

Why Are We Here? (2004)

Captivity and Regathering

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I can remember Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong standing up at the Feast and saying, "Brethren, why are we here?" The question always helped us to settle down from the travel, the hustle and bustle of getting ready for the Feast, and to truly consider just why we were at the Feast. It is important to do that.

The Feast of Tabernacles was the greatest and most joyous feast, without a doubt. For Israel, what could be more wonderful, than after a hard labor, with much of the crop in store for the coming year, that they should have an opportunity to rejoice before the Lord of all heaven and earth? For them, it was time to separate themselves from their daily routines and environment and rejoice before the God who had given them all the bounty that they possessed.

For us, brethren, it is essentially the same. Though we are not living in an agricultural society, we, perhaps much more than they, need the opportunity to escape from the carnal, material world we live in as well. Having lived in this materialistic, commercial-ridden, temptation-filled world with its influences continually bombarding us, with its tragedies, and its many difficult problems, we should indeed be thankful that we, too, can rejoice before the great God who has revealed His holy days to us, and who has blessed us so richly.

Also, we are blessed to be together as a group after being separated all year long. We usually hear, "Nineteen in Anaheim," "Thirty-nine in Portland," "Two in Georgia." We are all here together, and we can talk—and, indeed, we do. It is just wonderful.

Why has God ordained His feast days? He has ordained them that we might re-establish our focus on His plan and that we might be rejuvenated and lifted up.

Leviticus 23:34-36 "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

Leviticus 23:39-43 Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

In the early Feasts of this era of God's church, the concept of living in booths was much more realistic. Many people went to Big Sandy and lived in tents. In some seasons, it was dusty, and everyone's clothes and shoes were covered in dust. In other seasons, it rained, and it was just the

opposite: Everyone became muddy. It did not dampen the excitement of the people that were there celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Today, we meet in very nice quarters, but we should never let the meaning of staying in temporary dwellings slip away from us.

The purpose behind living in booths was to show Israel that their existence was transitory or temporary on their journey to a wonderful new world. This was to be a great contrast to Egypt.

With Israel, it was traveling from Egypt, which pictured a type of sin to which that they were enslaved. Their journey was to teach them that they had been freed from this slavery. They were now on a journey to the Promised Land, filled with milk and honey. This was a wonderful new future.

With us, as with our ancestors, we, too, have been freed from the slavery of the sins of this world. This does not mean that they do not chase after us, but we have been freed from them. We, too, are en route to the kingdom of God and the wonderful future that awaits us.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. 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. You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you."

We, as our ancestors, are to tithe on all our increase year after year, that we might eat before the Lord in the place He would choose. There we are to spend the tithe of our earnings that we might learn to fear—that, is to truly stand in awe of—our great God and His Son in all that they have done and are doing.

Verse 26 tells us that we are to spend that money for whatsoever we desire, and we are to rejoice. It is a time of happiness; it is a time of joy; and we should truly experience that.

What else is to occur on the Feast of Tabernacles?

In the book of Nehemiah, we see the respect that the people showed toward God's law. To me, this is quite moving, since they had been in captivity and had now been given the opportunity to return to and rebuild Jerusalem. After years in slavery, they were a very humble repentant people. This is what we are to be as well. They knew that their sins had separated them from their God, and now they longed to be under God's benevolent care. They had not heard the law for approximately seventy years, and now they truly wanted to hear what they were to do.

Nehemiah 8:1-18 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding

on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkihah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

It shows that we are following the same practices that they followed. We are living in temporary dwellings. We are being instructed. Brethren, we too, with all feasting and rejoicing, will be fed by God's teaching, as well, just as they were.

For those of you who would like to, you might read Ezra's prayer in Nehemiah 9:6-38. This is a beautiful prayer and it would be a good study for you.

Indeed, physical Israel kept the Feast each year as commanded, looking forward to their Messiah coming to rule, bringing in the wonderful world tomorrow. The disciples, who were living under Roman rule, were expecting the Messiah to come. As we live under this system, we, too, are expecting Him to come.

In John 1, you almost have to imagine what it was like, when all of a sudden they discovered that the Lamb of God was coming. What went through their minds? "Is this it? Is this the time for the rule of the Messiah?"

