

Prepare For Next Year's Feast!

by Staff

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"And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide. . . ."
—*Deuteronomy 14:23*

"The king is dead! Long live the king!"

This is a saying that the nobles of England cried immediately upon the death of one of their monarchs. Sometimes they mourned the death of the deceased king, and sometimes they did not, but they always looked forward with optimism to the reign of the new monarch, with the hope that he or she would learn from the good and bad examples of the old.

In these days and weeks immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, we in God's church can utter a similar cry:

"The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!"

Even though the excitement and the memories of this past Feast of Tabernacles are still fresh, we should be preparing—both physically and spiritually—for *next year's* Feast. Armed with the experiences of this year's Feast, we can, as the monarchs of England were supposed to do, learn from both the good and the bad that we experienced.

Do Not Murmur!

We usually think of this first admonition immediately after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when we examine the murmuring attitudes of the Israelites after God had rescued them from Egypt by means of some of the most marvelous miracles ever. However, we also need to consider it now, after the fall festivals, when it may again be necessary for us to learn from the bad, murmuring examples of the Israelites.

Also Moses said, "This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your murmurings which you make against Him. And what are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the Lord. (Exodus 16:8)

Here are a few questions to ponder:

- » Was this past Feast your "best Feast ever"? If not, why not?
- » What was/were the problem(s)?
- » What areas would you like to see improved next year?

Please consider the answers to these questions, but please do not murmur in doing so! Murmuring to one another gets us absolutely nowhere. In fact, as we see from the Israelites' examples, it is very detrimental. It can even be hazardous to our health! Rather, we should resolve to do something positive about any negative experiences we encountered. Complaining will not solve any problems, but taking steps to see that they do not happen again will make the Feast better for everyone.

Evaluate Your Experience

First, of course, we should pray about any problems we encountered at this year's Feast. We should pray that God will take any negative, murmuring, complaining attitudes out of us, and help us to turn them into some positive, constructive suggestions.

Please ask yourself another question: "What can *I* do to make next year's Feast even better?" Here is one thing we can all do: Take the time now—during the next day or two, while your Feast memories are still fresh in your mind—to sit down with pen and paper and jot down what, in your opinion, did not measure up about this year's Feast.

- » Poor sound quality?
- » Problems with seating or access in the main hall?
- » Not enough restaurants close by?
- » Poor service?
- » Hotel staff taking us for granted?
- » Not enough local attractions?
- » Not enough Wal-Marts?

With some of these, of course, I jest. With others, I do not. Once you have listed the negative points of your recent Feast experience, write down what, in your opinion, could be done to correct or improve those situations. But do not stop there! Send your positive suggestions—not a negative list of complaints—to those who are in positions to be able to correct any problems. These would normally include your pastor or your festival coordinator. They will consider your positive input and deal with it themselves, or if necessary, forward it to the appropriate department heads.

Perhaps you did not care for the Feast site itself. If this is the case, you are probably aware that other cities in other relatively central locations are constantly under consideration. However, here again, send your input to your pastor or your festival advisor. I repeat: Send *positive* input, *constructive* input—not just, "I don't want this or that location!"

Wherever the Feast is—wherever God chooses to place His name (Deuteronomy 14:23)—resolve to be there! Remember that the physical location is at best secondary to the spiritual inspiration of God upon those giving Feast messages and the fellowship of believers in unity.

Let us not forget to let those in leadership roles know how things went well too. If there was marked improvement in one area of your Feast experience this year, let them know so that it can be noted and continued next year. Besides, a pat on the back and a "Good job!" help make all the planning and effort worthwhile.

Practice Friendliness

Did you have a less than perfect Feast this year because:

- » . . . you did not make any new friends?
- » . . . you did not meet any new people?
- » . . . there were no new people there to meet?

There were, in fact, lots of new people to meet—people of all ages—people whom most of us had not met before. So perhaps the problem lies elsewhere:

- » Did *you* spend much of your time with the same group of friends?
- » Were *you* tied to your own relatives?
- » Do *you* consider yourself shy?

If any of these factors applies to you, then it is even more reason for you to prepare for next year's Feast by practicing being friendly during the coming year. How can we do this? It is quite simple really, but it does require a little effort: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Proverbs 18:24). Despite many different renditions of this verse, the concept implied in the old and New King James versions is a valid one: If you want friends, you must show yourself friendly.

