

## The Feasts Of Tabernacles And Unleavened Bread

**David C. Grabbe**

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When I was in high school, my English teachers employed what seemed to many of us to be cruel and unusual punishment. That is, they made us write essays. Remember, this was before the time when digital assistants could do homework for us. We had to write these ourselves.

As if writing essays were not sufficiently painful, there was a particular type of essay that we absolutely despised because of the mental energy it required. This type of essay really made us think, and to be blunt, we didn't like having to do that. But as it turns out, there was a method to what we believed was madness, because this type of essay helped us to thoroughly explore a topic, and see connections and symbolism and other things that we had not seen before. It helped us to get into the mind of the author. In short, it required us to learn things personally rather than just regurgitate Cliff's Notes.

The type of essay we dreaded so much was the "compare and contrast" essay. I don't know if it is still inflicted on students today. But in a "compare and contrast" assignment, the student must carefully evaluate two things—two characters, two events, or maybe two themes within a story—and then explain how those two things are similar—that's the "compare" part—and how those two things are different—that's the "contrast" part.

Comparing and contrasting forces the student to go beyond the words on the page and truly analyze what is beneath. And it takes a lot of work, which is why we were less than pleased. But I now have a grudging respect for those assignments because of what they produced.

Today, we will follow this pattern. I hasten to add that you will not be required to write any essays. But we will compare and contrast. We will see connections and symbolism and, ultimately, get a glimpse into the mind of the greatest Author and His life-giving word.

We will begin in Leviticus 23, if you would please turn there:

**Leviticus 23:1-2** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.

This is God’s preamble to His instructions for all the feasts in this chapter. This is the foundation upon which the rest of the instructions are built. Notice that God both claims all the feasts—He says “these are My feasts”—and He also tells us, in general, what their focus should be. They are “feasts of the LORD,” meaning each one of them must be observed in reference to Him. God declares at the outset that the feasts are for Him and about Him. If that focus is lost, then the feasts become our days rather than God’s.

Richard has been going through each of the feasts and showing how they point to Christ. That’s one comparison for us—that’s what all the feasts have in common. For decades, the focus of the church has been on how the feasts fit into a prophetic sequence, yet we are learning that they are about so much more. They teach us about God Himself. They are feasts “of the LORD,” and each one points to the Messiah.

Moving on to verse 4:

**Leviticus 23:4-8** ‘These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.’”

These are the first two feasts of the year. For now, just notice their structure or their arrangement. There is a one-day feast (Passover), followed by a seven-day feast.

Now, drop down to verse 33:

**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.

Also, verses 39-43:

**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.’”

So, we saw that the first two feasts were a one-day feast followed by a seven-day feast, and here we see that same pattern, but in reverse, like a mirror.

The last feasts of the year are a seven-day feast, followed by a one-day feast. That is not an accident. As we will see, what we observe later in the year relates to what we observe at the beginning.

Knowing what we do of God, both as the Creator and as the One who inspired these things, we should know that this is not happenstance. In everything God does, there is a purpose and precision, and His written word is no exception. His feasts and holy days are no exception. And this arrangement of one day plus seven days, and then seven days plus one, is also no exception. This pattern invites us to explore these feasts together, which will help us to get just a little more into the mind of their Author.

And that's what we will be doing today. We will compare and contrast Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles. We will look at what is the same and what is different, so that we might uncover connections that we may not have seen before.

But first, we need to understand another pattern within God's word. This seems to be one of God's favorites, because He uses it in many places. It is called the chiasm. A chiasm is a where related ideas are repeated, but in reverse order. That's what we've seen already, with the 1+7 and then 7+1. It repeats, but in reverse order.

The word chiasm comes from the Greek word chi, which is the letter X. In a chiasm, the first idea or element relates to the last idea or element. It does not mean they are identical, only that there is some relationship between them. When we understand the relationship through comparing and contrasting, we understand both better. Next in the chiasm, the second element in the chiasm relates to the second-to-last element. So, the top and bottom of the chiasm march toward each other, and they meet in the middle of the X.

In February, Richard gave a Bible study on the book of Daniel that showed a clear chiasm. In Daniel, chapters 2 and 7 are paired and mirrored, chapters 3 and 6 are paired and mirrored, and so are chapters 4 and 5. Each pairing reinforces the themes of the individual chapters.

