



God's Holy Day Plan

*The Promise of Hope
for All Mankind*

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Introduction

Every nation observes patriotic holidays. These special days are reminders of important events in a country's history. They provide continuity between a nation's past and the present.

Usually citizens can understand and explain at least some of the significance of these celebrations. Yet paradoxically, those same citizens seldom understand much about the days on which they worship and honor God. The nonbiblical roots of these religious practices are quietly ignored in their celebration.

As a result, people usually assume that popular observances such as Easter and Christmas serve as true representations of the themes of the Bible. Yet God's Word nowhere commands their observance, nor does the Bible record their observance by the early New Testament Church. However, God *does* command other, rarely noticed, festivals.

Some people realize that the Bible mentions specific days for religious celebration. But only a few can name any of them or explain their significance.

Those aware of these festivals generally believe that they were meant only for ancient Israel and that the need for them ceased following Jesus Christ's crucifixion. They assume these days simply pointed toward Christ, concluding that, since He lived on earth 2,000 years ago, their importance has long since passed. Most people consider these biblical festivals as nothing more than relics of history with no relevance to the modern world.

Believe it or not, the Bible itself contradicts these commonly held views. An objective look at the biblical record reveals that both Christmas and Easter—the two main observances on the traditional Christian calendar—are nowhere to be found (except in Acts 12:4 where the King James Version mistranslates the Greek word meaning *Passover* as *Easter*). Surprising to many, the New Testament shows Jesus Christ observing God's Holy Days, with His disciples following His example many decades after His death, burial and resurrection.

The teachings of the apostles in the years of the first century after the resurrection also differ from most people's assumptions. The apostles' instructions reveal a God who intended that *all* Christians observe the biblical Holy Days—and for a remarkable reason!

What these Holy Days reveal

Why does God want us to observe His Holy Days? Because He wants us to know about our future, He reveals to us *His great purpose for humanity*.

He explains why He put us on earth, reveals our ultimate destiny and tells

us how we can attain it! The observance of God's festivals provides the key to understanding God's great plan for the future of mankind!

The biblical festivals, and the Holy Days within them, fall during three seasons of the year—the early spring harvest, late spring harvest and early autumn harvest in the land of biblical Israel. The themes these days portray reflect God's *spiritual harvest* of mankind to eternal life spoken of by Jesus Christ (John 4:35-38).

These observances serve as timeless reminders of how God's plan gives *eternal life* to mortal man. Our Creator will bring His plan to fruition in spite of man's choices and actions, which have consistently led to separation from God, suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Isaiah 59:1-8; Jeremiah 10:23). These festivals reveal the unfolding of God's plan for humanity and how He will establish His Kingdom on earth. This is the *good news*, or *gospel*, Jesus Christ preached (Mark 1:14-15). (For more information, request or download our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

God's design to grant humanity eternal life has existed since “the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). His Holy Days teach humanity about that remarkable plan. The apostle Paul beautifully summed up its essence in his letter to the Ephesians: “He has made known to us his secret purpose, in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and earth, might be brought into unity in Christ. In Christ indeed we have been given our share in this heritage, as was decreed in his design whose purpose is everywhere at work” (Ephesians 1:9-11, Revised English Bible).

The Holy Days help us comprehend God's *master plan*—the way He intends us to truly become His people. Notice this description of our destiny: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). Step by step, the Holy Days show us how this beautiful picture will become a reality.

In Leviticus 23 we find a listing of God's festivals. After discussing the weekly Sabbath, the text describes special observances with unusual names, such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles—the word “Feast” here translated from the Hebrew *chag* or *hag*, specifying a festival or celebration. In giving these occasions, God instructed Moses to make it clear that “These are *the feasts of the LORD*” (verses 4, 37, emphasis added throughout). The word translated “feasts” in this case is the Hebrew *mo'edim*, meaning “appointed times”—appointments with God that He wants us to keep.

The Bible teaches that eventually God will teach *everyone* to observe these days (Zechariah 14:16). In the pages of this booklet you will learn the fascinating purpose of each of God's Holy Days, along with their promise of hope for mankind!

Are God's Holy Days Relevant Today?

When God begins something in this present age of mankind, He nearly always starts small. In Matthew 13:33 Jesus Christ compared God's Kingdom to both a *mustard seed* and *leaven*. Both analogies start with something small that expands into something much larger. Similarly, in Old Testament times God called only a relatively few people who were willing to follow His ways.

The biblical record shows that, early in the account spoken of in the Bible, only a small number of people decided to obey God. A faithful few such as Abel, Enoch and Noah responded to the revelation of God's plan of salvation (Matthew 23:35). After the great Flood of Noah's time, God found that He could work with Abraham and his wife Sarah. Of God's obedient people of those times, Hebrews 11:13 says they “all died in faith” with the sure knowledge that they would gain eternal life (verse 40).

We should note that the plan for providing eternal life was already at work in the lives of these early people of God. The plan did not start with a covenant God made with ancient Israel; nor did it start with Jesus' earthly ministry.

God loved the world so much “that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God's love in giving His Son continued His plan of salvation from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 13:8). The blueprint of the Holy Days would reveal in due time the plan God had designed from the very beginning. These festival observances were not just a cosmic afterthought.

With Abraham's family we see God beginning to reveal the good news about His plan of salvation (Galatians 3:8). Genesis 26:3-4 identifies specific blessings God promised to Abraham and Abraham's descendants. The Creator pledged to bestow them “because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (verse 5). Perhaps this is why the Bible calls Abraham “the friend of God” and “the father of all those who believe” (James 2:23; Romans 4:11; Genesis 18:17-19).

A nation singled out

Abraham's descendants grew into a mighty nation (Genesis 18:18). They were named after Jacob, the grandson of Abraham whose name was

changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). After settling in Egypt they eventually became slaves (Exodus 1). The story of God's deliverance of ancient Israel from their bondage and His deliverance of people today is part of the intricately woven fabric of His festivals.

In due time the Creator set in motion a series of events involving festival observances that, illustrating His great plan, led to the Israelites being freed from slavery in Egypt. When Moses and his brother Aaron appeared before Pharaoh, they told the Egyptian ruler that the God of Israel commanded, "Let My people go, *that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness*" (Exodus 5:1).

Moses and Aaron had earlier called for the elders of Israel to assemble and had explained to them God's plan to deliver them (Exodus 3:16-18). Then the two performed a series of God-directed miracles in the sight of the people (Exodus 4:29-30). As a result, the Israelites (although they later faltered) believed God would deliver them and fulfill His covenant with Abraham, as He had promised (Exodus 4:31; 6:4-8).

What followed was the first Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread for the Israelites who had been enslaved. Much later the New Testament Church kept these same days as a reminder of Christians' deliverance through Jesus Christ. For instance, Paul told members of the Church at Corinth—both Jews and gentiles—that they should be "unleavened," or without sin, because "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). In the next verse Paul said, "*Therefore let us keep the feast,*" referring to the same festival God had instituted in ancient Israel many centuries before.

The festivals in the New Testament

From His earliest childhood years, Jesus observed the feast days with His parents. "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover," Luke 2:41 tells us. The following verses describe Jesus, at age 12, engaging the theologians of His day in a spirited discussion during this festival season (verses 42-48). Clearly, He astonished these religious leaders with His understanding and insight. John writes of Jesus continuing to observe the annual feasts as an adult during His ministry (John 2:23; 4:45).

In one of the most instructive examples, Jesus risked His personal safety to attend the annual Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-2, 7-10, 14). We're told that "on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, [which] those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (verses 7:37-39).

Many churches believe that the apostle Paul fundamentally changed the way Christians are to worship. This notion assumes he taught gentiles that observance of the festivals and Holy Days was unnecessary. Although some of his writings were difficult to understand, even by his contemporaries (2 Peter 3:15-16), Paul's explicit statements and actions contradict any notion that he annulled or abolished observance of these Holy Days.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1-2, for example, Paul told his followers, "Imitate

God's Festivals in the New Testament

Biblical Observance	Commanded in the Old Testament	Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament
The Passover	Leviticus 23:5	Matthew 26:2, 17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 2:41-42; 22:1, 7-20; John 2:13, 23; 6:4; 13:1-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29
The Feast of Unleavened Bread	Leviticus 23:6-8	Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 2:41-42; 22:1, 7; Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8
The Feast of Pentecost	Leviticus 23:15-22	Acts 2:1-21; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8
The Feast of Trumpets*	Leviticus 23:23-25	Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:15
The Day of Atonement	Leviticus 23:26-32	Acts 27:9
The Feast of Tabernacles	Leviticus 23:33-43	John 7:1-2, 8, 10, 14
The Eighth Day (sometimes called the Last Great Day)	Leviticus 23:36, 39	John chapters 7-9

*Although the Feast of Trumpets is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, the theme of the day—the sounding of trumpets announcing Jesus Christ's return—is mentioned by several New Testament authors as noted in the references.

me, just as I also imitate Christ,” and, “Keep the traditions as I delivered them to you.” A few verses later he explained, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; *do this in remembrance of Me*’” (verses 23-24).

If Paul’s practice had not been to observe the feast days God had instituted, his comments to the Jews and gentiles in Corinth would have been meaningless. Clearly, evidence is lacking that Paul ever discouraged anyone from keeping the annual festivals; such a notion would have been unthinkable for him (Acts 24:12-14; 25:7-8; 28:17).

On the contrary, the biblical record of Paul’s ministry repeatedly depicts the Holy Days as important observances and milestones in his life. For example, he told the Christians in Ephesus, “*I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem*” (Acts 18:21). In Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8 we find Paul arranging his travel schedule to accommodate the Feast of Pentecost. In Acts 27:9 Luke, Paul’s companion in his travels, referred to a particular time of year as being after “the Fast,” a reference to the Day of Atonement (on which, as we will discuss later, one was to fast).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, in a reference to Acts 20:6, notes that Paul, unable to arrive at Jerusalem for the Passover, “remained at Philippi to celebrate it and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread.” (Richard Longenecker, 1981, Vol. 9, p. 507). Regarding Acts 20:16, the same commentary notes that Paul “wanted, if at all possible, to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost on the fiftieth day after Passover” (p. 510).

Paul’s ministry included observing the Holy Days with the Church. In defending the gospel he preached, Paul said he brought the same message the other apostles taught: “Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11).

Paul and all the apostles taught a consistent message of the Christian’s obligation to *follow the example of Jesus Christ in all matters*. The apostle John, who wrote near the close of the first century, summed up this message: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk *just as He walked*” (1 John 2:6).

Jewish believers continued to uphold the Holy Days, as did gentile Christians (see “Colossians 2:16 Shows Gentile Christians Observed the Biblical Holy Days” on page 53). From all these references we can conclude only that the practice of the early Church was to continue the observance of the festivals God gave, the first of which is the Passover.

The Passover: Why Did Jesus Christ Have to Die?

Most of us have heard that Jesus Christ died for our sins, but what does that really mean? Why was His death necessary? What part does Christ’s sacrifice play in God’s plan for mankind? How is Jesus Christ’s death reflected in God’s holy festivals? This chapter on the New Testament Passover will address these important questions.

Christ’s sacrifice is the pivotal event in God’s plan to save humanity.



Jesus foretold the fact that He would be “lifted up” in crucifixion so that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-16).

We see here that Jesus’

Jesus’ sacrifice, the central message of the Passover, was a supreme act of love for humanity. This important event laid the foundation for the remaining annual Holy Days and festivals.

sacrifice, the central message of the Passover, was a supreme act of love for humanity. This important event laid the foundation for the remaining annual festivals. It is the most momentous step in God’s plan.

Just before the Passover feast that would see His execution, Jesus said that “for this purpose I came to this hour . . . And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:27, 32).

The day on which this profound event, the crucifixion, transpired was the 14th day of the first month of God’s calendar, the very same day on which

the Passover lambs were to be slain (Leviticus 23:5). Paul would later tell the congregation at Corinth that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Now let’s look back through the Bible for the instructions and meaning God gave concerning this day. Doing so will help us understand why God expects us to continue observing the Passover.

God's Passover instruction

As previously mentioned, God through Moses told Pharaoh, “Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1).



The unblemished male animal represented Jesus Christ as the perfect, sinless sacrifice for our sins.

Through a series of plagues, God displayed His great power and delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. After nine plagues He gave Israel specific instructions about the next and final terrifying calamity and the steps each Israelite family should take to escape it.

God said that on the 10th day of the first month (in the spring in the Middle East) each Israelite was to select a lamb or goat large enough to feed each household (Exodus 12:3). The animal chosen was to be a yearling male without any sort of defect. On the 14th day of that month at evening, the Israelites were to kill the animals and place some of their blood on the doorposts of their homes. The animals were then to be roasted and eaten along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

The Creator further instructed the Israelites that on this evening He would kill all the firstborn of Egypt to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. The firstborn of each Israelite family would be protected if the sign of the blood were on the entrance of their homes. God would “pass over” their homes to spare them—thus the meaning of the name of this observance (verse 13).

God said this day would be to the Israelites a memorial, “and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance” (verse 14). Bible writers later explained that the annual Passover observance symbolized Christ. Paul, as

we just saw, referred to Christ as “our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7), and the apostle John recorded that John the Baptist recognized Christ as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The unblemished male animal represented Jesus Christ as the perfect, sinless sacrifice who died in our place, His death paying the penalty for our sins and reconciling us to God. Hebrews 9:11-12 tells us that “Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come . . . not with the blood of goats and calves, but *with His own blood* He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Jesus Christ bought us with His blood, pouring out His life as our Passover lamb so our sins could be forgiven.

Why did Jesus Christ have to die? Our Savior had to die because that was the only way God could mercifully forgive our sins while maintaining the integrity of His law and perfect justice. The Bible tells us that sin is the violation of God’s law of love (1 John 3:4). We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We have each earned the death penalty for our disobedience (Romans 5:12; 6:23).

Paul illustrated the profound love of Jesus Christ in giving up His life on our behalf (Romans 5:6-8). All would be doomed eternally had not the penalty for our sins been paid somehow. Christ, who lived a perfect life as the unblemished Lamb of God, substituted His death for ours. In fact, His death was the only possible substitution for ours. His sacrifice became the payment for our sins. He died in our place so we could share life with Him forever. We can no longer live according to our own desires. We become God’s redeemed, or bought and paid-for, possession (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Both Jesus and Paul made it clear that the Passover is to continue as a Christian observance. Jesus Himself specified elements of the Passover meal that would still be ceremonially partaken of to teach Christians important truths about Himself and God’s continuing plan of salvation.

The Passover sacrifice in the Old Testament *foreshadowed* Christ’s crucifixion. The New Testament Passover *memorializes* that crucifixion. By observing the Passover, we “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Now let’s examine Christ’s specific instructions concerning the Passover ceremony and the lessons we should learn from it.

A lesson in humility and service

The apostle John described the events of Jesus Christ’s last evening with His disciples: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” During the meal Jesus “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with

the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:1-5).

Washing the feet of another was an act of lowly servitude (1 Samuel 25:41). Jesus stooped down to wash the disciples’ feet Himself to teach an important spiritual lesson. The account continues: “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, *you also ought to wash one another’s feet*’” (verses 12-14).

Jesus left His disciples with a lasting reminder of the importance of humble service to others. This reinforced an earlier lesson He had given them recorded in Matthew 20:25-28, where He admonished His disciples about the wrong and right kind of leadership: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, *let him be your servant*. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, *but to serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The simple act of washing the feet of others teaches us a vital lesson intimately associated with the Passover. He concluded: “*I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you*” (John 13:15). How many Christians today follow Christ’s example and obey His simple instruction to wash each other’s feet, and exemplify that attitude in their lives? As the redeemed possession of God through Christ’s sacrifice, our lives should be devoted to the service of God and our fellow man.

The bread: symbol of Christ’s body

Later, while the disciples were eating, Jesus explained that one of them would soon betray Him (Matthew 26:21-25). But notice verse 26: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’” So the unleavened bread eaten in the Old Testament Passover was to take on new significance for the disciples.

Christ’s body was to become a sacrificial offering for sin, for indeed “we have been sanctified *through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ* once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man . . . offered one sacrifice for sins forever . . . For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:10-14). By accepting Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in place of our own death upon our repentance and faith, God forgives us and “sanctifies” us—sets us apart—for the holy purpose of obedience to Him.

Our decision to eat the Passover bread means we understand that Jesus

Christ has “put away sin *by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Hebrews 9:26). He willingly consented to suffer an excruciating death for us. Christ bore in His body mental and physical suffering brought on by sin.

Jesus’ sacrifice is also intricately associated with our healing. Peter wrote of Christ’s suffering that He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Isaiah prophesied of Jesus’ suffering on our behalf: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Matthew 8:16-17, describing incidents of healing in Jesus’ ministry, states that He helped “many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.’”

Jesus showed that He was the promised Messiah by miraculous healings. But besides demonstrating His compassion, such healings showed that Christ possessed the power to forgive sin (Matthew 9:2-6).

Sin brings suffering! The ultimate healing made possible by Christ’s complete sacrifice includes the *whole* person, alleviating and eliminating the mental, emotional and physical sufferings that result from our sins.

Through the forgiveness of our sins, Christ also made possible our receiving eternal life. “*I am the bread of life*,” He said. “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness [the nourishing substance God provided throughout Israel’s 40-year desert wandering], and are dead. This [Christ referring here to Himself] is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, *he will live forever*; and the bread that I shall give is *My flesh*, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:48-51).

A relationship leading to a new way of life

The Passover bread reminds us of the close relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:1-6 Paul shows that, once we are symbolically united with Christ in death through baptism, “we should no longer be slaves of sin” but “should walk in newness of life.” Eating the bread demonstrates our commitment *to allow Christ to live in us*.

The apostle Paul describes this uniting with Christ in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (KJV). Paul understood that pursuing his own ways was no longer his life’s focus. His relationship

with Jesus Christ became supremely important to him.

The apostle John tells us what Christ expects of us in our relationship with Him: “Now by this we know that we know Him, *if we keep His commandments* . . . He who says he abides in Him *ought himself also to walk just as He walked*” (1 John 2:3-6).

The Passover bread reinforces our understanding that Jesus Christ, the true “bread of life,” must *live within us*, enabling us to live an entirely new life. God forgives our sins to sanctify us—to continue to set us apart for a holy purpose, to redeem us (that is, purchase us for a price). We now *belong* to God so He can fulfill His purpose in us.

The meaning of the Passover wine

Why did Jesus command His disciples to drink wine as a symbol of His blood during the Passover service? What does this symbolize?

It had become tradition among the Jews to drink wine at meals on sacred occasions, including the Passover. But Jesus attached special meaning to the wine on this night: “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom’” (Matthew 26:27-29).

What are we to learn from this symbol? First, Christ knew that drinking a little wine as a symbol of His shed blood would impress deeply on our minds that His death was for the forgiveness of our sins. “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus “loved us and washed us from our sins *in His own blood*” (Revelation 1:5). God forgives our sins through Jesus’ shed blood (1 John 1:7).

Many people normally understand this tenet—that God forgives our sins through Jesus Christ’s blood—but not everyone realizes how it occurs. Paul explained that “according to the Law . . . all things are cleansed with blood, and *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin]*” (Hebrews 9:22, New American Standard Bible).

The Old Testament records God instructing the priesthood to perform certain duties that included a system of cleansing and purification using the blood of sacrificed animals, thus foreshadowing the shedding of Christ’s blood, the ultimate sacrifice for sin. He commanded the nation of Israel to follow this *temporary* system of the ritualistic cleansing of sin (Hebrews 9:9-10). Animal sacrifices served as a type of the one and only real and future sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who would pay the penalty for everyone’s sins once and for all.

The Bible teaches that one’s life is in his blood (Genesis 9:4). When a person loses sufficient blood, he or she dies. Therefore blood, when poured out,

makes the atonement for sin, which produces death (Leviticus 17:11). Jesus lost His blood when He was scourged, crucified and pierced (Luke 22:20; Isaiah 53:12). He poured out His blood, dying for the sins of humanity.



In partaking of the wine at the Passover service, we should carefully consider its meaning. That small portion of wine represents the very life blood that flowed from Jesus Christ’s dying body for the remission of our sins (Ephesians 1:7). With this forgiveness comes freedom from eternal death.

Not only does Jesus Christ’s blood completely cover our sins, but it makes possible the removal of our guilt. Hebrews 9:13-14 compares the physical sacrifice of an animal with the blood of Christ: “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for

Christ knew that drinking a little wine as a symbol of His shed blood would impress deeply on our minds that His death was for the forgiveness of our sins.

the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works* to serve the living God?”

The word *conscience* comes from the Latin word *conscire*, meaning “to be conscious of guilt.” Our conscience is our awareness of right and wrong.

