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HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A SITE FOR THE FEAST?

One of the major teachings that distinguishes the Churches of God from most other churches is that we observe all of the annual Feasts and Holy Days that are listed in Leviticus 23. Before Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986 there were over 100,000 of us keeping the Feast of Tabernacles at the various Feast Sites that the Church had established around the world. "Keeping the Feast" has always been a significant part of our way of life in the Church of God.

And then the Church was scattered and divided.

Over a number of years many new church organizations were formed, appealing to the people who had been a part of the Church before we were scattered. And that splintering and scattering has continued right up to the present. In addition, many people continued to practice the Church's teachings on their own, without attending with any of the larger new church groups. And very many other people simply dropped off the radar altogether, forsaking the way of life they had practiced during their years in God's Church.

For all those who have stayed faithful to the truth, observing the Feast of Tabernacles continues to be a major practice. So every year all of the various CoG organizations establish a number of feast sites for their members. In most cases their decisions regarding where to establish feast sites are guided by the needs of their members, which is fine. When the larger churches have a certain number of members in a certain region, or in a certain foreign country, then they try to select sites that will serve those members. Some of the smaller groups, on the other hand, will select only one site for the whole country (i.e. here in the USA).

And then there are the people who establish their own feast sites.

It seems like nowadays almost anybody can decide to establish a feast site, and then seek to attract other people to join them in their feast observances? Is that the way it should be?

THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR FEAST SITES

When Mr. Armstrong came into contact with the remnants of the Church of God in the 1920's, those people did not observe the annual Feasts. It was only after intensive Bible study that Mr. Armstrong realized that God's people today must also observe the annual Feasts. So Mr. Armstrong then looked for instructions or guidelines regarding how these Feasts should be observed. He then found the following Scriptures.

Three times in a year shall **all thy males** appear before the LORD thy God **in the place which he shall choose**; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: (Deuteronomy 16:16)

And **thou shalt eat** before the LORD thy God, **in the place which he shall choose to place his name there**, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. (Deuteronomy 14:23)

Three times in the year **all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.** (Exodus 23:17)

From these Scriptures Mr. Armstrong correctly understood two major points.

1) The very first and most important requirement for keeping the feasts is that we go to the place which **GOD** has chosen! This means that **FIRST God has to reveal WHERE He wants us to observe His feasts.** If we decide to go to any places that God has NOT chosen, then we will not be keeping God's feasts, because we will simply not be appearing "before the Eternal our God"!

GOD SELECTS OR AT LEAST APPROVES THE LOCATIONS WHERE WE MAY OBSERVE HIS FEASTS!

This is the first and most basic requirement for observing God's feasts. Before we even find out WHAT we are to do at the feasts, we first have to know WHERE to go in order to keep the feasts. And so God has revealed in the Bible that God Himself will select or approve the places where He will place His name, for God's people to observe God's feasts. Any other places will not be "appearing before God" because God has not decided to place His name there!

[COMMENT: In Old Testament times when all of the people of Israel lived in a relatively small confined area of considerably less than 100 miles north-south and 50 miles east-west, there was only one place where God placed His name, Jerusalem. So the Scriptures always speak about God placing His name in one place. Once Jesus Christ instructed His disciples to go and "**teach all nations**" (Matthew 28:19-20), then this automatically implied that in the future there would have to be more places where God would place His name for the observance of His feasts. It would have been impossible for all converts throughout the Roman empire to come to Jerusalem in order to observe God's feasts every year. This is even more so the case today, where God's people are scattered around the world.]

2) The second point Mr. Armstrong understood from these verses is that God's emphasis is on "all the males" appearing before God at His Feasts. The most obvious reason why sometimes some of the women might not be able to appear at the places where God would place His name is that a woman might just have given birth to a baby, or be about to give birth to a baby at the time of one of the feasts, and therefore she would not be in a position to undertake the journey to the place God had selected. The implication in those cases was that, if there was someone else available to be with the expectant mother (e.g. another woman), then in most cases the husband should still go to the place where God had placed His name.