John 1:29-36 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and [it] remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

John 1:40-41 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

If that happened today, and we did not think it was something strange, we would think that something was going to take place. We would think, "The Messiah is here, and He is going to rule."

Acts 1:6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

It seemed logical. He was there, and He had been sacrificed. He died for the people.

However, with all that they understood, they did not at that time have an accurate picture of what must take place with Israel and Judah to bring them to the place that they could represent God as His people. God's plan was not to take Israel just the way they were, the same as He cannot take us just the way we are. Even though they claimed Him as God, they would not obey Him. This is one of the keys.

Zechariah 7:3-14 . . . and to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?" Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'" Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to

his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.' But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate."

Did they pray? You bet they did. Did they fast? They sure did. Did they keep the Sabbath and the Holy days? They did. Did they obey God and change? No! Just as Richard said, their works were not acceptable to God in any way, shape, or form. How does this apply to us today? It applies in the same way that it did to physical Israel. We can be going through the motions, but if we are not working to obey from the heart and to make the changes, then we are wasting our time. That is the bottom line.

At this time in the history of the church, we know indeed that modern Israel will be punished greatly. This nation is going to be punished greatly. Why? That they might be humbled. It is a must!

Ezekiel 5:12 "A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine they shall be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds and I will draw out a sword after them."

Even here, we know that God saves a remnant.

We also understand that this time is the time of the last days, when not just Israel will be corrected, but the entire world.

Isaiah 24:1 Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants.

As many times as I have read Isaiah, I do not think that I ever realized that all of this was in chapter 24. Isaiah had been given a prophecy depicting universal judgment. The word *eres* means "earth," not "land." Many commentators think that this is just Jerusalem. What type of disaster is to occur? Isaiah states, "He will ruin its [the earth's] face." The RSV translates this as, "He will twist its surface." Another commentator states the meaning as, "He will ripple the earth's surface." In short, the earth will become distorted, and not as it is now. We will read of this in a few moments.

Isaiah 24:2 And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

He is saying that it will come upon the entire earth, the face of the whole earth. In verse two, it points out that it will be indiscriminate. It is going to affect everyone, every strata of society. Religious, social, and economic relationships cannot escape from it. The person that goes to the mountain to have his cabin and his own personal place of safety will be affected, as well.

Isaiah 24:3 The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word.

It will be as if an enemy has plundered the land.

Isaiah 24:4-5 The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the haughty people of the earth languish. The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.

It is a world of disaster, apathy and hopelessness, due to a complete moral collapse. As in the days of Noah, every intent of the heart is evil.

Isaiah 24:6 Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

This indicates that the population of the earth has been greatly reduced by this terrible calamity.

Isaiah 24:7-9 The new wine fails, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourine ceases, the noise of the jubilant ends, the joy of the harp ceases. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.

This is indicating that the crops will be damaged, as well, and the previous pleasures on which the world counted will no longer be there for them to utilize.

Isaiah 24:10-13 The city of confusion is broken down; every house is shut up, so that none may go in. There is a cry for wine in the streets, all joy is darkened, The mirth of the land is gone. In the city desolation is left, and the gate is stricken with destruction. When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people, it shall be like the shaking of an olive tree, like the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done.

The city is in rubble, and the people cannot enter their houses. The homes are blocked off because of the tremendous damage to the earth. The spirit of gloom is on the people.

Isaiah 24:14-16 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing; for the majesty of the LORD they shall cry aloud from the sea. Therefore glorify the LORD in the dawning light, the name of the LORD God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we have heard songs: "Glory to the righteous!"

In the midst of all of this desolation there are songs of joy coming forth. Those who remain—perhaps the great innumerable multitudes—those in captivity indeed raise their voices to praise God. Certainly, those in the place of safety are rejoicing. It is the joy that Martin talked about. They are filled with joy. God is moving on the land and bringing this to an end. They are rejoicing that God is exhibiting His great power and in what that power will finally mean to all of mankind.

Isaiah 24:16 But I said, "I am ruined, ruined! Woe to me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

Isaiah 24:21-23 It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

We see that tremendous things are coming on the earth.

Brethren, we look forward to the Messiah's coming, as did ancient Israel and the apostles and all that have gone before us, but with far more insight. God has revealed what is to take place prior to the beginning of the millennium. It is truly awesome and, at the same time, wonderful to behold.