Our partaking of wine in the New Testament Passover ceremony is an expression of faith that *God really has forgiven us*. We are free from sin and guilt (John 3:17-18), and our hearts are “made free from the sense of sin” (Hebrews 10:22, Bible in Basic English). We live in newness of life with a clear conscience (Romans 6:14).

Some people, however, feel guilty even after they have repented. Although our consciences should readily convict us when we sin again, we should *not* continue to condemn ourselves over sins God has already forgiven. Instead, we should be fully confident in our God-given freedom from guilt (1 John 1:9; 3:19-20).

Access to the Father

Christ’s shed blood also makes possible our access to the very throne of

God the Father. Under the Old Covenant only the high priest could enter the area of the tabernacle known as the Most Holy Place or Holiest of All (Hebrews 9:6-10). The “mercy seat” positioned there represented God’s throne. Leviticus 16 describes the ceremony that took place each year on another of God’s sacred occasions, the Day of Atonement. At that time the high priest took the blood of a goat, representing the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and sprinkled it on the mercy seat so the Israelites could be symbolically cleansed of all their sins (verses 15-16).

Because the blood of Jesus Christ removes sin, making us pure before God, we can enjoy direct access to the Father (Hebrews 9:24). Jesus, as our High Priest, entered into the Most Holy Place through His own blood (Hebrews 9:11-12). We can now approach God the Father without hesitation or fear of rejection, but with confidence and assurance (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Hebrews 4:16 speaks of this confidence we can have in approaching God: “Let us therefore *come boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to experience this intimate relationship with our Father.

Our covenant with God

The blood of Christ also signifies that He has entered into a covenant, or agreement. As we’ve seen, when Jesus presented the wine to His disciples during the observance of their final Passover together, He told them, “This is My blood of the new covenant” (Matthew 26:27-28).

Why is this wine called the “blood of the new covenant”? The writer of the book of Hebrews explains that, after God at Mount Sinai enjoined on ancient Israel what is now called the Old Covenant, and after the Israelites’ response of obedient commitment, the covenant was ratified by the ceremony of the sprinkling of blood. The Bible writers called this the “blood of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:18-20; 13:20; Exodus 24:3-8).

We must understand that repentance, baptism and the acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—along with belief in His promise to forgive our sin—constitutes a covenant with God. Through this covenant, which we gratefully accept and can completely rely on (Hebrews 6:17-20), God grants us eternal life. By accepting the sacrifice of Christ for the remission of sin, we enter into a covenant relationship with the God of the universe. The terms of this covenant are absolute, because it was sealed with the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:11-12, 15). We are reminded of this covenant every year when we partake of the Passover.

What are the terms of this covenant relationship? “‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more’” (Hebrews 10:16-17).

Ancient Israel did not have the heart to faithfully keep God’s commandments (Deuteronomy 5:29). Under the New Covenant, however, God writes His law *in our hearts and minds*. His laws are *not* those of physical purification contained in the system of sacrifices, washings and rituals in the tabernacle. Instead, they are the holy and righteous laws that define right behavior toward God and neighbor (Romans 7:12) and lead to eternal life (Matthew 19:17). Our drinking of the Passover wine is symbolic of our acceptance of this covenant relationship that is ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Annual observance in the early Church

The New Testament reveals Christians continuing to observe the annual festivals at the times commanded by God. As a youth, Jesus observed the Passover annually on the specified day (Luke 2:41), and He continued the practice with His disciples. The early Church continued to observe the other feast days at their specified times. For example, Acts records that Jesus’ followers met to observe the Feast of Pentecost: “Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1).

Scripture gives no hint of the early Church adding to or changing the dates God ordained for His festivals. Paul’s wording in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “*as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,*” simply means, “*every time you eat this bread and drink this cup*” (New Living Translation)—that being once per year at the Passover.

The Bible specifies the yearly observance of the Passover, and history records its annual celebration as the practice of the early Church. Passover, as a memorial of Jesus’ death, is to be observed annually rather than whenever or however often one chooses, just as all of the other annual festivals are to be kept once a year. Neither Jesus Christ nor His apostles indicated that we should change when or how often we observe any of God’s festivals.

Following their example, we should continue to observe the Passover at the beginning of the evening of the 14th day of the first month (Abib, or Nisan) of the Hebrew calendar. (Dates are listed on pages 28-29.)

During His last Passover with His disciples, Jesus explained that this celebration has significant implications for the future as well. In Matthew 26:29 He told them, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

Keeping the Passover each year reminds us that God is the forgiver of sin who grants us eternal life in His Kingdom through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Passover. This observance is a memorial of our Creator’s continuing role in humanity’s salvation.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread: The Lesson of Leaving Sin

Immediately after the Passover comes a festival that depicts the next step in the fulfillment of God's master plan. After God, through Christ's sacrifice, has forgiven us of our sins, how do we continue to avoid sin, since we must go on living in newness of life? How do we live as God's redeemed people? We find the answer in the remarkable symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

When God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, He told His people that for "seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (Exodus 12:15). Verse 39 further explains, "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves."

Leavening is an agent such as yeast that causes bread dough to rise. And the leavening process takes time. The Israelites had no time to spare when they left Egypt, so they baked and ate flat bread. What started out as a necessity continued for a week. God appropriately named this time the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6), or Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3).

When Jesus came to earth as a human being, He observed this seven-day festival—sometimes called the Feast of Passover by the Jews because the days of Unleavened bread followed immediately after Passover, so that the two adjoining festivals could seem to be one—and in fact Passover themes do carry over into the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus observed this festival as a child and later as an adult (Luke 2:41; Matthew 26:17). The early Church, imitating Christ in His religious practices, observed it as well.

Earliest instructions and Christ's teachings

God gave His earliest instructions concerning this festival to the Israelites as they prepared to leave Egypt. "For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do" (Exodus 12:14-

16, New International Version). So this was a seven-day festival, with the first and seventh days being annual Sabbaths or Holy Days.

Each year as the Israelites observed this feast, it reminded them of God's deliverance of their forefathers from Egypt. The Creator instructed, "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt" (verse 17, NIV). The Exodus



from Egypt remains as a foundational reason for observing this feast today. Just as God delivered ancient Israel, He delivers us from our sins and difficulties.

Now notice Jesus Christ's teaching about leaven, which expands the meaning of this feast.

During Christ's ministry He performed two

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that with God's help we must remove and avoid all types of sin—symbolized by leaven—in all areas of our life.

miracles in which a few fish and loaves of bread fed thousands of people. After one of these incidents, when His disciples had gone around the Sea of Galilee, they forgot to bring bread with them. So Jesus told them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:5-6, NASB).

The disciples thought Jesus was referring to their lack of bread. However, He was using the occasion to teach them by calling on the symbolism of leaven. Christ asked them: "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then the disciples "understood that He did not say to beware of the *leaven of bread*, but of the *teaching* of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (verses 11-12, NASB).

Some of the members of the religious establishment of Christ's day appeared to be righteous, yet they secretly practiced sinful behavior. Jesus let them know He knew their hearts. They may have appeared righteous to other people, "but inside," He told them, "you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28).