However, there could certainly also be situations where it was essential that the husband also stay at home with his wife, because there was nobody else available to help the woman. The decisions in these types of situations were always the responsibility of the people themselves. In such circumstances it is not for the ministry to decide whether or not a woman should go to the Feast, or whether or not her husband should also stay at home. The people themselves are always responsible for making such decisions, though the ministry should certainly be available for counsel and advice.

So the point we should note is this:

Whether or not a specific place qualifies for observing the Feast of Tabernacles is NOT determined by how many sermons will be given or played (if pre-recorded)! Simply because someone "plays a bunch of feast sermons" at some or other location is not a deciding factor as to whether that constitutes the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles in the eyes of God! The key factor before God is that such "giving or playing a bunch of feast sermons" takes place at **a location that has God's approval!**

You want to know the reason WHY that is the key?

The reason is as follows:

If people are not willing to go to places where GOD has placed His name, then they are not really willing to submit to God! They are in effect telling God that they are self-willed! THEY can decide for themselves where to keep God's Feasts; they don't need any guidance or direction from God in this regard. The point is that **going to a place** where GOD has placed His name is first of all an expression of **submission to God!** Self-willed observance of the Feast of Tabernacles is of no value before God!

Going to the place where GOD has placed His name is an acknowledgment that God is working through some people or some organizations and that God is NOT working through other people or other organizations.

Self-willed observance of God's Feasts never has God's approval. It is NOT the "Feast observance" that comes first; it is the submission to God's authority that comes first, and then the other things follow.

But people will find ways to make God's instructions fit in with their wishes. And we saw that happening after Mr. Armstrong's death. Let's look at some examples of misuse of God's instructions to keep His Feasts.

A MISUSE OF GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

After Mr. Armstrong's death there was a methodical attempt to destroy everything that God had used Mr. Armstrong to teach God's people. That included attempts to pervert the observance of God's Feasts. For example:

1) Let's have a "feast site" that is **an ocean cruise** on an ocean liner. We can cruise through the Caribbean or through the Mediterranean Sea, and we'll have church services on board every day, and even two services on the Holy Days. Won't that be a great feast site?!

THAT SUGGESTION WAS OBVIOUSLY SICK! And it constituted a clear misuse by those in authority of the responsibility to select feast sites for the people of God.

2) Let's have a "feast site" that consists of **a tour of Israel** (or any other place), visiting biblical sites and having talks by experts in archeology. And it can be so biblically enlightening and inspiring.

THAT SUGGESTION WAS OBVIOUSLY EQUALLY SICK! Turning the observance of God's Feast of Tabernacles into a tour of anything is sick! **God did NOT intend for His Feast to be "a tour"!**

The criterion for observing God's Feasts is not whether or not something is "educational" or "inspiring"! The first key is to go to **a place that God has selected** to place His name there.

Both of the above two examples were nothing more than attempts to cater to people who had a lot of money to blow! Appealing to selfishness was the underlying motivation in the above two suggestions for "feast sites". They were basically along the lines of modern "tour operators" who organize vacations for tourists ... with a sermon thrown in every day to make it still qualify as "a feast observance". And obviously, the people who participated in that "tour" loved it ... just **like any other tourists** love the tours they participate in! **BUT IT WAS NOT A FEAST OF TABERNACLES!**

In that particular instance the blame lies squarely with those who organized that "tour"; they should have known better than to turn God's Feast into a "tour"! It was a case of "o my people, **they which lead you**

cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" (Isaiah 3:12).

