

# The Refuser Of Festivities

by Ronny H. Graham

*Forerunner*, "Ready Answer," September-October 2005

While thumbing through the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, I came across an intriguing subject. At first, it seemed strange and far-out, but after reading through it, I found it to be not only fascinating, but also quite appropriate for the season. The subject of the dictionary article was "Refuser of Festivities."

As defined in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, a *refuser of festivities* "is one who, motivated by personal interests, chooses not to participate in joyful activities of the community." In literature, such a person is often called a churl. Essentially, he refuses to be happy for others or to participate in some joyous event with others. In some cases, he declines any invitation to enjoy the good times of life.

What does the refusal of festivities have to do with Christian living? Could we possibly be guilty of this negative activity in our personal lives and in our fellowship with others in the church? With the fall feasts just around the corner, how can we relate it to them?

For starters, we can ask ourselves, do we rejoice when we see others receive a blessing, or do we gripe that it should have come to us instead? Do we fall into a bad attitude when others are having a perfectly good time? Do we find fault with others' wholesome activities just because we are not in the mood to be happy? On the other hand, there are certainly times that we must refuse to participate in people's celebrations due to immorality or ungodliness.

On the surface, refusing festivities may seem like a small matter, but this attitude is part of what made Satan what he is. He could not be happy with the blessings, honor, and authority God had bestowed on him, and it eventually drove him to rebel and separate himself from the indescribable joy of being in God's presence. In other words, he was discontented, making him incapable of true happiness. It led him to sin.

As the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* puts it, the Bible paints the churl in a "tragic hue": "The refusal of festivities is always associated with sinfully misplaced priorities." Those misplaced priorities distill down to one: self! "Me first." "If I'm not happy, no one is going to be happy." "I'm not happy, and everyone's going to hear about it." Perhaps we have heard others—or ourselves—say similar things from time to time. We will see that these are not godly traits.

## Old Testament Examples

There are many examples throughout the Bible of the refuser of festivities, beginning with its originator, Satan. He refused to be happy in the position in which God had placed him—in one of the highest offices in God's Kingdom (Ezekiel 28:12-16)! But this was not enough; he wanted to have it *his* way. He refused to rejoice and be content with what God was doing, so he rejected God and eternal life in His Kingdom!

Obviously, this is a very serious attitude to fall into. The apostle Paul takes great pains to explain to the church that God has placed each of us just where He wants us (I Corinthians 12:18). It is certainly fine to desire the best gifts for the good of God's purpose (verse 31), but unlike Satan, we need to be

content and humble with what God has given us to this point (I Timothy 6:6). Then we can properly rejoice when honor comes, whether to others or to ourselves (I Corinthians 12:26).

An unmistakable example of refusing festivities in the Old Testament is that of the prophet Jonah. God gives Jonah a job to do, but he refuses and runs the other way. By the time we reach the end of the book, Jonah is pouting in anger. The people of Nineveh had heeded the warning delivered to them by Jonah and repented! Jonah, however, refuses to rejoice with them; he refuses to be happy after a marvelous example of God's mercy:

Then God saw [the Ninevites'] works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was this not what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm." (Jonah 3:10; 4:1-2)

Instead of rejoicing and enjoying the mercy of God, Jonah wanted to see the people of Nineveh pay for their sins! It is clear by what Jonah says that he understood what God was doing. He understood God's mercy and forgiveness. He had a good understanding of God's character and His will, but from his own words in verse 2, he did not want God's mercy and grace to be showered on the people of Nineveh! They were Israel's enemies, and he did not want to have anything to do with bringing them good things from God. These pagan Assyrians were more receptive to God's will than Jonah was.

### **Michal's Pride**

Another Old Testament example of a refuser of festivities is that of David's wife, Michal, whose story appears in II Samuel 6. The occasion of her churlishness was her husband's joyous celebration of the return of the Ark of the Testimony to Jerusalem.

Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. (verses 14-16)

Three times in this chapter, Michal is referred to as "Saul's daughter." Michal may have harbored some of the same contempt for David that her father showed the shepherd from Bethlehem. Maybe she was more her father's daughter than her husband's wife. Or perhaps the writer wants his audience to think, "Like father, like daughter" in terms of Saul's famous pride. He may have started out a humble man (I Samuel 10:17-24; 15:17), but his office went to his head. He seems to have passed this trait on to his daughter.

Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" So David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore will I play music before the Lord. And I will be even more

undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor." Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death. (II Samuel 6:20-23)

Michal, revealing another aspect of her nature, accuses David of dancing shamefully before the maids of his servants. Jealousy had set so deeply in her heart that it led her to despise her husband. Her embarrassment—which no one else seemed to share—blinded her to the larger occasion of giving God glory. She could see the celebration going on from her window, but in her self-centered jealousy and pride, she refused to rejoice with the rest of Israel.

She could only find fault. Proud Michal felt that her husband should do things the way *she* thought they should be done—evidently, with stately grandeur rather than wild abandon. Her jealousy caused her to try to make David feel guilty for celebrating as he did. The king does not let her off easily, but lets her have a piece of his mind!

Today, we might call Michal a "party pooper," but in reality, her transgression was far more serious. Because she could not see past her baseless pride and jealousy, she was punished with barrenness. Some commentators suggest that she was not to come before the king the rest of her life!

### **Group Attitude**

Groups—and even whole nations—can have this same attitude of refusing festivities. From a national point of view, the children of Israel were freed from 400 years of bondage, and were they happy! However, their rejoicing was short-lived. Though God provided their every need and stayed in full view of them night and day, via the cloud and the fire (Exodus 13:21), it took them only a few days to begin griping and pointing fingers.

They accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to die. They complained about the food. They whined about their leader running off. They grumbled about not having enough water. The children of Israel refused to be content with the way God chose to free them, and for their refusal, they did not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:23; Psalm 95:7-11).

The New Testament has probably the best example of "refusers of festivities" in the whole Bible: the Pharisees, a group of men schooled in the Scripture. They knew God's Word over and under, front and back. They went to great lengths to keep the law. They even knew that the Messiah was coming, but they refused to accept the way God chose to present Him.

The Pharisees had an accusation for every move Jesus made. They charged Him with gluttony, excessive drinking, and keeping bad company. They asked; "Why would the Messiah keep company with sinners and the poor?" They attacked the miracles that He did and went so far as to prefer giving credit to Satan than to believe in Him (Matthew 12:24). Rather than rejoicing that God was with them in the flesh, they did their best to attack Him, and ultimately joined those who condemned Him to crucifixion!

### **Making It Personal**

Feast time approaches, making it a good time to evaluate ourselves. Since God commands us to rejoice in His Feast (Deuteronomy 14:26), we should add "refuser of festivities" to our list of points to consider. Is God's Feast a joy to us, or do we feel burdened by it? Do we complain about the

decisions of those in charge? Do we grumble about going to the same old Feast site? Do we gripe about the meeting hall, the hotel, or the restaurants? Do we criticize the spiritual food? Do we whine about too many activities or not enough? Do we protest the way certain situations are handled? Do we work ourselves into a disgruntled attitude before we ever get there? Are we quenching the Spirit by refusing to be happy and enjoy what God has provided?

A seventeenth-century English clergyman, Jeremy Taylor, once said, "God promises to do terrible things to people who refuse to be happy." Paul writes something similar in Romans 8:6: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The "refuser of festivities" is one who allows human, carnal feelings to rule his or her actions. He will never have peace while in this state of mind, and his future will hold nothing but troubles.

The prophet Jonah should have understood the way God worked, and God tested him to see how the man would react to his given task. He was commanded to preach repentance to the Ninevites, but he rejected God's instruction. Even when God set him back on track, he maintained his bad attitude throughout his mission. The author of the book leaves us hanging about whether he ever repented of his stubborn, sullen dissatisfaction.

We are likewise commanded to go to God's Feast and rejoice. God has given us specific instructions on where, when, and how to keep it. What will be our attitude in celebrating it this year? Will we be festive Davids—or killjoy Jonahs?