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that with God's help we must

remove and avoid all types of sin—symbolized by leaven—in all areas of our life.

Continued importance of these days

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the apostle Paul taught the same *spiritual lessons* Jesus had, invoking the comparison of sin to leaven. In the context of reprimanding the Corinthian congregation for its divisions, jealousies and tolerance of sexual misconduct, Paul wrote: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore *purge out the old leaven*, that you may be a new lump, *since you truly are unleavened*. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore *let us keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but *with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The church at Corinth was obviously and unmistakably keeping the Feast of



Paul spoke of this much-needed self-reflection in 2 Corinthians 13:5, when he told the Corinthian church, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.”

Unleavened Bread, to which Paul repeatedly alluded. However, Paul used the Corinthians’ faithful obedience in keeping the feast physically (removing leaven from their homes) as a basis to encourage them to celebrate this feast with proper understanding of its *spiritual* intent.

Today removing leaven from our homes for seven days reminds us that we, too, through prayer and God’s help and understanding, *must recognize, expel and avoid sin*. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is thus a time of personal reflection. We should meditate on our attitudes and conduct and ask God to help us recognize and overcome our shortcomings.

Paul spoke of this much-needed self-reflection in 2 Corinthians 13:5, when he told the Corinthian church: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”

Paul explained the significance of the phrase “Jesus Christ is in you”

in a verse quoted earlier—Galatians 2:20: “I am *crucified with Christ*: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (KJV).

These seven days of self-examination prove invaluable in helping us to devote our lives to God and Jesus Christ. This week-long period also pictures our eventual triumph over sin. As God delivered the ancient Israelites from enslavement to Egypt, so He delivers us from our enslavement to sin (Romans 6:12-18).

Applying the spiritual lessons

We learn by doing. We learn spiritual lessons by doing physical things. Performing the task of delecting our homes reminds us to vigilantly watch for sinful thoughts and actions so we can avoid them. God knows that, in spite of our good intentions, we all sin.

Many years after his conversion, Paul described the powerful human tendency to sin: “I find then a law, that *evil is present with me*, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and *bringing me into captivity to the law of sin* which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—[deliverance will come] through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:21-25).

Paul knew life itself is a battle with sin. The Bible speaks of “the sin which *so easily* ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1). We have our own part to play in struggling to overcome sin. Yet paradoxically, we must rely on God to help us. Paul explained this to the Philippians by telling them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you* both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13, KJV).

Indeed, Paul did not end his discussion about struggling with sin in Romans 7 on the seemingly hopeless note of remaining enslaved to sin. He went on in chapter 8 to show that we can be free of the way of sin and death—with Christ’s help through God’s Holy Spirit.

Our observance of the Days of Unleavened Bread helps us realize our crucial need for Jesus’ help in overcoming our weaknesses. And this feast is certainly a time for rejoicing because He freely gives us the help we need. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins, thus enabling us to be unleavened, cleansed of sin. And He continues to help us put sin out of our lives by dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit, thereby leading us to regular repentance and empowering us to live in obedience to God—which brings us to the subject of the next chapter.

The Feast of Pentecost: The Firstfruits of God's Harvest

In the process of revealing His plan of salvation for mankind, God established His annual Holy Days around the harvest seasons in the Middle East (Leviticus 23:9-16; Exodus 23:14-16). Just as His people harvested their crops around these three festival seasons, God's Holy Days show us how He is harvesting people for eternal life in His Kingdom.

The Holy Days have meanings that build upon each other. Together they progressively reveal how God works with humanity.

Earlier we saw Passover symbolizing Christ's giving of Himself for us so our sins could be forgiven. We also learned how the Days of Unleavened Bread teach us that we must remove and avoid sin, whether in actions or attitudes. The next festival and Holy Day, Pentecost, builds on this important foundation.

This festival is known by several names that derive from its meaning and timing. Also known as the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), it represents the firstfruits (Numbers 28:26) gathered as the result of the labor of those who completed the spring grain harvests in ancient Israel (Exodus 23:16).

It is also called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), with this name coming from the seven weeks plus one day (50 days in all) that are counted to determine when to celebrate this festival (Leviticus 23:16). Similarly, in the New Testament, which was written in Greek, this festival is known as Pentecost (*Pentekostos* in the original), which means "fiftieth" (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Pentecost").

Among Jews the most popular name for this festival is the Feast of Weeks, or *shavuot*, in Hebrew. When celebrating this festival, many Jewish people recall one of the greatest events in history, God's revealing of the law at Mount Sinai.

But Pentecost doesn't just picture the giving of the law; it also shows—through a great miracle that occurred on the first Pentecost in the early Church—how to keep the *spiritual intent* of God's laws.

The gift of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit

God chose the first Pentecost after Jesus Christ's resurrection to pour

out His Holy Spirit on 120 believers (Acts 1:15). "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And



they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

The speaking in various languages occurred as a crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem, with each visitor hearing the speech of the disciples in his own native tongue (verses 6-11). These

This festival is known by several names that derive from its meaning and timing. Also known as the Feast of Harvest, it represents the firstfruits gathered as the result of the labor of those who completed the spring grain harvests in ancient Israel.

astounding events demonstrated the presence of the Holy Spirit.

At first the people of Jerusalem who witnessed this miraculous phenomenon were astonished, with some attributing the actions of the Christians to drunkenness (Acts 2:12-13). The apostle Peter, now filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly explained the event to the crowd as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28).

Peter explained how his listeners could also receive this Spirit: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

God used these miracles and Peter's preaching to add 3,000 people to His Church in one day. These converts were all baptized and received the Holy Spirit (verses 40-41). From this pivotal point, God's Spirit has been available to all who truly repent and are properly baptized. The Day or Feast of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God poured out His Spirit

to establish His Church, the group of believers who are led by His Spirit.

Why we need God's Spirit

Humanly speaking, no matter how hard we try not to, we still sin (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23). Acknowledging this inherent weakness of humanity, God lamented in Deuteronomy 5:29, "Oh, that they had *such a heart* in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments that it might be well with them and with their children forever!"

Here God explains that humankind has a *heart problem*. Academic knowledge of the law does not enable us to think like God. Becoming godly in our thoughts, attitudes and actions is beyond the comprehension and ability of men and women without an additional ingredient—*God's Spirit*.

God's way of thinking produces peace, happiness and concern for others. Jesus complimented a lawyer who correctly quoted the essence of God's law: "You shall *love the LORD your God* with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind" and "[*love*] your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). This man quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, from two books of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). Jesus here confirmed that the Old Testament Scriptures are based on these two great principles of love (Matthew 22:40).

The essence of God's law is *love* (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9). God gave His commandments because He loves us. Writing to brethren who had God's Spirit, John said, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when *we love God* and *keep His commandments*. For *this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3).

Because God's Spirit was now residing in the Church, its members could express genuine love. "A new commandment I give to you," Jesus had said, "that you *love one another; as I have loved you* . . . By this all will know that you are My disciples, *if you have love for one another*" (John 13:34-35). God's gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost made it possible for the Church to fully express God's commandments of love.

