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Appendix 8c: The Biblical Festivals — Why None of Them Can Be Kept Today

This page is part of a series exploring the laws of God that could be obeyed only when the Temple was present in Jerusalem.

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The Holy Festivals — What the Law Actually Commanded

The annual festivals were not merely celebrations or cultural gatherings. They were holy convocations built around **offerings**, **sacrifices**, **firstfruits**, **tithes**, and **purification requirements** that God tied directly to the Temple He chose (Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 12:11; 16:2, 16:5-6). Every major feast — Passover, Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles — required the worshipper to appear before the Lord **in the place He chose**, not in any location the people preferred (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

- Passover required a lamb offered at the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 16:5-6).
- The Festival of Unleavened Bread required daily offerings made by fire (Numbers 28:17-19).
- The Festival of Weeks required offerings of firstfruits (Deuteronomy 26:1-2, 26:9-10).
- The Festival of Trumpets required sacrifices “made by fire” (Numbers 29:1-6).
- The Day of Atonement required priestly rituals in the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:2-34).
- The Festival of Tabernacles required daily sacrifices (Numbers 29:12-38).
- The Eighth Day Assembly required additional offerings as part of the same festival cycle (Numbers 29:35-39).

God described these festivals with great precision and repeatedly stressed that they were **His appointed times**, to be observed exactly as He commanded (Leviticus 23:1-2, 23:37-38). No part of these observances was left to personal interpretation, local custom, or symbolic adaptation. The place, the sacrifices, the priests, and the offerings were all part of the command.

How Israel Obeyed These Commandments in the Past

When the Temple stood, Israel obeyed the festivals exactly as God instructed. The people traveled to Jerusalem for the appointed times (Deuteronomy 16:16-17; Luke 2:41-42). They brought their sacrifices to the priests, who offered them upon the altar. They rejoiced before the Lord in the place He sanctified (Deuteronomy 16:11; Nehemiah 8:14-18). Even Passover itself — the oldest of all national festivals — could not be observed in homes after God established a central sanctuary. It could be kept **only** in the place where the Lord set His Name (Deuteronomy 16:5-6).

Scripture also shows what happened when Israel attempted to keep the festivals improperly. When Jeroboam created alternative festival days and places, God condemned his entire system as sin (1 Kings 12:31-33). When the people neglected the Temple or allowed impurity, the festivals themselves became unacceptable (2 Chronicles 30:18-20; Isaiah 1:11-15). The pattern is consistent: **obedience required the Temple**, and without the Temple, there was no obedience.

Why These Festival Commandments Cannot Be Obeyed Today

After the destruction of the Temple, the commanded structure for the festivals ceased to exist. Not the festivals themselves — the Law does not change — but the **required elements**:

- No Temple
- No altar
- No Levitical priesthood
- No sacrificial system
- No commanded place for offering firstfruits
- No ability to present the Passover lamb
- No Holy of Holies for the Day of Atonement

- No daily sacrifices during Tabernacles

Because God required these elements for festival obedience, and because they cannot be replaced, adapted, or symbolized, **true obedience is now impossible**. As Moses warned, Israel was not permitted to offer Passover “in any town the Lord your God gives you,” but only “in the place the Lord will choose” (Deuteronomy 16:5-6). That place no longer stands.

The Law still exists. The festivals still exist. But the **means of obedience** are gone — removed by God Himself (Lamentations 2:6-7).

The Error of Symbolic or Invented Festival Observance

Many today attempt to “honor the festivals” through symbolic reenactments, congregation-based gatherings, or simplified versions of biblical commands:

- Holding Passover seders without a lamb
- Hosting “Feasts of Tabernacles” with no sacrifices
- Celebrating “Shavuot” without firstfruits taken to a priest
- Creating “New Moon services” never commanded in the Torah
- Inventing “practice festivals” or “prophetic festivals” as substitutes

None of these practices appear anywhere in Scripture.
None were practiced by Moses, David, Ezra, Jesus, or the apostles.
None match the commandments God gave.

God does not accept symbolic offerings (Leviticus 10:1-3).
God does not accept worship performed “anywhere” (Deuteronomy 12:13-14).
God does not accept rituals created by human imagination (Deuteronomy 4:2).

A festival without sacrifices is not the biblical festival.
A Passover without a lamb offered in the Temple is not Passover.
A “Day of Atonement” without priestly service is not obedience.

To imitate these laws without the Temple is not faithfulness — it is presumption.

The Festivals Await the Temple Only God Can Restore

The Torah calls these festivals **“lasting ordinances throughout your generations”** (Leviticus 23:14, 23:21, 23:31, 23:41). Nothing in Scripture — Law, Prophets, or Gospels — ever cancels that description. Jesus Himself affirmed that not even the smallest letter of the Law would fall until heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:17-18). Heaven and earth remain; therefore the festivals remain.

But they cannot be obeyed today because God has removed:

- the place
- the altar
- the priesthood
- the sacrificial system that defined the festivals

Therefore, until God restores what He removed, we honor these commandments by acknowledging their perfection — not by inventing symbolic replacements. Faithfulness means respecting God’s design, not modifying it.