We need to recognize that after the early years of observing the Feast (in places like Belknap Springs in the Willamette Valley east of Eugene in Oregon, and then Big Sandy before the College was developed there) there was a change in emphasis for "keeping the Feast". As more people came into the Church who had "plenty of second tithe", so some people tried to cater to these financially better off people, by providing opportunities for people to **turn the Feast into travel opportunities or into a vacation!**

3) The result was that **people could go "feast site shopping"** for where to attend the Feast! Wouldn't you like a vacation in Hawaii or in Italy or in England or in South America, etc.? No problem! We'll have a feast site for you in all of these locations, and you can be "a transfer" to one of those areas. Hey, why not make a vacation out of your observance of the Feast of Tabernacles? So if you want to visit your aunt Emma in England, or your aunt Maria in Italy, then you can just go there for the Feast. Cool, isn't it? **You get to do what you want to do**, and you still get to be at a place that GOD has selected to place His name there. You couldn't ask for more! How cool is that?

4) Anyway, a small number of people actually "did ask for more". They decided that since they were already traveling to this exotic area anyway, why not "pick up" another exciting area in the process by "**feast site hopping**"? So they would "keep" half the Feast at one site, and then travel to another feast site for the second half of the Feast. And as long as they were going to another feast site, this was all supposedly okay.

THIS TOO WAS SICK!

This approach is nothing more than **manipulating God's instructions** for our own selfish ends!

Try to see this from God's point of view. Here people have in fact gone to a place where GOD has placed His name (i.e. the first feast site they attend). Then, in the course of the Feast, they in effect say: "Good bye God, we'll see You at the next feast site". So in leaving the first feast site **THEY ARE IN EFFECT GOING AWAY FROM A PLACE WHERE GOD HAS PLACED HIS NAME!** So WHY are they going away from a place where God has placed His name? Wasn't that place good enough for a whole Feast for them? Were four days the most they could stand at the place God had selected, before they absolutely needed a change in scenery? Were they perhaps "feast site hopping" by following their favorite speakers?

Can you understand that this practice is nothing more than manipulating God's instructions for our own personal ends? **And it is wrong before God!**

Now the blame for this wrong practice goes back to Mr. Armstrong! It is one thing when there are **not enough ministers available** to serve God's people at a feast site that has been selected; in such cases (in the days before the internet with live video and audio transmissions!) **a minister** might travel there during the Feast to serve the people at that site. This was the case in the early years when there weren't enough ministers available to do all the speaking at all of the feast sites. And this might even be the case with some groups today ... that they don't have enough ministers to speak at all of their sites?

But it is something altogether different when there is an adequate number of ministers available at a site to take care of all of the speaking responsibilities. In those cases the feast site hopping ministers and their entourage don't come to the next feast site to fill a need; in those cases they come to the next feast site as "**a special attraction**"! Now it is pretty hard to find biblical justifications for such "special attractions".

Yet that is precisely how the feast sites were advertized in Mr. Armstrong's later years ... look at all "the

special attraction ministers" who will be speaking at these various sites. People were being wooed by special incentives to go to the places where God would place His name ... the more special attractions a feast site had to offer, the more people were likely to go there.

And so **today** frequently it is not really a case of people hearing: this is where GOD has placed His name this year for the Feast, and THEREFORE **you have a responsibility** to go there! No, today it is primarily a case of making **a sales pitch**: look at what we are able to offer you at this site. So come to our feast site, because God has given you a choice, so you don't have to feel that you might somehow miss out.

Now at the peak of this practice of feast site hopping in 1969 or 1970 Mr. Armstrong spoke 16 or 17 times during the Feast at over a dozen different feast sites. After starting the Feast in French-speaking Europe that year (though he couldn't speak a word of French!) he then came over to us in Minehead, England, for the morning service of the First Day of Tabernacles, before flying out to the USA right after services that day to speak somewhere else. The Holy Days and the weekly Sabbath during the Feast had become major travel days for feast site hopping speakers, including Mr. Armstrong.

For Mr. Armstrong it was a matter of pride that he spoke more often than any other speakers during the Feast ... and it was deemed to be so "very important" that as many people as possible would get the chance to actually hear Mr. Armstrong personally at least once during the Feast. This practice was billed as "**the highlight of the whole Feast**", having Mr. Armstrong actually give a live sermon at that site. Big deal!

