: "The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and *the sacred meeting* [*atzeret*]." Obviously, God had something against Israel and Judah's observance of the feasts, mentioning in both places the sacred assemblies in particular.

The overall sense seems to be less that the sacred assemblies themselves were filled with iniquity—although that is a possibility—but that God rejected the sacred assemblies because the people were so contrary to Him that their coming before Him in the sacred assembly was meaningless. The people's assembling, ostensibly before Him, did not fit with how they lived the rest of the year. When we add the concept found in the root word that an *atzeret* should involve retaining, God seems to be saying that the people were not using the *atzerote* properly. The people came to the feasts, but they retained nothing.

A confirmation of this appears earlier in Amos, where God mentions Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, each a significant location in Israelite history, causing the people to regard them as holy places:

For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel—" ([Amos 5:4-6](#))

Bethel became significant in their history because it was the place where God revealed Himself to Jacob through his dream. He called it Bethel, which means "House of God," because he believed God lived in that place. Jacob arrived at Bethel as a wanderer, fleeing from Esau after deceiving their father, but then he encountered God. He left Bethel as a man with a future and a hope.

At Bethel, a transformation began for Jacob. Later, after reconciling with Esau, Jacob returned there, where God solidified the change of Jacob's name to Israel and made a covenant with him ([Genesis 35:9-15](#)). For the Israelites, Bethel came to signify a place of renewal, of reorientation of one's life, and of transformation by God.

Because of Jacob's experience, Bethel contained a shrine to which the Israelites would make a pilgrimage. However, in Amos 5:5, God says not to seek Bethel but instead to seek the LORD and live (verse 6). Reading between the lines, the Israelites placed more emphasis on the location than on God. They made a pilgrimage to a special place, thinking they would gain some favor as a result. They believed something good would rub off on them because God had been there for Jacob.

Yet Bethel stood as a silent witness against them because, after visiting, unlike Jacob, they experienced no transformation, no renewal, no reorientation of their lives. Maybe they felt more spiritual for having gone, but nothing changed.

The lesson regarding Bethel lies in the background of God's declaration that He hated the Israelites' feast days and took no delight in their sacred assemblies. We can see how it fits with the theme of "retaining" within *atzeret*, but as a contrast: They were *not* retaining anything. What they should have gleaned just ran like sand through their fingers, so they had nothing to show for having made the trip. They may have felt satisfied that they had obeyed God's command to observe the sacred assembly and felt uplifted, but no transformation, no true turn for the better, occurred in their lives. They did not close their hands to grasp and retain what came from appearing before God.

In Part Three, we will examine another use of *atzeret* from a different prophet, Joel.

- David C. Grabbe

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**New Transcripts**

**[BS-AC22: Acts \(Part Twenty-Two\)](#)**

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 21-Feb-89

**[BS-AC23: Acts \(Part Twenty-Three\)](#)**

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 28-Feb-89

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**From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

**[Fall Feast Lessons](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The world will learn that God judges- that He has had perpetual hands on contact with His creation, having the ultimate decision over everything. After Satan is bound and confined, God proceeds to bring about seven reconcilements: (1) Judah reconciled with Christ (2) Judah and Israel reconciled (3) Israel, Assyria, and Egypt reconciled (4) all nations reconciled to each other (5) Man and nature reconciled (6) Families reconciled to each other (7) God and man reconciled despite all we have done to trash His property.

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**From the Archives: Featured Article**

**[Amos 5 and the Feast of Tabernacles](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

How can we evaluate whether our Feast of Tabernacles is a "good" one or not? Using God's criticism of Israel's feasts in Amos 5, John Ritenbaugh shows that the ancient pilgrimage locations of Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal provide instruction about what God wants us to learn from His feasts.

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**Featured Audio Schedule**

**Friday Night Bible Study**

The next Bible Study (Friday 15-Aug-25) will be **Acts (Part Twenty-Two)**,

## CGG Weekly: The Sacred Assemblies (Part Two) (15-Aug-25)

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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