Matthew chapter 13 contains eight parables, and they are arranged as a chiasm as well. When you compare and contrast, you see that the first four

parables are spoken to a large, public audience, while the last four parables are spoken privately, just to the disciples—the fledgling church. What is more, the problems described in the first four parables, spoken to the carnal nation, find their resolution in the last four parables. The problem in the first parable is answered by the eighth parable. The second parable is resolved by the seventh, and so on. Even though the comparing and contrasting takes effort, it brings things together to tell a much larger story than any one of the smaller parts.

In fact, the entire Bible forms a chiasm. As you march forward through the Bible from the beginning to the middle, and you march backward from the end of the Bible toward the middle, you can pick out how things are paired and mirrored. You start seeing the signature of the divine Author everywhere you look.

So, God uses the chiasm repeatedly, so it is worth paying attention to it because it is part of how His mind works. The chiasm is not some minor feature, let alone just a quirk of ancient writing. The chiasm is a deliberate part of how the Creator chose to arrange His word to help us by drawing attention to connections and elements we may not notice otherwise.

And for our topic today, the eight feast days are also arranged in a chiasm. Passover relates to the 8<sup>th</sup> Day. The First Day of Unleavened Bread—and, really, most of Unleavened Bread—relates to Tabernacles. The Last Day of Unleavened Bread relates to Atonement. And Pentecost and Trumpets are linked as well. We have tended to look at them just as a sequence, but when we identify the commonalities between the pairs, it helps us to better understand what God is teaching us with these times that He has set apart.

As we read, the reason that we stay in temporary dwellings is because God made the Israelites stay in booths when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Now, maybe it seems unusual that the instructions for this feast mention the exodus, which we associate with the Unleavened Bread. We have tended to think of Tabernacles in terms of looking ahead. But by God's command, Israel had to look back to and remember the exodus journey, and this applies to us as well.

Please turn with me to the exodus story in Exodus 12:

**Exodus 12:37-42** Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

This passage is all about the First Day of Unleavened Bread, beginning with the night of solemn observance, just after sunset. Unleavened Bread pictures God's deliverance from the environment of sin. It is about what God did and does for us—it is a memorial of His deliverance. But notice where this took place: Verse 37 puts the beginning of the exodus at Succoth. That was the first place they camped after leaving Ramses in Egypt proper.

So, this is a commonality with Tabernacles, because the place the Israelites camped for the First Day of Unleavened Bread is what this feast is named after. The Jews call this Feast Sukkot, which is the Hebrew word for tabernacle, tent, or booth. And the name of the first place the Israelites camped is Succoth, which is the same word, except that it is plural. So, the Israelites stayed in booths in Succoth. This is curious because they stayed in booths in the place that had already been named "booths." It was already named Succoth when they got there and made their camp. The backstory to this is found in Genesis 33:17:

**Genesis 33:17** And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

So, the place the Israelites camped for the First Day of Unleavened Bread was named after the dwellings Jacob made for his animals, and those dwellings are what this current feast is named after. It's one of those understated connections in God's word. But it shows a linkage between these feasts. They have a common origin.

Please turn back to Leviticus 23.

Another commonality with these feasts is that they are both kept for seven days. That may sound obvious, and it is, but it is worth reviewing God's commands so we don't forget. Back in verse 6, it says, "...seven days you must eat unleavened bread." You don't have to turn to these, but I will read to you the same command in other places:

**Exodus 12:15** Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread . . . .

**Exodus 13:6-7** Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days . . . .

**Exodus 23:15** You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you. . .

**Exodus 34:18** "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you . .  
..

**Numbers 28:17** And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days.

Seven times, God says to eat unleavened bread for seven days. He is very clear.

It is commonly held that Unleavened Bread is about putting sin out of our lives. And while that is an aspect, if we were to go through all of God's instructions for Unleavened Bread, we would see that His reason and

emphasis are different. What God overwhelmingly emphasizes is His deliverance, not our work of avoiding leavening and thus sin (Exodus 12:17; Exodus 13:3, 8-9; 23:15; 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:3).