The point is that **by that time** many of these feast sites had a dozen or more ministers in attendance. It was **no longer a case of filling a need** because there weren't enough ministers available to do all the speaking. There were more than enough ministers at the sites to take care of all of the speaking requirements. **By then it had become a matter of vanity!**

It is vain to think that one minister's message is somehow "more important" than another minister's message. It was a matter of vanity because it established and entrenched a hierarchy of "powerful speakers", **THE MAJORITY OF WHOM WERE NOT EVEN CONVERTED!!** And so that majority of powerful feast site hopping speakers from the 60's and 70's and 80's have abandoned God's Church altogether! They are no longer around! The Apostle John explains that **these men had never been converted**. As John put it: **they went out from us** so that it would become very clear that **they were never a part of us** (see 1 John 2:19).

It was vanity because it ignored the fact that "God accepts no man's person" (Galatians 2:6), and in this verse Paul was referring specifically to "the powerful speakers" of his day.

It was vanity because it ignored the fact that **even the best of the best sermons from anybody isn't worth a hill of beans two days later!** Let's get real!

What did all the hundreds of sermons which Mr. Armstrong and the top feast site hopping evangelists gave in the 60's and 70's and early 80's actually achieve? Practically nothing at all! In spite of all those powerful feast sermons the vast majority of people at the feast sites back then have now forsaken the truth of God.

And here is the point:

Those people who DID remain faithful did so because there was something in their minds and in their characters that motivated them to hold fast to the truth of God. It wasn't the sermons from the feast site hopping evangelists which they had heard that gave them that motivation. In fact, **the sermons we give have very little influence on the actual character of people in the Church of God**. A specific sermon

has great value for one person because that person already had a certain mindset even before hearing that sermon. The same sermon is a waste of time for another person who has a different mindset.

There is a huge difference between "a powerful sermon" and "a valuable sermon". Powerful sermons sway the feelings and emotions of people; they can be very impressive, but frequently they have very little value. We had an overabundance of this in the 60's and 70's, when there was a lot of emphasis on powerful speaking.

At any rate, **unless there is a shortage of qualified men** to take care of all the sermon responsibilities at a feast site, there is really no reason today why even a minister should travel to different feast sites during the Feast of Tabernacles. We need to stop viewing the Feast of Tabernacles as **an opportunity to showcase supposed powerful or inspirational speakers** to God's people, by having those "powerful speakers" speak at several different feast sites. And there is no justification whatsoever for non-ministers to switch feast sites during the Feast! Switching feast sites during the feast is **a way of manipulating God's instructions** for us to go to a place (**ONE, not two or three**) where God has placed His name that year.

The point is that these practices turned the Feast of God into something that justified **a selfish motivation!**

To make this plain:

When God said that He would place His name in certain locations (i.e. after Matthew 28:19 there needed to be more than one location) for His people to observe His Feasts, **it was never God's intention** to offer His people **a supermarket selection of "exciting venues"** for the Feast. God never intended Feast observance to be a "pick and choose" opportunity, where **people with more money** would go to exotic places in other parts of the world!

Selfishness is always wrong before God! This means that selfish decisions are not good! The primary purpose for the Feast is that we **"learn to fear the Eternal our God always"** (Deuteronomy 14:23), not that we visit aunt Emma in England or have some "inspiring tour" of Israel!

5) Today we also have some people who offer **"feast services" for just the two Holy Days ...** so that they can take up offerings! That type of arrangement is utterly pathetic, in addition to being so **blatantly covetous** (Jeremiah 6:13)! Do you really believe that God "places His name" somewhere for the 1st and the 8th day, while being unconcerned for the intervening days? It is immaterial whether the sermons on those two days are the most inspiring oratory you could wish to hear (itching ears?) or whether they are total garbage; this whole type of setup is a sham!