We know that during the last trump, the vials are poured out. I am just going to touch on those.

With the first vial, grievous sores fall on those who have the mark of the beast. With the second vial, the sea turns to blood as the blood of a dead man: dark black blood. Every living soul dies in the sea.

With the third vial, the rivers and springs of waters turn to blood, for those to drink who have shed the blood of the saints. With the fourth vial, the sun produces a strength that scorches men. Still, men will not repent but curse God.

The fifth vial is poured out and darkness that is emblematic of disaster covers the Beast's kingdom, causing confusion, disorder, and deep anguish. The sixth vial is poured out in the river Euphrates; and the river is dried up, leaving the way open for the kings of the east. Three unclean spirits come out of the mouth of Satan, of the beast, and of the false prophet. Working miracles, these spirits go forth to gather the kings of the earth and their armies to the final battle of that great day of God Almighty!

Revelation 16:17-21 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

This is the final punishment, and now the time that we picture here today is about to begin.

Isaiah 4:2-4 In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing For those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be

called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the LORD has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,

In the Chaldee or Aramaic it reads, "In that day the Messiah of the Lord shall be for joy and glory, and the doers of the law for praise and honor." The fruit of the earth shall be excellent and beautiful for those of Israel that have survived. Things will be different for God's people. Blessings will be poured out for them, and they will glorify God in their lives. The remnant remaining after the terrible end time will be a different people from their fathers. Not only shall they be called holy, but they will be the holy people of God. That will be after Jesus has cleansed His people of their pride, vanity, stubbornness—their crimes of oppression, cruelty, and robbery—through the calamity that came upon their nation and through their captivity.

Isaiah 4:5-6 Then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

God will take care of His people. God's anger has now been turned, and He will take His people as His favored possession. He will protect them and be their strong defense, and His protection will be on each individual home. From now on, they will be safe under God's divine protection.

Jeremiah 23:5-8 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

God is going to bring them back. Here is where we begin to see God re-gather His people.

Isaiah 27:12-13 And it shall come to pass in that day that the LORD will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

The term *thresh* refers to threshing, or gathering fruit in a harvest. It is done ever so gently, so as not to bruise the fruit. They shall be gathered carefully, one by one, so that none is lost and none is damaged. God is on their side.

Isaiah 10:20-23 And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as

the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land.

They will serve Him sincerely, with energy, no longer merely pretending obedience but genuinely obeying from their hearts. Even though they had a huge population in that they compassed the earth, only a small remnant will return. *Consumption* has been decreed, meaning "to finish, to complete, to waste away, to cause to languish, destruction." National prosperity will be terminated, and all this will all be done in righteousness. It will be done to eventually produce righteousness.

Isaiah 11:11-12 It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth

Isaiah 11:16 There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.

Jesus Christ, Himself, will be the Banner, or Ensign, for the world to see and obey. God is going to prepare a way to bring them to Himself.

Jeremiah 24:6-7 For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.

What is the condition of the captives? For those of us who are older, we remember the films about Auschwitz, Bougainville, Dachau, Belsen, and the other concentration camps in Europe during World War II. We remember the newsreels of our troops marching into concentration camps and seeing the skin-and-bone bodies of men and women that were barely alive. I could tell you stories about that that are very disturbing. We saw the ovens where hundreds of thousands were gassed and their bodies burned. We learned of the horrible medical experiments using prisoners, not to mention all of the repulsive, immoral things that took place at the time that they were in the hands of the enemy. Satan was in it all the way, influencing the perversions that reflected his hatred of God's people.

As bad as all of that was, it will be far worse for those at the end time. God's people will be completely under the control of their captors. They will not have any say as to how they live or what they do or what is done to them or to their loved ones. It will be a time of utter sadness and despair.

How will God's people come out of captivity?

Jeremiah 31:7 For thus says the LORD: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!'"

Joy and relief will fill the hearts of the prisoners as they see the tide turning. I am sure that many rumors will flood the prisons, saying that things are changing.

Jeremiah 31:8 "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there."

God will bring them from where He scattered them, and those that one might think would be left behind will not be forgotten. The blind, the lame, the women with child, and the women in labor will be given special care. This return pictures universal participation of all the nations, as we will see in a moment.

Jeremiah 31:9 "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn."

