

August 22, 2020

Hello Brethren,

When the nights begin to cool off, it always makes me think of the Feast and begin to yearn for that special time even more! But the Fall Holy Days, especially the Feast of Tabernacles, are going to be different this year. Not by any choice we've made, but rather because circumstances around the world have dramatically changed due to a Chinese virus and the fear of infection. Virtually every Feast site in every country around the world has been and will be impacted. The Feast will be different this year.

Unless things change a great deal over the next month, most of our Latin American brethren will be unable to attend an in-person Feast at all! Currently I don't believe any of our brethren in central or south America will be able to hold the Feast together. It will all have to be done via webcasting and perhaps messages recorded on DVD or flash drive. Let's be sure to pray for the encouragement of our brethren there!

Because of severe travel restrictions, US member is able to travel out of the country for the Feast this year. Many members have had to scrap their plans for international travel, and work on getting refunds of airfare and hotel reservations. It also means that all the ministers who were slated to travel and speak around the world are not able to do so. So the schedules in all those areas are more difficult, and in almost every case we are having to fill the voids with pre-recorded sermons.

Thankfully, five of the Headquarters ministers are recording sermons that will be available to be downloaded before the Feast. Also Cody Kitts and I are recording two sermons apiece, some for Ghana but all of them for Nigeria. . It isn't the same as actually being there, but it is the best we can do under these circumstances.

While the borders in both Ghana and Nigeria remain closed, restrictions are beginning to lift in Ghana. The government has lifted the restriction on the number of people gathering for worship services (previously capped at 100), and they have also eased restrictions on the length of time a worship service may take (not 2 hours as opposed to 1). So it is making our planning for the Feast there a bit easier.

Here in the US we are facing varying restrictions depending on where a Feast site is located. Different states and different towns will have differing requirements. Social distancing will be required at all sites as well as use of face masks or shields. In Branson this means we are having to use three different meeting facilities to accommodate everyone with the seating distances required. Services will be webcast from the main hall to each of the other two. This arrangement allows everyone to attend every day – something that will not be possible at some of our other US Feast sites.

But it does complicate some things considerably. We want to group families and extended families together, making sure that no matter which hall they are in for that day, they can still be together. It also makes services like ushering more challenging, because we have to have three

complete crews. We also have to have Mother's Rooms available for each group. And of course for the tech crew it means more manpower, more connections, and more possibility for problems.

But realize this will create opportunities for frustration as well. As much as we try, we already know we are not going to be able to make it so all friends will be in the same meeting halls. If there are technical issues, that can be frustrating. I've found if I'm aware of potential frustrations ahead of time, I can be better prepared to respond appropriately if they do occur.

While seating, masks, limited group activities or perhaps rotating days with meeting in-person or webcast from the hotel, I think there is something important for us to always keep in mind: WE ARE GOING TO OBEY GOD AND KEEP THE FEAST! Leviticus 23 makes it very clear that the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths as in the KJV and NKJV) is commanded by God. If at all possibly, we need to be there to worship our Creator and learn from the messages He has inspired.

Deuteronomy 14:23-25 reminds us that we should faithfully set aside our 2nd or Festival tithe for keeping the Feast. And we are also reminded that it is kept "in the place where He chooses to make His name abide". God's name and His presence will be at each of the Feast sites – something we should not forget!

I never fully realized how finding the place where God chose to place His name worked until I started organizing the Feasts in parts of Africa. Sometimes a door slams shut tightly, and it becomes clear God did not place His name there. At other times a door opens widely and freely, and we can see God is providing the way. Our job is to pray and look diligently for those open doors!

The Feast will be different this year, but I don't want us to become so distracted by the physical changes and requirements that we miss out on the deep, powerful and eternal spiritual lessons God wants us to learn this year. Being together for the Feast is more than a mask, it is more than being divided and having to rotate through meeting halls, it is more than lack of activities. Keeping the Feast is first and foremost about worshipping our Creator, and looking forward with eager anticipation to the wonderful future our God has promised is coming!

The Feast is all about hope for the future – and that will NOT be different this year!

Tomorrow my family and I will be in Van Buren and then travel up to Bentonville for afternoon services. I hope you all have a wonderful Sabbath!

Best regards,

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