6) And then we have people who don't need any ministers to keep God's Feasts. Hey, they can give some pretty good sermons themselves, right? Or they can lead some pretty good "discussion groups" on serious biblical topics? Or maybe they get sermons on a CD from someone else? And so **they themselves can figure out** where God should be placing His name, and that's where they are going to go. And they will freely call their particular location a Feast of Tabernacles. But whether or not God has actually given them the authority to decide where God should be placing His name is another matter altogether.

Yes, we've come a long way since the days in Belknap Springs 60 years ago. But it hasn't all been for the good.

SO HOW DOES GOD PLACE HIS NAME SOMEWHERE?

Right, so how can we know where God has placed His name? It is clear that today God does not want all of His people from around the world to go to Jerusalem. That's clear because today there is no Church of God in Jerusalem; today Jerusalem is a permanent latent war zone.

So how can you know what to do for the Feast of Tabernacles?

Consider the following principle:

At various times God has delegated certain responsibilities to human beings. This principle started already in the days of Adam, when God delegated to Adam the naming of all the animals God had created (Genesis 2:19). This same principle of delegation was used by Jesus Christ when He established the foundation for the NT Church of God. After the Apostle Peter had acknowledged Jesus Christ as "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus Christ said the following:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and **whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven**: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19)

This was not a statement that would apply exclusively to the Apostle Peter. Rather, it was a principle that would apply to decisions made by those whom God would call to leadership positions in God's Church. This intent is clear from a similar statement two chapters later:

Verily I say unto you, **Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven**: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That **if two of you shall agree on earth** as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For **where two or three are gathered together in my name**, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:18-20)

The reference to two agreeing and to two or three gathered together in Christ's name is specifically a reference to **those that God had called to leadership in the Church of God** agreeing on specific decisions that need to be made for the proper functioning of the Church of God in this particular age. The context is talking about those called into the ministry making binding decisions for God's Church.

So in our context this principle means that God has in this age delegated the responsibility for selecting feast sites to His true ministers. It follows that **those who are not God's true ministers are also not qualified to select places** where God will place His name. In plain language: for any place to be an acceptable site for the Feast of Tabernacles requires the approval from someone who is a servant of God, someone who has been called by God to the responsibility of teaching God's people the truth of God.

So how do we then identify such individuals who have authority from God to select feast sites? This question takes us to Matthew chapter 7.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS WHO COME IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

After stating that the way to eternal life was narrow and difficult to find (Matthew 7:13-14), Jesus Christ said the following:

Beware of false prophets, which **come to you in sheep's clothing**, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

Sheep are a symbol for true Christians, people who have unconditionally submitted their lives to God. This verse is not a reference to ministers from other religions. This is a reference to unconverted men who claim to be ministers of God. They have all the outward trappings (i.e. sheep's clothing) that make them look like they could be God's servants.

The expression "ravening wolves" is a translation of the Greek words "lukoi harpages". The adjective "harpax" (i.e. "ravening") comes from the verb "harpazo" which means **"to seize by force"**. Only here is this Greek word "harpax" translated as "ravening"; in the other four places where it is used in the New Testament (Luke 18:11; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 1 Corinthians 6:10) it is always translated as **"extortioners"**. (This meaning is still the same in modern Greek, where "arpax" refers to "a rapacious person", meaning someone excessively covetous who lives on prey.)

The Greek word "lukos" means "a wolf". This word is used metaphorically to mean **"cruel and greedy"**. So we can now put the whole expression together.

In Matthew 7:15 Jesus Christ warned His people that **"cruel, greedy and rapacious extortioners"** would enter into the ranks of church leadership. But they would very carefully disguise themselves, assuming the appearance of "fellow sheep". In other words, Jesus Christ tells us "don't trust appearances"! Beware of people with selfish motivations.