They shall come weeping in relief and, very probably, in repentance, with prayers of gratitude. Israel and Judah will be truly humbled and understand what their disobedience has caused in their lives. They will start to walk away from the camps, almost in disbelief. The fear, the dread, and the utter hopelessness will start to fade away at last. Almost afraid to hope, they will begin to bubble over a little bit in conversation, because, for the first time, there will seem to be real hope for the nation. They will not be sure of what will be required of them or what changes that they will have to make; but because of God's great humbling, they will be willing to make whatever changes God asks of them. They will know God as the loving God that has redeemed them.

Jeremiah 31:10-14 "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.' For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD—for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD."

Something else must be done prior to this taking place; God had to take care of something first before all this could take place.

Revelation 20:1-3 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

With all that God is planning for His people and for the world, the archenemy and all those that agree with him are put away so that God has no obstruction to what He is about to do. The many nations that have hated Israel with a perfect hatred have unknowingly been greatly influenced by Satan. Their hatred of God's people was, in fact, Satan's hatred of God's people, as well. With their minds cleared, genuine humbleness, and appreciation for God's people, their role in the world, their special place before God, will be realized at last.

Isaiah 49:22-23 Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders; kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

The prisoners who were dressed in rags and living in human waste, those who have lived in dire circumstances totally under the control of their oppressors will see a remarkable, unbelievable change take place. They will be treated as royalty, given respectable garments and good food. The reason is that they are God's people, and the world will know it. They will be brought to God in great tenderness and respect by their former captors. Something that God has wanted to do since the creation is about to take place.

Hebrews 8:8-13 Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them," says the LORD. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

This is what is going to take place in Israel. Just as with us, this does not happen overnight. God does not create character by fiat.

Jeremiah 3:14-15 "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Isaiah 30:20-21 And though the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

Indeed, there has been much discussion regarding these verses. Does this mean that we, as spirit beings, will constantly be behind all those alive, instructing them how to live? Does this mean that only God's Spirit will prod their minds, or could God use a friend to step in to help, or a child, that tells a parent he is not living by what he has been teaching to the family? We cannot limit God, but we know that God will use the very best method He can to ensure that all will be led in the direction of the Kingdom of God.

Zephaniah 3:8-13 "Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "until the day I rise up for plunder; my determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering. In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid."

Just as the world was separated at the tower of Babel by the languages being confounded, God is going to unite the world with a new, universal language. There will be no confusion, and everyone will know what is being taught. I do not have any idea how many different languages or dialects there are in China, but I did discover that in Africa alone, there are reported to be over 1600 different languages. How do you deal with something like that? God is going to change that. No wonder we cannot really communicate ideas, thoughts, and concepts in this world today.

God sets forth to purify the nations of the world and to pour out His wrath. Once that is done, God will unconfuse man with the languages and give them one pure lip, one pure language. The term *pure lip* or *pure language* carries more meaning than just that of a central language. It carries with it the sense of a pure and right heart, expressed in words that will reflect God in all that is spoken.

No more will there be derogatory ethnic slang, wrong jokes, or racial slurs, but words that reflect the calling and nature of God in wise, joyful, helpful, positive uplifting conversation. There is far more to this pure language than just a new language to learn. A great many things must initially take place at the return of Jesus Christ, and this is one of the very important things, this restoration of the language. The earth has to be rebuilt, and, remember, you are going to have a part in this.

Zechariah 14:4-11 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The LORD is one," and His name one. All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the

First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king's winepresses. The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

The Mount of Olives is the central high area in a line of hills. It is about a mile long and overlooks Jerusalem, from which it is separated by a narrow valley where the brook Kidron flows. It is 187 feet higher than Mount Zion, 295 feet above Mount Moriah, and 443 feet above Gethsemane, lying between the city and the wilderness toward the Dead Sea.

The tremendous earthquake will split it in two. Verses 8-10 show that living waters will spring forth from Jerusalem; half toward the former sea (the Dead Sea), and half toward the hinder sea (the Mediterranean Sea). All year long shall it be. In verse 10, we see that the land around Jerusalem shall be turned into a plain, with mountains being made low, and Jerusalem being lifted up.