The overarching reason for that feast, and the reason we eat unleavened bread for seven days, is to remember God's deliverance. When we get to the New Testament, Jesus identifies Himself as the bread of God—the bread of life. He was entirely unleavened.

Further, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 5:8, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Christ is the embodiment of sincerity and truth. He is the One who delivered us from this present, evil age, from spiritual bondage, from the power of darkness. And it is through the strength that He supplies that we have the means to overcome sin. And that strength comes from ingesting His word and beseeching Him to live His life in us every day.

The unleavened bread that God says we must eat for seven days represents Christ Himself. To miss eating the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth is to miss out on the divine connection with our Savior. Our minds should rebel at the thought of skipping that.

It is similar with Passover. The bread and wine are the symbols of Passover. It wouldn't be Passover without them. These things may just be symbols, but these symbols signal to God our intent and our desire to fulfill all righteousness, even in the symbols.

In the same way, we keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days by eating unleavened bread each day and not merely avoiding leavening. Consider what neglecting to eat the unleavened bread of life every day would signal to God. The symbols matter.

Faithful and righteous Daniel chose to spend the night in a cave of lions rather than give up his bread of life for a single day. That's how important his connection with God, and being strengthened by God, was to Daniel. It is

those who know their God who will be strong and carry out great exploits, but that strength and knowledge of God come from continually partaking of what, or of Whom the unleavened bread represents.

There is similar slippage that can happen with the Feast of Tabernacles, where sometimes plans are made to arrive at the Feast late or to leave early, which means fewer than seven days of keeping it. There is also an idea that has been around for decades that since only the first day and eighth days are holy, we don't have to attend services on the other days.

Now, before exploring those ideas, I am going to confess to you. I attended an engineering school. (That's not what I am confessing.) The engineering coursework was quite rigorous, and I was concerned about missing classes for the Feast. The nearest Feast site was about 1.5 hours away. So, for the Feast, I drove to the site for the Sabbath and holy days, but the rest of the days, I was at college.

My experience was that it wasn't really a Feast. It certainly was not a "feast of the LORD," nor was I truly keeping it to Him, even though I was going to the convocations on the holy days. I was 18 at the time and not yet baptized, and so I was not thinking clearly. I was reasoning carnally, regrettably, and my priorities showed that. And this is how I know the idea that only the first and eighth days are important has been around for decades.

Here in Leviticus 23, verse 34 says the Feast of Tabernacles is for seven days, and again, it is "to the LORD." It says in verse 39: "you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days," and again in verse 41: "You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days." And verse 42 says, "you shall dwell in booths for seven days."

If God is not the object and our foremost consideration, then it is basically just a vacation—it isn't the Feast. It becomes our week rather than His. And we may compound the error by using second tithe to pay for our vacation.

Now, let's look at an example from one of Judah's revivals that shows how a people who were eager to keep the Feast "to the LORD" did so. Please turn to Nehemiah 8. This takes place after a portion of Judah returned from captivity and rediscovered God's law:

**Nehemiah 8:17-18** 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.

This shows how they kept the feast. They were in temporary dwellings for seven days, but more than that, they also had Ezra reading from the law each day. And Ezra was probably doing more than just reading. If you look back to the start of the chapter, the first observance of the Day of Trumpets after the return from exile is described. Verse 7 mentions some of the men in the congregation, and verse 8 says, “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” Verse 3 says, “the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”

This is what people do who are eager to take in God’s word and receive what He has for them. This is the example that God recorded for us regarding what it means to keep a feast to the LORD for seven days. And this is the pattern we follow today. We not only stay in temporary dwellings for seven days, but we also have the word of God expounded on for seven days, even non-holy days, followed by a sacred assembly.

So, both these feasts are seven days long and involve specific things for us to do all seven days. Seven is the number of divine perfection, completion, and fullness. In instances of 7 days plus 1 day, the seven days are for sanctifying. But not being consistent for all seven days, whether in eating or in dwelling, undermines what God desires for the days to produce.

Another commonality is that the instructions for both week-long feasts involve dwellings, and this is where the contrasts come in. Please turn to Exodus 12:

**Exodus 12:15** Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. [By] the first day you shall remove leaven from your **houses**. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

**Exodus 12:19-20** For seven days no leaven shall be found in your **houses**, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your **dwelling**s you shall eat unleavened bread.”