Now when people in this particular category set up their own feast sites, then MONEY is always going to be a major issue! Feast offerings can lend a certain amount of credibility to their demands for money; after all, God commands you to give your feast offerings to them; so they are almost doing you a favor in accepting your offerings, is the appeal.

Next Jesus Christ then pointed out how we may identify such "ravening wolves".

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (Matthew 7:16)

Notice verse 18.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. (Matthew 7:18)

Here Jesus Christ was pointing out certain impossibilities. Thus, if the tree is bad, then there is no way that it can somehow bring forth "good fruit", even if the fruit may look good on the outside. Sometimes we don't discover that a great looking peach or apple is rotten until we bite into it. So here is the point:

We need to look at "the fruit" such men are bearing. But it goes further than that, because sometimes for a while rotten fruit can still look pretty good on the outside. So we also have to look at "the tree", i.e. the individual himself. Is he "a good tree" or is he "a corrupt tree"? The Greek expression "dendron sapon" ("corrupt tree") refers to a tree that is **rotten** and unfit for any use. And ultimately the fruits will also be rotten and useless, even if for a short while they looked very good.

Wherefore **by their fruits ye shall know them.** (Matthew 7:20)

We are not to be impressed by oratory (1 Corinthians 2:4). We need to examine the things that various men teach: do they teach obedience to God's laws or do they turn the grace of God into licence to sin

(Jude 1:4)? As Paul pointed out:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and **the fire shall try every man's work** of what sort it is. (1 Corinthians 3:13)

It will eventually come out whether they are faithful or whether they promise their followers liberty to sin (2 Peter 2:19).

Getting back to the authority to select places where God will place His name for a feast observance: if we can identify "the fruits" of any man as corrupt or rotten, then it follows that such a man **most certainly** does not have any right or authority to establish a feast site!

Let's continue in Matthew 7.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

It is not the things people say that count, or how they say them. It is not the sermons they give that count! **Many unconverted people can be very inspirational speakers.** The key is always whether they preach and practice obedience to God. The next verse makes quite clear that Jesus Christ is in this context referring to false teachers who have entered the true Church.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? (Matthew 7:22)

The statement "have we not prophesied in Your name" is another way of saying: **didn't we give powerful sermons in Your name to Your people? Didn't we organize feast sites for your people to keep the Feast of Tabernacles?** Look at all the wonderful works we did for Your Church?

This verse makes clear that some people deceive themselves! They are actually convinced that they were doing "the right thing" before God. It never occurs to them that they are **presumptuously** taking ministerial responsibilities to themselves, when God has not called them into the ministry. It is like King Saul deciding to bring a sacrifice himself (1 Samuel 13:9) and like King Uzziah deciding that he was good enough to enter the Temple and to burn incense before God (2 Chronicles 26:16), and King Uzziah didn't back down until God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:19-21).

Let me try to make this plain. Regarding selecting feast sites:

IT IS NOT A CASE OF KNOWING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE! IT IS A CASE OF: HAS GOD CALLED YOU TO DO IT?

Notice what Jesus Christ continued to say:

And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you:** depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:23)

To be quite clear: Jesus Christ will say "I never knew you" to some people who **gave sermons** or sermonettes in God's Church (i.e. they had prophesied in His name) and who had **anointed the sick** in God's Church (i.e. they had cast out demons) and who had done "**many wonderful works**" in a Church of God context. These words will be said by Jesus Christ to some people who are alive today and who are in some way involved with God's Church. Under "wonderful works" you can include: and we even organized feast sites for Your people.

The key here is as follows:

Jesus Christ "knows" every single individual who has God's Spirit. The people Christ does NOT "know" are those who do NOT have God's Spirit. The people Jesus Christ "NEVER knew" are **those people who have NEVER at any time had God's Spirit!** That is what "I never knew you" means! And He was speaking about some people who are alive today and who consider themselves to be a part of God's Church.