Jesus Christ: the firstfruits of eternal life

Firstfruits are the first agricultural products to mature and ripen. Throughout the Bible, God uses the analogy of the harvest—and, particularly on Pentecost, firstfruits—to illustrate aspects of His plan of salvation. Israel observed this day in the late spring after the barley and wheat harvests. A special offering of the first ripe grain during the Days of Unleavened Bread, called the wave-sheaf offering, marked the beginning of these harvests, which continued during the next 50 days and led up to Pentecost (Leviticus 23:11). This spring harvest was the firstfruits of the yearly agricultural cycle.

One of the first harvest lessons of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ "is risen from the dead, and has become *the firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The wave-sheaf offering represented Jesus Christ, who was the "*firstborn* over all creation" and the "*firstborn* from the dead" (Colossians 1:15, 18). He presented Himself to God the Father on the Sunday after His resurrection, the same day during the Days of Unleavened Bread on which the first sheaf of grain of the spring harvest was to be waved before God.

Early on the first day of the week (Sunday morning), while it was still dark and after Jesus had already been resurrected (John 20:1), Mary Magdalene came to His tomb and discovered that the rock in front of it had already been rolled away. She ran to tell Peter and John that Jesus was no longer in His grave. The two men hurried to see this and verified that Jesus' body was gone (John 20:2-10). Mary also returned and, after Peter and John left, she stood outside the tomb (verse 11). As she wept, Jesus appeared to her but would not allow her to touch Him because He had "not yet ascended" to the Father (John 20:17).

Later that same day Jesus appeared again. This time He allowed certain women to touch Him (Matthew 28:9). His own words show that, between the time Mary Magdalene saw Him and the time He allowed the women to touch Him, Christ had ascended to, and had been accepted by, the Father.

The wave-sheaf ceremony God gave to ancient Israel thus represents Jesus Christ's acceptance by His Father as "the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Church as firstfruits

Romans 8:29 speaks of Jesus Christ as "*the firstborn of many brethren*." Yet the New Testament Church is *also* considered to be firstfruits. In speaking of the Father, James said, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of *firstfruits* of His creatures" (James 1:18).

God's Spirit within us identifies us and sanctifies us—sets us apart as Christians. "*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ*," wrote Paul, "*he is not His*," and "*as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God*" (Romans 8:9, 14).

Paul also referred to the members of the Church as those "who have the *firstfruits of the Spirit*" (verse 23). He alluded to several first-century Christians as the firstfruits of God's calling (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15).

The significance of the Bible writers calling these people of God firstfruits becomes evident when we consider John 14:6. Here Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through Me*."

How many, throughout the centuries, have really accepted and practiced

the way of life Jesus taught? Even today many people have simply never heard much, if anything, about Jesus Christ. How will God offer *them* salvation?

Few people understand that God follows a systematic plan, symbolized by His Holy Days, to save *all* of humanity by offering *all* people eternal life in His Kingdom. In this world we are simply at *the beginning* of the harvest for the Kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul understood this: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, *even so in Christ all shall be made alive*. But *each one in his own order*: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22-23). Anyone who is now called and chosen by God is included with Christ as God’s firstfruits (James 1:18).

The Bible teaches us that *God must call people* (John 6:44; 6:63). Our Creator, therefore, *controls the timing* of His harvest. When God founded His Church by imparting His Spirit to believers on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, He was expanding His spiritual harvest. It was the beginning of what Joel prophesied, that God will ultimately pour out His Spirit on “all flesh” (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:14-17).

The Holy Spirit at work

The coming of the Holy Spirit dramatically changed the lives of these early Christians. The book of Acts is filled with accounts of the early Church’s remarkable spiritual impact on the surrounding society. A transformation was so evident that nonbelievers accused the Christians of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Such was the dynamic, miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

To fully grasp how God’s Spirit can work with us, we must comprehend what the Holy Spirit is. It is *not* a person who, along with God the Father and Christ the Son, forms a “Holy Trinity.” In Scripture the Holy Spirit is described as the *power* of God at work in our lives (Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13, 19), the same power that was at work in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38). (To learn more about what the Holy Spirit is, download or send for our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

This divine power allows us to be “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). It was this same power that transformed the lives of the early Christians and is the power working in the Church today. Paul told Timothy that God’s Spirit is a “*spirit of . . . power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Pentecost serves as an annual reminder that our Creator still works miracles, granting His Spirit to those called to be the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest, empowering them to carry out His work in this world.

The Feast of Trumpets: Turning Point in Mankind’s History

The Feast of Trumpets introduces the autumn festivals—representing the culmination of the present age of man and the beginning of an incredible time during which God will play a much more direct part in world events. Indeed, this festival, a Holy Day, signals the intervention of God in the affairs of humanity on a global basis. The Feast of Trumpets thus represents a dramatic turning point in world history.

This particular festival also marks the beginning of the third and final feast season (Exodus 23:14; Deuteronomy 16:16), which includes the final four Holy Days of the year.

The return of Jesus Christ!

The Feast of Trumpets depicts nothing less than the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God! The book of Revelation reveals a sequence of earth-shaking events heralded by angels sounding a series of seven trumpet blasts. The seventh angel’s sounding of the last trumpet signifies that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15, NIV). The Bible foretells that at this time Jesus Christ will at last return to the earth. Of all the prophecies in the Bible, this one surely heralds the most exciting news possible for this weary, sin-filled world!

The Feast of Trumpets also marks the future fulfillment of the many Old Testament prophecies that speak of a Messiah coming as a king of the line of David who will sit on the throne of Israel and rule with power and authority over all nations. The concept of a conquering Messiah was on the minds of the apostles immediately after Jesus’ resurrection. When He appeared to them in those early days, they asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

Even in His earthly ministry, Jesus had spoken of distinctions between His first and second comings. When Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, questioned Him just before the crucifixion, Jesus stated clearly that He had not come to rule at that time.

“My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus told the governor. “If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not

The Annual Festivals of God

Roman Year	Passover	Feast of Unleavened Bread	Pentecost	Feast of Trumpets	Day of Atonement	Feast of Tabernacles	The Eighth Day
2010	March 29	March 30-April 5	May 23	Sept. 9	Sept. 18	Sept. 23-29	Sept. 30
2011	April 18	April 19-25	June 12	Sept. 29	Oct. 8	Oct. 13-19	Oct. 20
2012	April 6	April 7-13	May 27	Sept. 17	Sept. 26	Oct. 1-7	Oct. 8
2013	March 25	March 26-April 1	May 19	Sept. 5	Sept. 14	Sept. 19-25	Sept. 26
2014	April 14	April 15-21	June 8	Sept. 25	Oct. 4	Oct. 9-15	Oct. 16
2015	April 3	April 4-10	May 24	Sept. 14	Sept. 23	Sept. 28-Oct. 4	Oct. 5
2016	April 22	April 23-29	June 12	Oct. 3	Oct. 12	Oct. 17-23	Oct. 24
2017	April 10	April 11-17	June 4	Sept. 21	Sept. 30	Oct. 5-11	Oct. 12
2018	March 30	March 31-April 6	May 20	Sept. 10	Sept. 19	Sept. 24-30	Oct. 1
2019	April 19	April 20-26	June 9	Sept. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 14-20	Oct. 21
2020	April 8	April 9-15	May 31	Sept. 19	Sept. 28	Oct. 3-9	Oct. 10
2021	March 27	March 28-April 3	May 16	Sept. 7	Sept. 16	Sept. 21-27	Sept. 28
2022	April 15	April 16-22	June 5	Sept. 26	Oct. 5	Oct. 10-16	Oct. 17
2023	April 5	April 6-12	May 28	Sept. 16	Sept. 25	Sept. 30-Oct. 6	Oct. 7