Maybe you have never caught this, but the instructions here are not just about our food for the week, but God includes multiple mentions of our dwellings—our houses, our quarters, or those areas that are under our authority. Again, that is not by chance. Every word matters. By the First Day of Unleavened Bread, all the leavening must be removed from our houses, and then we must be vigilant about not letting anything leavened into our houses. In all our dwellings, we eat unleavened bread.

Houses are dwellings that are made to last. They have foundations. They represent being settled and having a more-or-less permanent place of one's own. Of course, nothing physical is truly permanent, but there is greater and longer-term stability in houses compared to booths. Houses give a measure of certainty. They become a base from which we operate and return to. Under normal circumstances, we aren't concerned that they will be blown or washed away. They have foundations, and they become foundational to us.

We can apply that to the lessons of Unleavened Bread. God says repeatedly that the reason we keep that feast and eat unleavened bread is because of what He did. He delivered Israel from Egypt and the power of the Pharaoh. Likewise, He delivered us from this present evil age and its adversarial ruler. He delivered us from spiritual Egypt and has given us a new home.

The Israelites only had physical houses, but we have a spiritual house that can give us far greater stability, if we allow it. Now, we could go to Matthew

7 and plug in the parable of the two builders and apply the houses there to our lives, and that does fit. But there is another way to apply the house symbolism, which we will see in Hebrews 3, if you would turn there:

**Hebrews 3:1-6** Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

As with so many things, the symbol of the house points us back to Christ as well. He has built and is building a spiritual house, and we are that house, as long as “we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” We are that house because we are in Him. Jesus promised that the gates of the grave would not prevail against the church—this house. The individual members die physically, but this house has continued for some 2,000 years. It has a sure foundation.

This does not mean that this house is always tranquil inside, because it consists of still-imperfect people, and the carnality that remains tends to cause friction. But in the long view, the house is far more stable than anything that spiritual Egypt can offer because it is founded on and upheld by the Son of God. The spiritual house is a shelter from the storms that rage outside. So, part of our duty is not to bring corruption, symbolized by leaven, into either our own homes or into this spiritual house, but to prioritize feeding on the Bread of Life and helping other members of the household do the same.

Now, within the imagery of the house or dwelling, there is an intriguing contrast with Tabernacles. Please turn back to Leviticus 23:

**Leviticus 23:42-43** 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.’”

God says this feast is about the Israelites’ experience with Him when He brought them out of Egypt. God puts the focus of this feast on the journey to the inheritance. It is about pilgrimage, and moving toward our inheritance, rather than picturing the inheritance.

Booths are, by definition, temporary. They lack a foundation. In the Faith Chapter, Abraham is noted as dwelling in temporary dwellings with Isaac and Jacob, and it is contrasted with a city that has foundations. Booths provide some protection from the elements, but they also remind us that there is a goal we are moving toward that is far more significant. Nobody settles down in a booth. So, we sacrifice some comfort and stability for the sake of being led and fed by God Himself.

God commanded the tabernacles to be made from branches, which contain another lesson. The walls and roof started out green and lush. They were vibrant and beautiful. But in the hot and dry Mediterranean climate, as each day passed, the branches dried and the leaves turned brown. As the week progressed, the people watched the relentless march of time and entropy.

When we get to the New Testament, the human body becomes one antitype of the temporary dwellings. For the purpose of this message, I will be leaning more on the temporary aspect than the permanent dwelling that Richard explained on the first day. As he said, we can still gain some insight from this symbolism. He went through the primary symbolism, so for today, we will look more at this secondary antitype.

Both Paul and Peter refer to their bodies as tents. They use this symbolism to describe the temporariness of human life (II Peter 1:13-14; II Corinthians 5:

1, 4). Like dwellings of branches, our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. They are full of life at the start, but eventually they wear out because the physical creation has been subjected to futility.

Even the Word of God, who was and is God, took on this tent of flesh to tabernacle with mankind (John 1:14). He not only tabernacled with His creation, which He had already done with Israel, but this time He tabernacled as His creation tabernacles. He took on the very same temporary form. It is a truly remarkable thing.