You can practice being friendly at church services each Sabbath throughout the year, especially when you have visitors from other areas. Whenever you meet someone new, thrust out your hand, give the other a firm handshake, and simply say, "Hello, my name is Fred Bloggs, and I live in Paducah, Kentucky!"—of course, substituting your own name and hometown. Follow up your initial greeting with, "What do you do for a living?" or "Where do you work?" Most people love this question, especially those who have been retired for a long time!

We can also practice friendliness at work, in the grocery store, in the bank, and so many other places in our everyday lives. Being more outgoing and sociable will pay dividends over time in our careers and relationships.

Were you so excessively tied to your own extended family during this year's Feast that it prevented you from meeting new people? We must learn to take time to get to know our *spiritual* brothers and sisters, even if it means spending a little less time with our *physical* families. Jesus left us an example on this point:

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, your mother and your

brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
(Matthew 12:46-50)

We can be sure that Jesus loved His physical mother and brothers dearly, but His Father's will being His top priority, He deliberately spent time with His spiritual family. Now, this does not mean that we should ignore our physical family members. The Feast certainly is a great opportunity to spend time with our physical families—especially those whom we may not be able to see as frequently as we would like during the rest of the year. The bottom line is this: Divide your time as suitably as possible among old and new friends and family at the Feast.

Prepare Your Children

We have all probably experienced Feasts at which the behavior of children, during services especially, distracted us terribly. Babies crying, children talking and whispering constantly, making loud noises with their toys, taking excessive trips in and out of the hall, and hanging around the water tables in the corridor, etc., can be quite trying, to say the least! Even if the church service time were not divided up by hymn-singing, announcements, and special music, as it is, expecting a child to remain quiet for two hours cannot be construed as a cruel or unusual restriction—they will easily and gladly do this while watching a movie!

All in all, parents seem to be doing a better job of looking after and restraining their children, and this has made services much more comfortable for everyone. However, there is always room for improvement, and this means that preparation and training are required throughout the coming year: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Effort spent in proper training now will lead to benefits that will extend way beyond next year's Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, those benefits can last on into the child's adult life, and even further, on into eternity!

Here are two effective training methods that were suggested to my wife and me some years ago when our daughters were little—training methods that will prepare babies and young children for proper behavior during Feast services. One is a *daily* training session. The other is a *weekly* session.

Beginning with the daily session, a mother's Bible study time can serve as an excellent training period for her children. Here is how: Put the child on the same blanket one would normally put him (or her) on for services. Gently, day after day, teach him to stay on the blanket and remain quiet. Give him books to read and *quiet* toys to play with—special and appropriate books and toys that are reserved for that special time.

The weekly training session is similar to the daily session, but it takes place, of course, on the weekly Sabbath day during the service. Just as in the daily session, the child should be trained to sit quietly on his blanket with his special Sabbath books and toys.

In both daily and weekly training sessions, discipline and punishment for infractions should be dependent upon the child's age and level of understanding. Please do not expect too much right away

from babies or even from older children who have not had the benefit of previous training in this regard. Always keep in mind how lovingly our heavenly Father trains us. Be gentle, be patient, but be insistent and consistent.

Many organizations in the greater church of God have two sets of circumstances for Sabbath services. Larger groups meet for weekly Sabbath services in relatively formal assemblies—typically in some kind of rented hall or hotel conference room. Others, generally the smaller groups and individual families, keep Sabbath services in a home environment.

No matter which kind of group one belongs to, Sabbath services are the perfect weekly training ground for proper behavior at the Feast. Children should sit calmly and quietly during services, even if the services take place within one's own living room! If parents allow them to talk, play, and get up and down at their whim, they will not know any difference at the Feast, and they will disturb other church members without knowing that they are doing anything wrong.

Save Your Festival Tithe

If you really want to be with your spiritual brothers and sisters next year at the location where God chooses to place His name, you need to start immediately to save your second or festival tithe. The scriptures covering this necessity are very familiar:

And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:23-26)

We find God's commands to save our festival tithe in the same area of His Word that we find His commands to keep His feasts so, as the old Doris Day song tells us: "You can't have one without the other!"

Some may need to supplement their second tithe with additional funds if the expected amount of their festival tithe is calculated to be insufficient to cover their Feast expenses. This will take some advance thought and planning. Considering the priority God places on our attendance at His Feasts, we should, if necessary, be willing to forego some unnecessary expenditures during the rest of the year so that we can save those funds and put them towards our Feast expenses. Another tip to bolster your festival tithe funds is to put a day's worth of your regular budgeted grocery money towards each day you will be away for the Feast.

Let us prepare—both physically and spiritually—for next year's Feast—being armed with the experiences of this year's Feast that has just finished.

The Feast is over! Prepare for the Feast!