In biblical reckoning, days begin in the evening (Genesis 1:5), when the sun goes down (Joshua 8:29; 2 Chronicles 18:34; Mark 1:32), and are counted from evening to evening (Leviticus 23:32). Thus, all God's festivals begin the sunset just before

the dates listed in this table. For example, in 2015 Passover is observed on the evening of April 2, after sundown, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the following evening, April 3. The festivals end at sunset on the dates given.

be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” So Pilate asked Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered in the affirmative: “You say rightly that I am a king. *For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth*” (John 18:36-37).

After Christ’s resurrection, the apostles excitedly anticipated the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises. They were aware of messianic prophecies such as Isaiah’s that describe a time during which “the government will be upon His shoulder” and “of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

In answer to the apostles’ question as to whether He would soon establish the Kingdom, Jesus told them it was not for them to know the “times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). Instead, Christ told them to focus on spreading the gospel—the good news—throughout the world. Later, in due time, the apostles realized that Christ’s second coming was not necessarily imminent. Numerous scriptures describe the saints as eagerly looking forward to His return.

Why the symbolism of trumpets?

The excitement of this Holy Day, picturing these monumental events, is captured in the symbolism of this festival. Ancient Israel celebrated it with “a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts” (Leviticus 23:24, NIV).

Actually, the word “trumpet” does not appear in this verse. The phrase “trumpet blasts” translates a single Hebrew word, *teruah*, which means a loud, resounding noise—a great shout or blaring, or an awakening blast. This was the sound of a “trumpet,” but not the metal, musical kind also used by the Israelites. The God’s Word Translation renders this phrase as “a holy assembly announced by the blowing of ram’s horns.” In that day a hollow animal horn, known as a *shofar*, was used to communicate important messages.

Such horns, blaring an alarm like a modern air-raid or tornado siren, were used to warn of impending danger, such as imminent war. As the prophet Jeremiah lamented: “O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet [*shofar*], the alarm of war” (Jeremiah 4:19; compare Amos 3:6).

This ties in with the fact that the events of the Day of the Lord that will usher in Christ’s return will be cataclysmic, announced, as already mentioned, with angels blowing trumpets (Revelation 8-9; compare Zephaniah 1:14-16).

With their ability to transmit sound over great distances, trumpets were in ancient times excellent instruments for *attracting people’s attention*. God even used the sound of a shofar to herald His meeting with Israel when He descended on Mount Sinai to speak the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16).

Moreover, the shofar was used in coronation ceremonies (1 Kings 1:34, 39), and we’ve already seen that Christ assumes rule over the earth at the last trumpet. In connection with this Feast Day, Psalm 81:3 exhorts, “Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon . . . on our solemn feast day.”

Amplification of the meaning of trumpets

The writers of the New Testament revealed additional understanding



of the significance of the blowing of trumpets. Notice Paul’s description of the return of Jesus Christ: “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with*

In ancient Israel’s day a hollow animal horn, known as a shofar, was used to communicate important messages.

them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul also spoke of the day when the firstfruits pictured by Pentecost will be resurrected to immortal life. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 he says this will happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*” Thus the awakening blast of this last trumpet will awaken the dead!

Although the Trumpets festival isn’t mentioned by name in the New Testament, we have no valid reason for assuming that this Holy Day should not be observed today. On the contrary, the early Church used the Hebrew Scriptures as the foundation for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16). Like the Ten Commandments (James 2:10-11), each of God’s festivals is intimately and intricately related to the others. By keeping all of them, we can understand God’s remarkable plan for humanity as it unfolds. We should not ignore some of His Holy Days while observing others.

Jesus’ prophetic teaching

Near the end of Christ’s earthly ministry, the apostles asked Him about the end of the present era. Notice Matthew 24:3: “Now as He sat on the

Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

Earlier, Daniel had prophesied about the establishment of the Kingdom of God and how the saints, or God’s people, would inherit that Kingdom (Daniel 2:44; 7:18). Like the disciples, however, Daniel did not understand when the Kingdom would come.

Jesus, in response to His disciples’ questions, laid out for them a series of events that would lead up to His return. He mentioned to them religious deception, wars, famines, disease, earthquakes and other calamities (Matthew 24:4-13). He characterized the time of His return as an era of hatred and lawlessness. In this setting Jesus said, “This *gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, *and then the end will come*” (verse 14).

More details in the book of Revelation

Later Jesus Christ revealed many

These dramatic events set the stage for the seventh angel’s trumpet sounding and Jesus Christ’s return to assume rule over the governments of the earth.

more details about this pivotal time. The book of Revelation is described as “the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1). Here Christ repeated through the apostle John the same events He had described to His disciples decades earlier. Now, however, Jesus used the symbolism of a series of seals He would open one by one (Revelation 6).

After this, at the beginning of God’s anger against the disobedient nations, seven plagues will be poured out on a sinning world, with a trumpet blast announcing each, as we’ve seen (Revelation 8-9). Finally God will send two “witnesses,” or “prophets,” to proclaim His truth to a rebellious world (Revelation 11). Such prophetic witness is compared to a trumpet warning (Isaiah 58:1). Tragically, the godless society of the last days will reject these two servants of God and kill them (verses 7-10).

These dramatic events set the stage for the seventh angel’s trumpet



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sounding and Jesus Christ’s return to begin the rule of His government over the entire earth (Revelation 11:15).

Of this same scenario, Matthew 24 says that “immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels *with a great sound of a trumpet*, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (verses 29-31).

Unprecedented events at Christ’s return

Incredibly, when Jesus Christ returns to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the nations of the earth will gather to *fight against Him* (Zechariah 14:1-4). Revelation 19:19 describes this impending battle: “And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to *make war* against Him [Jesus Christ] who sat on the horse and against His army.”

Why would anyone want to fight the Messiah? The armies will try to destroy Christ *because Satan has deceived the whole world* (Revelation 12:9). The devil’s influence will inspire the nations to fight against Jesus when He returns.

Also at the time of Christ’s return, His faithful followers will be resurrected to immortality. Revelation 20:5 describes this as the “first resurrection,” which is also a “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35). This change to immortal life was the hope of early Christians and remains the fervent hope of those who understand God’s plan.

In the book of Romans, Paul depicts this resurrection as a glorious deliverance from bondage: “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God . . . because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God . . . And not only they, but we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:19, 21, 23).