Ezekiel 47:8-12 Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

We know that water is emblematic of the Holy Spirit or spiritual healing. God knows that to once again support mankind, the earth must be healed. Because the lakes, rivers, and oceans have been polluted and are almost dead, God, in His wonderful planning, starts this physical healing. Out of this war-torn world, very possibly damaged by many atomic explosions and bacterial warfare, healing will begin to take place.

The eastern channel of the river will flow into the Dead Sea, 1,286 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the lowest spot on earth. It is interesting to note that, although nothing lives in the Dead Sea, it is here that the healing starts. The sea will rise and overflow through the desert, causing new plant life to spring up, and the water will be filled with fish. Marshes will be created, and salt will be plentiful. Today, many fish are being fished to near extinction, but God will repair man's abuse of the sea and provide healthy waters and an abundance of fish. At the same time, marvelous vegetation will begin to appear, with trees that bear fruit each month in their season, their fruit good for food and their leaves for healing.

Isaiah 35:1-10 The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the

ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; it shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Those of us who enjoy good health cannot really comprehend what it is to be blind, have great mental distress, nor have missing limbs. I can remember one soldier in the amputee ward who had lost all four limbs in Korea. What will it be like for him to be restored whole? It will be the same for those having lost limbs coming through the tribulation and the captivity.

When I was in sales, I used to call on the Good Shepherd Home for mentally handicapped children. What is it like to have a complete mind, a mind that works, that functions? They were a wonderful bunch of kids, but they just did not have it all together. For those who have had their minds twisted and warped by this world, what a wonderful gift it will be to finally have a sound, clean, healthy mind. All who have had infirmities of any type will be healed—including healing from sickness of mind—and health will be restored to all.

Just as a road sign tells us our destination, and how far we must travel, the sign "The Way of Holiness" informs mankind of the way they should be living their lives to arrive at their destination, which is holiness!

Isaiah 2 tells us that, very early in all these events, Jesus Christ will establish His throne and government. The house of the Lord will be set up as the most elegant structure on earth. It will be exalted above the countryside, and above all governments. We will see that the wealth of nations poured into to it and into Jerusalem. In time, the nations will flow to it in great numbers and not just to see the structure; it will be to embrace the teaching coming from that location of Jerusalem. The law of God will be the nation's wisdom and, eventually, the world's wisdom. As a result of this wonderful teaching, peace, health, happiness, and great prosperity will be the fruit that all will see.

Haggai 2:6-9 (New English Bible) One thing more: I will shake the heavens and the earth, and land. I will shake all nations: the treasure of nations shall come hither, and I will fill this house with glory; so says the LORD of hosts, and the glory of this later house shall surpass the glory of the former says the LORD of hosts. In this place I will grant prosperity and peace! This is the word of the LORD of hosts!

One of the most amazing things—and probably one of the biggest trials—that Israel has ever had to face is the trial of prosperity. Once they get prosperous, they forget God. At last, that will be done away, and prosperity will be in its right place. You can read about this is Isaiah 60:1-12, a beautiful set of scriptures to read. In the past, the one thing they could never handle was prosperity, but then they will have the right perspective on prosperity. With God's tremendous blessings of peace, right climate, right food, and prosperity, Israel's population will increase greatly, until there is no more room in the land.

Isaiah 49:13-21 Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me. Your sons shall make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you. Lift up your eyes, look around and see; all these gather together and come to you. As I live," says the LORD, "you shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does. For your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, 'The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.' Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was, left alone; but these, where were they?'"

The focus will have been on just getting their lives together, and it almost seems as if they raise their heads and say, "Where did everybody come from?" Then, as God had originally planned it, His children start to migrate to other areas of the earth. It would seem logical that they, at last, start to repopulate America and all the land that had been ground up in the "rippling of the surface" of the earth in the last, greatest earthquake.

They, no doubt, will find that the topography will have changed drastically. The thousands and thousands of square miles of desert and waste land will become fertile and ready for populating. We just traveled from Anaheim, California, to Dallas, Texas, and that is roughly 1,400 miles. I have to tell you that there is a lot of nothing between Anaheim and Dallas. When we drive to Denver, there are millions of square miles of desert, just nothing. God will prepare this land for the future generations that are going to come in the White Throne Judgment

Those doing the pioneering will know that they are also preparing these areas, not just for themselves, but for the tremendous numbers that will be coming up in the Great White Throne Judgment. It is a wonderful life, with a right, honest government; and with nobody homeless except by act or choice. The world will be blessed with peace; good crops; healthy, happy families; strong marriages; and right education.