In the days of Jeremiah God stated this same point, that some people presume to speak for God. Notice:

For **I have not sent them**, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. (Jeremiah 27:15)

For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: **I have not sent them**, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 29:9)

These verses show that God DOES "send" some people. But these verses also show that some other people will presumptuously attempt to speak for God. So if God hasn't given you the right to establish a feast site for some of His people, then you should proceed very cautiously.

ONE MORE EXCUSE

Let's look at an Old Testament example of a king establishing his own feast site. After Solomon's death God gave 10 tribes to Jeroboam. They became the Northern Kingdom, known as "the House of Israel". The remaining tribes stayed with Solomon's son Rehoboam, and they became the Southern Kingdom, known as "the House of Judah".

Now Jeroboam was very worried that if his people would continue to go up to Jerusalem for the feasts (i.e. to the place where GOD had placed His name at that time) and for various sacrificial offerings, then eventually they would reunite with Judah and get rid of him. **Jeroboam perceived people going to the place** where God had placed His name as a threat.

So here is the solution Jeroboam implemented:

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, **It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem**: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (1 Kings 12:28)

Jeroboam followed that up with establishing a feast in competition with the Feast of Tabernacles.

And **Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month**, on the fifteenth day of the month, **like unto the feast that is in Judah**, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. (1 Kings 12:32)

We know that Jeroboam's real reason for establishing these pagan customs was the fear of being deposed by his own people. But the official reason Jeroboam presented to the people was:

IT TAKES TOO MUCH EFFORT TO GO UP TO JERUSALEM! WHY, IT MIGHT TAKE YOU 3 DAYS TO GET THERE! SO HERE IS SOMETHING MUCH MORE CONVENIENT!

[COMMENT: As an aside, this incident reveals the main motivation why people in positions of authority

will not uncommonly introduce heresies. That main motivation is a desire to entrench their own positions! Introducing heresies is intended to pressure people to commit to staying with them, to eliminate the likelihood of being "deposed". People who in our age introduce heresies have the same motivation that Jeroboam had. If you can understand Jeroboam's underlying motivation, then you should be able to understand why many of the new CoG groups simply have to introduce their own "pet teachings". They are doing the same thing that Jeroboam did, and their motivation is the same.]

Now in our age: yes, sometimes a feast site may indeed be "too far" because God's people are scattered far and wide. But there are also any number of occasions when this is nothing more than an excuse, to justify going somewhere else. **We just don't want to go to a certain feast site.**

Now the choices that God's people have are as follows:

Either they can go to a place where GOD has placed His name, or if that is indeed too far for them then they can stay at home. Those are the two possibilities. But this type of situation should never be construed or exploited to justify people **GOING AWAY FROM HOME SOMEWHERE** for the duration of the Feast, perhaps to a nearby resort or hotel, as their own particular "feast site". God does not give people the right to set up their own micro-Feast sites. The first key for any feast observance is always to go to a place where **GOD** has placed His name.

So the only two options are: **either** you stay at home because your circumstances don't permit you to travel to a location where God has placed His name; **or** you go to a place where God has placed His name. But you don't have the right to turn the Feast into a vacation at a venue of your own choosing. The Feast is not a vacation; it is a responsibility before God.

We need to clearly understand that God's people do not really have the option of establishing their own places for keeping God's Feasts. That is confusion! That is nothing more than every man doing that which is right in his own eyes (see Judges 21:25).

There is one other major issue that affects "the places where God chooses to place His name". And that is that we observe God's Feasts at the right times that God has appointed.

WHAT IF A FEAST SITE IS ORGANIZED FOR THE WRONG DAYS?

In Leviticus 23 God clearly spells out the correct dates for all of His annual observances. Historically the Church assumed that those dates are supposed to be based on the present Jewish calendar. This was assumed without ever being proved. But over the past 10-15 years it has become abundantly clear to many people in the churches of God that the present Jewish calendar is nothing more than a Jewish human tradition which in fact violates a number of biblical principles, and that it (the Jewish calendar) is in fact not even accurate as far as real new moon conjunctions are concerned, and it should thus be rightfully classified as one of the "Jewish fables" (see Titus 1:14).