This is part of what God wants us to reflect on. We are commanded to rejoice in the abundance and shelter that God gives, both this week and throughout the year, yet also remember that it does not continue forever. This feast teaches about the impermanence and transitoriness of this life as we follow God on a difficult way. It reminds us of our complete dependence on Him to supply the need during this pilgrimage of 70 or 80 years, and the rejoicing we should do as we see Him provide, time and again.

Even though only the booths are mentioned here, we should understand that they can stand for all the aspects of the wilderness journey. Today, if we refer to a “tent city” of displaced peoples, we understand that the tents really point to their entire circumstance of vulnerability, uncertainty, and lack, and not just where the people sleep.

Likewise, for the Israelites, that time was marked by their absolute dependence on God to sustain them through a harsh environment that was hostile to human life. They were helpless on their own, and God had to be with them every day of those 40 years.

And He was. He provided food where there was no food, and etched the Sabbath into their minds with the manna. Through the pillar of cloud, He provided shade from the blistering sun during the day. Through the pillar of fire, and He provided light and warmth as the temperatures dipped at night. If you think about it, He was their true shelter, and the booths were echoes or tokens. He provided water where there was no water, opening the fountains of the deep (as Mark described a few weeks ago). God protected them, though He also tested them so they would learn to trust Him.

Of course, the Israelites second-guessed Him at just about every point, even as we sometimes do. The Israelites at least had the pillar of cloud and fire to look at and be reminded of God's presence. We must overcome living by sight, and use our faith to be reminded that God is with us, and He is providing for our physical and spiritual needs on our pilgrimage as well. He is doing far more with us and for us than He did with Israel, and His care is even more detailed. But we must strive to live within this spiritual reality, recognizing and finding comfort in His presence, even though we don't see it physically.

Now, these themes of impermanence and pilgrimage may seem to contradict the themes of houses with foundations in Unleavened Bread. It is comparisons and contrasts such as these that lead us to insights that might otherwise remain hidden. The way to reconcile the symbolism of permanence and being settled in houses with the temporariness and movement is, again, to see how both relate to Christ's work.

The pattern for understanding this seeming-contradiction is found in Christ's words on the eve of His crucifixion. Please turn to John 16:33:

**John 16:33** These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Notice that He does not take away tribulation. He does not take away the storms. He does not take away the gates of the grave. These are all unsettling things. These and other certainties that make us uncertain are all elements of our pilgrimage.

Instead of giving us permanence now, He says that in Him we have peace. In Him, we have stability, even when our lives may seem unstable, and the direction of our lives does not make sense to us. The houses in Unleavened Bread and the temporary dwellings in Tabernacles find their commonality in Christ. Our lives are still like those on the move, but in Him, there is peace. But the peace is internal. This peace does not come from controlling all the things in our environment. It comes from surrendering and trusting.

The temporary dwellings this week keep us a little off balance, and that's good. A common human failing is that when everything is the way we want it (or close to it), we lose sight of God.

The temporary dwellings remind us that nothing on earth is permanent, and that our focus and faith must be on what God is doing with us, because the things of this life are not our true inheritance. The temporary dwellings teach us to trust in God's providence, and to temper the drive in all of us to live life on our terms. So, we must surrender our lives and entrust them God, not just at baptism, but every day of this journey.

Now, we will continue to compare and contrast these feasts. Just as both feasts have dwellings as a significant aspect, so also both feasts focus on eating. The Feast of Unleavened Bread has food in its name. The Israelites left Egypt with little time to prepare, so they could not make bread like they normally would. God calls it "the bread of affliction," in part because of their affliction in Egypt, but also because, physically, unleavened bread is simply not as satisfying as bread that has time to rise.

The instructions for Unleavened Bread mentions houses, which implies some stability, if not comfort. However, the bread itself is lackluster because it has not risen. Most of us are relieved to return to normal bread.

That feast keeps us somewhat off-balance regarding our diet. Hardly anything touches us like food does, so a restricted diet affects a major portion of life. When our diet is missing something we normally enjoy, it is impossible to ignore. Each time we have to think about what we are eating or not eating, we have to turn off the auto-pilot and remember what the seven days are about. So, being a little off-balance is part of God's education of us.

