

Coach House Church BEACONS

HOLIDAY

1 2 T H S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 0

We have recently had the pleasure of being able to take a holiday. Being away from home gives you the opportunity to relax and unwind. Scientists say that having a holiday makes people more productive the rest of the year round. Sadly in today's hedonistic and self centred culture the true meaning of holidays has been lost. We see holidays as one of our rights, enshrined in law, as a time when we can do our own thing and not to be tied down by the demands of our employer. I think we can all agree that holidays are important to us, but why is this, and where did holidays originally come from?

Well the clue is in the name. Over time words evolve and the word holiday comes from the combination of two words, Holy and Day, into one word. OK so that's useful to know, and I guess it gives us a big clue as to the meaning. But where did holidays originally come from?

Throughout most of our recent history the only days on which people didn't work were those days set aside for religious reasons, hence the name. These included Easter, the start of Lent, and harvest festivals. On these days people would gather at church in the morning to listen to the bible stories that underpinned these festivals. This was important at the time as most people couldn't read and needed this type of repetitive story telling to be able to understand what the bible was saying. The afternoon would be spent relaxing, sharing food with friends and family and enjoying entertainments or games. One thing that wasn't included was staying away from home, that came much more recently.

But this still doesn't tell us where holidays came from. So, let's get straight to the point, holidays, like all good ideas, come from God himself. After all God designed and built us so He knows only too well how we work and what our true needs are.

If you look up "holiday" in a bible concordance it will point you towards several sections of the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. These basically all cover the same subject, of days that were to be kept Holy, but in slightly different ways.

Lets look at one of these, Numbers, and read from chapter 23. "These are the Lords appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times, the Lords passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lords festival of unleavened bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do not do any of your ordinary work. For seven days present a food offering to the Lord. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do not do any of your ordinary work."

There were seven key festivals ordained by God to be celebrated each year. These, were in addition to the Sabbath days. Two of these, unleavened bread, which we have just read about, and tabernacles, or booths, were to last for seven days. Each one included the instruction "do not do any of your ordinary work." So we have seven days throughout which you do no ordinary work, which sounds just like going on holiday. For most of the people this didn't include going to the seaside but there was an expectation that some people would go to Jerusalem for some of the holidays. We know that Jesus' parents went up to Jerusalem for the passover every year because the gospel writer Luke tells us so. Another gospel writer, John, recorded three instances of Jesus going up to Jerusalem for the passover, noting in chapter 11 that "many went up from the country to Jerusalem". So we can see that it was right and proper for the people to stop work and go up to Jerusalem. Now it was God who instigated these holy days but what was it that God expected of us on these holy days? Well we have already noted three things in the passage that we read; the first was to spend time with God, the second to sacrifice to God, and the third was to do no ordinary work. Another interesting requirement was unique to the festival of Tabernacles. The people were to cut down branches from leafy trees and make temporary shelters out of them to remind them of the time when the Israelites lived in tents. This sounds a bit like a camping holiday but it also reminds me of holidays with our church family in the lakes when we have been up to Whinlatter forest and built a den out of branches. You see, in all that we do today there is nothing new. God always sets the pattern.

Another important reason to take a holiday is so that we can rest. But what does it mean to take rest? Is it just about sleeping in late and watching telly all day, or is it something more than that?

The pattern of Holy Days was given to Moses, by God, even before they entered the promised land, with the intention that they would serve as a reminder of how God had taken them out of Egypt and given them rest in the promised land. This rest which he was referring to was to be in his presence. The writer to the Hebrews points out that many of those that left Egypt with Moses failed to enter this rest. Even Moses himself did not enter the promised land, that task was left to Joshua. The writer adds this "If Joshua had given them rest God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest"

Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land because they saw that it was impossible for them to do so in their own strength, but they had faith to believe that it was possible in God's strength. Likewise we cannot enter eternal life in our own strength, we can only do so by believing that it is possible in God's strength.

We no longer celebrate the festivals ordained in the Old Testament, although we do of course have a Sabbath day, but we do take ever increasing numbers of holidays.

Let us remember that these are still given to us by God, as, after all, all good things come from God. We should, therefore, remember that, in addition to the sun and the sand and the ice-cream, we should spend time with God whilst we are away. The basic instructions for Holy Days still apply and just because we are on holiday doesn't mean that we should stop making "every effort to enter that rest" In fact by giving time over to God you will not only feel so much more physically rested but you will be closer to that eternal rest which He has promised us.

I pray that you will enjoy your holidays and that God will bless you through them.



STEVE ADSHEAD



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn