



November 1, 2024

Should New Covenant believers celebrate Purim and Hanukkah?

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Most of us have returned from observing the Lord's Feast of Tabernacles and are now back into our daily routine. Multiple reports from around the world convey that this Feast was blessed!

As promised, I want to examine in the next several weeks some of the topics related to in depth discussions that took place during the Feast.

Should New Covenant believers celebrate Purim and Hanukkah and observe other Jewish traditions and rituals?

We'll in a few weeks be celebrating Thanksgiving here in the United States. Someone asked "why we celebrate Thanksgiving but not the other holidays that our society observes and involves themselves with?"

It's a fair question, and deserves an answer.

Since the Jews *added* the feasts of Purim (the origins of which are described in the book of Esther) and Hanukkah, otherwise known as the Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication (mentioned in John 10:22-23), some believe we are free to add any religious holidays and celebrations of our own choosing. Is this true?

Important differences in the background and intent of these observances are obvious when we compare them to Christmas, Easter and Halloween. The Jews instituted Purim to commemorate their deliverance during the time of Esther, and Hanukkah to celebrate the rededication of the Jerusalem temple after its defilement by the Syrian invader Antiochus Epiphanes.

Neither celebration originated in paganism, although over the centuries these celebrations have taken on some practices, like the Hanukkah bush, that are rooted in paganism. In their original form, Hanukkah and Purim, like the American holiday of Thanksgiving, are celebrations of thanks and honor to God for His intervention and blessings. The way some Americans celebrate Thanksgiving is far removed from the original intent, but that does not alter the real meaning and significance of the day.

An important distinction between acceptable holidays and those rooted in paganism (like Christmas and Easter) is that they do not alter, replace or distort the meaning of a festival of God or other biblical truths. What does God think about people using customs and practices rooted in false religion to worship Him and His Son. We find His views clearly expressed in both the Old and New Testament.

God specifically commands His people not to do what early church leaders did when they incorporated idolatrous practices and relabeled them "Christian".

Before they entered the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites a stern warning: *"Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them [the inhabitants of the land]...and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods ... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it"* (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

Because the Jews instituted the celebrations of Purim and the Feast of Dedication, and these events celebrated special deliverance by the LORD, should New Covenant believers celebrate these days and observe other Jewish traditions and rituals?

Does one have to first become a member of the Jewish community in order to then become a member of the Christian community of believers?

Do we need to incorporate the wearing of special garments with fringes or other special clothing in order to please God and live according to His instructions?

For proper context, let's begin by looking at the principles based on the decisions reached in Acts 15.

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."" (Acts 15:1) Paul and Barnabas strongly disputed this. (v.2) A meeting was held with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas related how God had granted conversion to the uncircumcised Gentiles. In response to this, *"some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses."* (v.5) more discussion ensued including the testimony of Peter about how God granted the Holy Spirit to the uncircumcised Gentiles as he had to the apostles. James led the discussion that led to the conclusion that the Gentiles did not have to be physically circumcised to be part of the body of believers.

However, the instructions in Exodus 12:48 required a non-Israelite and the males of his household to be circumcised if they wished to keep the Passover. The instructions in Leviticus 12:2-3 required and Israelite woman to have a male child circumcised on the eighth day.

How do we explain the decision reached by the apostles regarding circumcision? We will continue this discussion next time...as we delve into these questions more

deeply.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Scott Hoefker', with a stylized, scribbled end.

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