If you would turn to Deuteronomy 14, we will see the food aspect of Tabernacles:

**Deuteronomy 14:22-26** "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.

In verse 23, God says the reason we save our tithe and eat before Him is to learn to fear Him always. When we keep this feast as He intends, it instills a reverential awe of Him because we experience Him acting and providing and working things out. As we see His work, it builds our respect for Him so that He is always part of our priorities and decisions.

And so, God wants us to rejoice in the abundance He gives, which is why He calls it a feast. But God also places some hedges. As it says, the reason for enjoying the abundance is learning to fear God. But not all rejoicing or feasting instills the fear of God.

Verses 23 and 26 say we are to eat before the LORD. Similarly, we read back in Leviticus 23 that we are “rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days,” again showing that He is the object of the Feast. It could be said that all rejoicing is “before” Him in the sense that He is aware of everything, and that part is true. But in another sense, rejoicing is not truly “before Him” if He is not at the forefront of our minds and the reason for the rejoicing.

The Israelites ate and they rejoiced, but it was not truly “before the Lord.” God, though Isaiah and Amos, took Judah and Israel to task because of their festival observances. God was not at the forefront of their minds. Their keeping of the feasts did not increase their respect or awe of Him, because they didn’t really seek Him at the feast.

They didn’t approach the feast like a nation that had been weak and unable to provide for itself, and in need of God’s providence at every turn. They

forgot the reasons for the temporary dwellings, forgot the lessons of the wilderness journey, and forgot that being God's people means that one's life is no longer one's own. In short, they forgot God. So, while He was certainly aware of their eating and rejoicing, they weren't really aware of Him.

So, like Unleavened Bread with its diet restriction, this feast also keeps us a little off balance with its housing restriction. During this feast, our food is normal and even abundant, but we don't have the comfort or stability of our homes and all our belongings. We rejoice in the abundance of what God has provided this year, but we do so in dwellings that are lacking things that our homes have. Usually, by the end of the feast, we are ready to say goodbye to our temporary dwellings and get back to what is familiar.

So, to start drawing together this comparing and contrasting, during Unleavened Bread, our food lacks something. During Tabernacles, our dwellings lack something. In looking at these two feasts together, we see that God often does not give us everything we might like. He provides abundantly, but where He holds back, it prompts us to think about what is lacking, and then to reason through why we might not have that thing that we believe would make our lives complete.

God's providence is perfect. It falls short only in our estimation and expectation. We need to consider why God might withhold things that are normally acceptable or even good, such as normal bread for a week, or normal dwellings for a week. We can take this further into aspects of our life that we feel are lacking. Maybe it is a better job, or a bigger house, or being free of a health issue, or deliverance of some sort—you can fill in the blank for yourself. And while you are filling in your blank, please turn with me to Psalm 84:

**Psalm 84:11** For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

We may be doing all we know to do to walk uprightly, and yet it seems that God is withholding good from us. This can rigorously test our faith. Please turn to Psalm 34:

**Psalm 34:9-10** Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

Similar to Psalm 84, God promises that those whom this describes won't lack any good thing. And yet we may feel like we are lacking something good, even though we are doing our part: We fear Him and we seek Him and we are trying to walk uprightly.

This challenge becomes even more difficult if we fall into the deadly snare of comparing our lives with the lives of others. We may see God blessing others in ways that we would like to be blessed. This can lead to jealousy and envy and thinking terrible thoughts about people whom God has given good things while withholding them from us. And those others might even be sinners, unlike us, we think. Next may come complaints about what we judge to be unfair, complaints that are spoken before the LORD, because He listens. If we are not careful, we may know better than God how to run His creation, just like Helel before he was cast out. Finding fault with God's management puts us on very thin ice.

Circumstances like this can drive us to the super-righteousness that Solomon warns of in Ecclesiastes 7. That is, if we just pray more and study more and become more righteous—maybe if we fast twice a week, and give a tithe and a half on all we possess—then we can earn our way into God's favor, and convince Him to give us that good thing that is lacking. But that isn't going to work, and there is a better way to understand this dilemma.

