

A Spiritual Feast

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I am looking forward to our time together this Spring. Although I know a few of you, I have never met many of you and am looking forward to getting to know more of my brothers and sisters in Christ. Dennis has invited me to begin our fellowship together by sending a few articles over the next couple of months. So in this first article, I would like to ask, why should we spend a few days together in dedicated focus to the Scriptures?

To answer this, I would like to look back to the Israelite Feast of Booths. Perhaps with the exception of the Passover, this feast was most central to the history of Israel as it celebrated the LORD's deliverance of His people. God commanded, "You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:42-43). Indeed, this Feast, also called the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles, commemorated God's merciful hand guiding Israel from Egypt to the promised land.

Unlike the Day of Atonement that lasted a single day, the Feast of Booths lasted a week. Again God says, "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days" (Lev. 23:39). Israel would come together to feast, fellowship, and praise--all for the purpose of commemorating God's providence to His people. Consulting the Jewish calendar, this feast occurred during the Fall harvest, so it was a time of abundance and rejoicing. Indeed, our American holiday Thanksgiving is patterned after the Puritan celebration of this feast.

So what does the Feast of Booths have to do with a gospel meeting? Well, both are a time when God's people come together to feast and to praise Him! Except the feast that we celebrate consists not of wheat and animals but of the Bread of Life. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my

flesh” (John 6:48-51). So our feast is not of physical bread but of the Bread of Life.

Truly, it is of utmost importance to our spiritual lives that we take time to feast on the Bread of Life together. Hundreds of years after Moses first offered his instruction about the Feast of Booths, Israel once more celebrated this Feast. In Ezra 8, the priest Ezra has returned with other Hebrews from Babylonian Captivity to the land of Israel, and Ezra reads the Book of the Law to those gathered (Ezra 8:1-12). In this reading, the people realized their command to keep the Feast of Booths. “And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day, the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing” (Ezra 8:17). This Feast spurred a spiritual revival in Israel, and the people went before God in confessing their sins (Ezra 9).

Just as the Feast of Booths drove Israel toward restoration and revival, a gospel meeting should have the same effects on us. The Bread of Life delivered in Jesus and preserved in the Scriptures should give us sustenance and life (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). God wanted His people to celebrate the Feast as a reminder of His goodness, and such time together was to lead the people to greater devotion to Him. Likewise, God wants His people today to feast on the Word of God together, leading us to revival, restoration, and increased service to Him.

So much as we offer thanks before eating a meal together, I ask that you now begin praying for our spiritual feast in March. To give you a quick forecast of the week, we will focus on the book of Revelation. This book is no simple glass of milk but a well-aged filet that, when digested properly, can provide us endurance and instruction like perhaps no other book of the Bible can. Sadly, many Christians fear Revelation and avoid its pages, but we will gather around this book for a few days to gain nourishment from it.

Indeed, the nourishment that the Scriptures give us--and specifically the endurance that our meeting will hopefully provide--should motivate us to greater service to God. Our meeting is not an end to itself but a means to greater dedication to our great God! Much as Israel was to keep the Feast of Booths for their spiritual benefit, so we have the privilege to participate in a meeting together as we feast on the Bread of Life.