Amos 9:13-15 "A time is coming," says the LORD, "when the plowman shall follow hard on the vintner, and he who treads the grapes after him that sows the seed. The mountains shall run with fresh wine, and every hill shall wave with corn. I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel; they shall rebuild deserted cities and live in them, they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, make gardens and eat the fruit. Once more I will plant them on their own soil, and they shall never again be uprooted from the soil I have given them. It is the word of the LORD your God.

Every man and family will have their land or their business; and character will be built, in part, by how they govern what they have been given.

Micah 4:4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

This is an environment in which I think all of us would like to live. We live in the Los Angeles basin with 18 to 19 million people. I am always amazed when I turn on the water faucet and anything comes out. I know that, at this age, the thought of getting away from the rat race and sitting under my vine and fig tree in a peaceful world has a tremendous attraction, and I think it does for all of us. The thought of physically living in the millennium and out of this world is, I am sure, a desire we all have. Yet, is that for us? It is in one sense. The millennium is for us, too, in the most wonderful of manners.

At the beginning of the sermon, we asked the question, as Mr. Armstrong did, "Why are we here?" That should be expanded to, "Why are we called at this time?" Why are we here at this time? What is God's purpose for having us here?

Revelation 20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Revelation 5:10 "And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

That is it in a nutshell. Will the whole earth be without problems? Will character be built by fiat? The answer is no! There will not be the gangs and the wars, but there will be human nature to overcome. One does not become a spirit being of God, or gain the kingdom, without overcoming. There will be bad habits, pulls, and things of this nature.

What is our job description?

Deuteronomy 17:8-13 If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you. Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.

Our job in the Millennium will be to guide and to teach those on the earth at that time.

I Corinthians 6:2-3 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

We have a future in front of us that is absolutely wonderful, and it is going to teach us and cause us to grow. Luke 19 tells us that we will be made rulers of cities. As to how God divides all this up, I do not know; but I do know that we will have positions of righteous leadership. What, then, is our job to prepare for this wonderful opportunity to serve those in the millennium and beyond? What is our job all about? Simply put, we have to work to build right character in this life we have been given. You have been getting this kind of information already. We must develop the fruit of God's Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering or patience, kindness to all, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Our job, in this time that has been given to us, is to develop and use this fruit in our homes, with our families, our neighbors, employers and employees, and with all those with whom we come in contact. It has to start in the home. The marriages have to be warm and alive, and the children have to be loved. As human beings, we tend to take our families for granted, and we want our neighbors and bosses to think we are wonderful. It has to start in the home, and it has to be there that these characteristics are developed.

We are to learn to use and apply God's Word in our lives. This is called "going on to perfection," not just doing things as we have always done them but applying God's Word to how we are living and to how we should make the changes in our lives. We should develop our skills and our abilities and learn to handle wisely our wealth and gifts, in whatever form, to the glory of God. Whatever you have, learn to handle it wisely and properly in God's sight.

You see, brethren, just as God the Father and Jesus Christ planned to redeem all of Israel and this world, He planned for a people to be called at this end time, to assist in all that had to be done. **We** are that people.

Brethren, these days picture the most wonderful of times: a time of national calling, a time of calling for all the world, a time of repentance, and a time of understanding, at long last; a time of healing of man and earth, a time of righteous, honest, just government for all; a time of great blessing, of great inventions and accomplishment; a time of peace and safety throughout all the earth, where even former enemies get along; a time of having wonderful families and neighbors. For us, it will be a time to be changed from flesh to spirit, and a time to be with God as a part of His family. What an absolutely wonderful time these holy days picture!

I would like to conclude here, as I did last year, with Hosea 2. It sums up this season perfectly.

Hosea 2:18-23 "In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD. It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the LORD; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and

with oil; they shall answer Jezreel. Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

Brethren, in spite of the many problems that we may have and the problems that we see in this world, let us all be encouraged by the future that is ahead of us, that is pictured by the keeping of these Feast days. Look forward to the positive future that awaits us all. Let us do what God told us in the beginning: to learn to fear God and to rejoice before Him.

Have a wonderful and uplifting Feast of Tabernacles.