If we accept these verses as absolute truth—which we should—it means that if there is something lacking in our lives, it must not be good for us in the present circumstances, or else God would provide it. That means that the failure is not in God's providence—perish the thought—but in our own expectations. That can be hard to accept. It can be especially challenging if what we lack is something that God Himself says or indicates is good. It just may not be the best thing for us at this time or in this circumstance.

If God is withholding something, it does not mean that God hates us and is determined to make us miserable. As difficult as it is to believe at times, everything God does is an act of love. But sometimes that takes some deep

evaluation to understand why and how what He does (or does not do) is an act of love.

When we experience a lack, that invites us to more deeply take stock of our life with God, and consider why something perfectly legitimate might not be the best for us. That can be uncomfortable because it may reveal something about us that we may not want to see—that there is something about us in our present state that could make a normally good thing not be good for us. It does not mean that we are a terrible person. Incomplete, yes, but not terrible. Probably.

But such an evaluation helps us to remember that it is God who is guiding us to the destination He has in mind for us, and only He knows the particulars of what it will take for us not to just get there, but to arrive with the right character and spiritual image. The lack we experience in this life is part of what God does to make us complete. That's the meaning of seven. Both of these seven-day feasts lack things to help make us perfect.

When we see a lack of something that would otherwise be good, we can and we should be grateful that Somebody is watching out for us, saving us from things that would not be good for us right now, and doing something even better than what we lack under the sun.

A significant part of our journey is learning to account that where we are going, and what God is forming in us, vastly exceed the things we are missing. But it requires fully surrendering to His way of forming us into His image, which often clashes with how we think it should be done. We have to trust that our Master Potter knows exactly what we need (and don't need) to be a vessel of honor that will bring glory to Him rather than itself.

As a lesson for later generations, God allowed one man to have absolutely everything physical that he wanted. That might sound like heaven on earth, but as it turns out, it wasn't. It was probably thrilling for a time, but it turned into vanity and grasping for wind.

Solomon's wealth and accomplishments did not truly satisfy him, and it would be the same for every last person. We already know that what he tried didn't work, so we don't have to try to copy him. Solomon concluded that

what really matters is what this feast teaches: to fear God and keep His commandments. Yet even after reaching that foundational truth, Solomon still went astray. Just knowing that paramount life principle did not keep him from turning away because he did not follow through on his conclusion. He did not practice what he learned. He lost his fear of God and broke His commandments.

Ecclesiastes is often part of the reading for Tabernacles, yet this lesson also relates to Unleavened Bread. Unleavened Bread teaches that true satisfaction cannot come from anything physical. Lasting satisfaction only comes from the Bread of Life. To the world, that perfect Bread of Life seems lackluster, and even revolting. Carnal man cannot imagine the benefit of being strengthened by Christ and letting go of sin. Like leavening, sin seems normal. For the unconverted, it is a shock to think about going without.

But those who know the Father and the Son experience the sense of well-being that comes from a growing relationship. That relationship delivers the contentment, the joy, peace, and satisfaction that eluded even Solomon.

These two feasts, and the lessons we have already seen, meet together in Deuteronomy 8, if you would turn there:

**Deuteronomy 8:2-3** And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

This passage contains the themes of both eating bread from God and the rigors of the wilderness journey. Though the booths are unmentioned here, this fills in some of the details of that time. Notice that it was God who caused a measure of hardship, and denied them some things to see what was in their hearts.

He does this with us as well, not just during these two feasts, but throughout our lives. He withholds things when withholding is better. That's what we must accept, and then begin to explore why it could be better this way, with something lacking, rather than our way, with everything already perfect.

The apostle Paul exemplified this. He experienced the heights of acclaim and status as he advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries, but also the depths of rejection because of Christ. Think of Paul's ministry as a type of the wilderness journey and all its themes. Please turn to II Corinthians 11. II Corinthians 11 recounts what Paul went through in service to Christ, and it is a resume I don't think any of us would want.