Now the larger organizations amongst the churches of God have all dug in their heels on this issue. They defend the use of the Jewish calendar for the purpose of establishing the dates for the annual Feasts tooth and nail, no matter what evidence is presented against the Jewish calendar. Most of them have spent a considerable amount of futile effort over the past decade or so trying their utmost to nullify all the irrefutable evidence against the Jewish calendar. They have locked down in defense mode, indicating that **they don't even care what evidence may be presented against the Jewish calendar**. In the words of Jesus Christ: "full well they reject the commandment of God, that they may keep **their** own tradition" (Mark 7:9, adapted).

This year of 2013 the Jewish calendar started the year on **March 12**, which was 8-9 days **before the end of winter!** Now it is quite clear from the Bible that **the year can only start in the spring!** But the tradition of the Jewish calendar doesn't care about little things like that, and so the Jewish calendar started the year one new moon too early! But before God it is simply not right to start the new year in the winter!

So this year all the larger Church of God organizations will observe their "Feast of Tabernacles" at a time **one month early**, at a time that God in fact HATES! **Isaiah 1:14** is a pretty plain statement about God hating "their appointed feasts". Now consider that in the previous verse (Isaiah 1:13) God refers to "**the solemn meetings**" (i.e. the church services at their feast sites) which are established based on the Jewish calendar as "**iniquity**"! God is here calling certain church services whose timing is determined by the Jewish calendar "iniquity"! That's pretty strong language. There is really no way of getting around the fact that Isaiah 1:13-14 is talking about the Feast of Tabernacles being observed according to the dates of the present Jewish calendar.

Now when God refers to something as "iniquity", then I take that as a very clear indication that God doesn't want us to be involved with the things God calls "iniquity". Is that how you see it?

So we now have two issues about feast sites:

1) **If God has not placed His name somewhere**, then such a location cannot possibly be an acceptable feast site before God. If God has not placed His name there, then whatever happens there cannot possibly be a Feast of Tabernacles in the sight of God.

2) **If people select dates that God has not selected** for the observance of God's Feasts, then once again such observances cannot possibly be Feast of Tabernacles observances in the eyes of God. The only thing such observances can be is "**YOUR** appointed feasts" (Isaiah 1:14). God's use of the word "iniquity" for such observances further confirms this. What this means is that those organizations amongst the churches of God that would normally have the authority to select feast sites **have in fact misused that authority** by selecting the wrong month for the Feast observance. In so doing they place the people of God who attend with them into the very uncomfortable position of having Isaiah 1:14 apply to them.

IN CONCLUSION

God established the annual Feasts and Holy Days. In so doing God didn't actually spell out all the details regarding how we are to observe the three annual Feasts. Rather, God tells us the general principles that we are to **rejoice**, and that we are to **learn to fear God**.

But God did spell out two specific points:

1) We are to observe the Feast **in the place that God selects** to place His name there for the duration of the Feast.

2) We are to keep the Feast **at very specific dates**. Those dates, already given in the days of Moses, are based on a calendar where every year starts with the first new moon in the spring of the Northern Hemisphere, **a calendar that requires no calculations**, just the methodical record-keeping of every new moon conjunction. By contrast, the calculations for the present Jewish calendar were only put together by the Pharisee Hillel II over 1,700 years after the time of Moses.

So if you are someone who is planning to establish a feast site: make sure that you really do have that authority from God to select a place where God will then place His name. Don't take this lightly, as if somehow every true Christian has the right to establish a feast site, because that is not the case.

And if you are someone who is deciding where you will keep God's Feast of Tabernacles: do your best to ascertain that God has approved that particular location for placing His name there. And also make sure that God approves of the dates that will be observed at the site you have selected.

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