**II Corinthians 11:23-29** Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

In the next chapter, Paul also mentions his thorn in the flesh, so we can add that to Paul's resume. This apostle lived a journey that lacked physical stability of any sort, never knowing what the service of God might require. Paul had nothing physical as a foundation or a source of security. There was nothing physical on which he could depend. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, he was vulnerable, and he had to depend on God for food, for shelter, for protection, and for guidance. But notice from his testimony here that the food, shelter, and protection did not always show up immediately or completely.

This was one of the most faithful and committed servants of Christ ever. We might think that if anyone would be granted favor because of righteousness, it would be Paul. But that wasn't how it worked. Paul did not have what the world calls a "charmed life."

We could look at this list and identify any number of things we would consider "good" that God chose not to provide—things like deliverance from stripes, being kept out of prison, or not being in danger of death so often. Those would normally be very good things. How about not being beaten or stoned or shipwrecked. We would consider it fantastic for those things not to happen, yet sometimes that was lacking as well. How about deliverance from all the perils Paul mentions, or deliverance from weariness, or being able to sleep, or always having food and clothing. How about not having that thorn in the flesh. All the opposites of this list seem like good things. Paul feared God, sought God, and walked uprightly, and yet look at all these instances of providence or protection that were lacking for Paul.

This is not meant to make us doubt God, but to get us to think these things through, because this is for us. Scripture cannot be broken, which means that if God intervened to stop those things, or if He provided differently than He did, it would not have been good. While it could have been good in a different circumstance or for a different servant, it was better for Paul to experience the lack of certain things.

God's providence was perfect for what He was doing with Paul, even though it meant that Paul seemed to lack all sorts of things. Yet these perils and lacks required that Paul stay focused on God—and that was how God defined good for Paul. What was truly good was what the lack of otherwise good things produced in Paul. In other words, God defines what is good for each one of us individually, which is why comparing our lives is an exercise in futility.

Now, let's turn to Philippians 4 so we can see Paul's approach to his challenging journey:

**Philippians 4:11-13** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I

have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Paul could genuinely write these words—and mean them—because of what his experiences with God had taught him about the God he was serving and we are serving. These verses show what his focus and priorities were because of the hardship, because of being in dire straits, of lacking even food and adequate clothing at times.

His response was not to murmur and complain like Israelites—physical and even spiritual. Instead, because Paul was totally on board with God’s project of being completely remade in His image, and because Paul had come to know God, he could be content, knowing that what was truly needed would be supplied, and that what was not supplied must not truly be needed for God’s will to come to pass in his life.

Paul had fully surrendered to God’s guidance and oversight of all his circumstances, and this produced a wonderful fruit within him: peace. That peace came through learning to focus on God rather than his circumstances. This allowed Paul to be content. He was not agitated or anxious over the uncertainty, or over what could go wrong, or what was lacking. He had contentment because his focus was above the sun, which allowed him to take all the things under the sun in stride. His life was built on the Rock. Because of God’s unique calling, he had more storms of life than probably all of us, yet he also had an internal stability because Christ was real to him.

His final statement here in verse 13 brings in Unleavened Bread: The source of Paul’s strength was not himself. It couldn’t be. It was Christ, the Bread of Life. It was food that the world would not accept because it seemed to be lacking the ingredients for a fulfilling life. Yet Paul saw it differently. He sought out this Bread because he understood its true worth. As a result, he had strength and he had internal peace and stability, even though outwardly it seemed like he was always buffeted about. The unconverted do not understand this. They believe rejoicing only comes from good times and abundance. Yet God says there can be rejoicing in trials, or when we are abased, or when normally good things are lacking.

And now, in chiastic fashion, we will return to the beginning. We have compared and contrasted the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles. We have seen some of their similarities, such as their lengths, and the aspects of dwellings and food. We have also seen how they differ because each feast has something different to teach us.

But where they overwhelmingly meet together and reinforce each other is in the centrality of Jesus Christ. He is our Deliverer from spiritual Egypt. He is our Unleavened Bread of sincerity and truth. He is the source of strength that we must seek every day. He is the one guiding us on our pilgrimage, leading us in ways and places that may not make sense to us because we cannot see the whole picture yet. He is the one protecting us and providing for us according to what He knows is good for us. We might find ourselves disagreeing with Him, which simply means we have not yet fully learned the lessons of these feasts. But they are feasts to Him. They point us to Him, and they lead us to Him.