We see that, even though tragic events lie ahead, the good news is that God will intervene to save humanity and guide mankind into His abundant way of life.

Jesus Christ will return to raise His followers from death and establish God’s perfect rule over the earth. This is the wonderful, inspiring meaning of the Feast of Trumpets. Christ taught us to pray to the Father, “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10, KJV). How urgently we need the answer to that prayer!

Atonement: Removal of Sin's Cause and Reconciliation to God

We have already seen—through the symbolism involved in the Passover—that Christ's shed blood atones for our past sins. In fact, atonement means reconciliation. The Day of Atonement symbolizes the reconciliation of God and all humanity.

If we are reconciled to God through Christ's sacrifice, why do we need another Holy Day to teach us about reconciliation? If we are already reconciled, why do we need to fast, as commanded on the Day of Atonement? (Leviticus 23:27; Acts 27:9). What is this day's specific significance in God's master plan for the salvation of mankind?

The Day of Atonement and Passover both teach us about the forgiveness of sin and our reconciliation with God through Christ's sacrifice. However, Passover concerns the redemption of the firstborn and thus applies most directly to Christians whom God has called in this age, while Atonement carries *universal* implications.

Moreover, the Day of Atonement pictures an essential additional step in God's salvation plan not found in the symbolism of the Passover. This step *must take place* before humanity can experience true peace on earth. All people suffer the tragic consequences of sin. But sin doesn't happen without a cause, and God makes this cause clear in the symbolism associated with the Day of Atonement.

Satan is the author of sin

The Day of Atonement involves not only the forgiveness of sin; it pictures the removal of the *primary cause* of sin—Satan and his demons. Until God removes the original instigator of sin, mankind will simply continue to fall back into disobedience and suffering. Although our human nature has a part to play in our sins, Satan the devil bears great responsibility for influencing mankind to disobey God.

Even though many people doubt the existence of a devil, the Bible reveals Satan as a powerful, invisible being who can sway all mankind. Revelation 12:9 tells us that his influence is so great that he "*deceives the whole world.*"

The devil blinds people to the understanding of God's truth. The apostle Paul explained this to the Corinthians: "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to

those who are perishing, whose minds *the god of this age* has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul also teaches us that Satan has influenced every human being to walk in the ways of disobedience. He notes that those called into God's Church "once walked according to the course of this world, according to *the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Paul warned the Corinthians that Satan can present himself as righteous to lead people astray: "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Jesus Christ plainly stated that Satan introduced sin and rebellion into the world. In John 8:44 Christ declared to those who were antagonistic to His teaching: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. *He was a murderer from the beginning*, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for *he is a liar and the father of it.*"

Tying these scriptures together allows us to see the power and the influence of Satan. Paul warned us to beware of the deceitful methods of the devil: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3, NIV).

Christians who struggle to resist Satan and stop sinning fight a *spiritual battle* against the devil and his demons. Paul explains: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the *spiritual forces of wickedness*" (Ephesians 6:12, NASB).

Paul further explains here that Jesus Christ will deliver us from the influence of the devil (verses 13-18). Of course, God is much more powerful than Satan, but we must do our part by *actively resisting* the devil and the pulls of the flesh (James 4:7). The Day of Atonement looks forward to the time during which Satan's deception will be removed and he will no longer be free to influence and deceive mankind (Revelation 20:1-3).

Old Testament symbolism

Leviticus 16 describes God instructing ancient Israel to observe the Day of Atonement. Although Christians are not required to offer animal sacrifices today, this chapter adds significantly to our understanding of God's plan.

Notice that the priest was to select *two* goats for a sin offering for the people, and he was to present them before God (verses 5, 7). Aaron, the high priest, was to cast lots to select one "for the LORD," which he was to offer

as a sacrifice (verses 8-9). This goat represented Jesus Christ, who would be slain to pay the penalty for our sins.

The other goat served a completely different purpose: “But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness” (verse 10). Notice that this goat was *not to be killed*. The high priest was to “lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall *send the goat away* into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place;



The priest was to select two goats for a sin offering for the people, with one goat chosen by lot to be offered as a sacrifice.

and the man shall release it in the desert” (verses 21-22, NIV).

The priest chose by lot the “scapegoat,” or *Azazel*, as the word appears in the original Hebrew. Many scholars identify *Azazel* as the name of a demon inhabiting the wilderness (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 326). The *Azazel* goat represents Satan, who bears the responsibility for the sins of humanity (verse 22) because of the deception he has foisted upon mankind.

The high priest laid hands on this goat and confessed over it the wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people. Why did he do that? As present ruler of the world, the devil bears responsibility for his perversity in beguiling and coercing humanity to sin. “The sending of the sin-laden goat . . . signified the complete removal of the sins of the people and the handing them over, as it were, to the evil spirit to whom they belonged” (*The One Volume Bible Commentary*, 1975, p. 95).

A scapegoat, in modern usage, is someone unfairly held responsible for the mistakes of others. However, the modern English word *scapegoat* cannot properly be applied to Satan; the devil is not a scapegoat in the modern sense of the term. (Although some Bible versions use the word “scapegoat,” Green’s Literal Translation more accurately calls it the “goat of departure.”) Rather than *unfairly* bearing the blame for sin, Satan will be held *justly*

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accountable for his own deliberate actions by which he has led humanity into sin for thousands of years.

The symbolism of the live goat parallels the fate of Satan and his demons, who will be removed at the outset of Jesus’ reign over the nations. The book of Revelation describes this removal: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished . . .” (Revelation 20:1-3).

Thus the devil and his demons, who for thousands of years have led mankind into every evil deed imaginable, will be removed to a place of restraint (verse 4). Complete global reconciliation to God cannot occur until the source of so much sin and suffering is out of the picture.

The modern application of this festival

Now notice specific instructions on when and how we are to keep this festival. “Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement,” God says. “It shall be a holy convocation for you; *you shall afflict your souls . . .*” (Leviticus 23:27).

How do you “afflict your soul” on this day? *Afflict* comes from the Hebrew *anah*, which means “to be afflicted, be bowed down, be humbled, be meek” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, “To Be Humbled, Afflicted”). The same word is used in connection with fasting in Psalm 35:13, Isaiah 58:3, 5 and Ezra 8:21. Fasting means abstaining from food and drink (Esther 4:16).

So why does God tell us to fast during this specific 24 hours? Fasting expresses our humble desire *to draw closer to God*. The Day of Atonement represents a coming time of reconciliation during which, with Satan banished and the world having been devastated by the horrific events leading up to this time, a humbled and repentant humanity will at last be reconciled to God.

Few understand the proper reasons for fasting. Fasting is not to bend God to our will. We don’t fast to receive anything from God except His abundant mercy and forgiveness for our human weaknesses. Fasting helps us remember how temporary our physical existence is. Without food and water, we would soon perish. Fasting helps us realize *just how much we need God* as the giver and sustainer of life.

We should always fast on the Day of Atonement in a *repentant frame of mind*. Notice the prophet Daniel’s exemplary attitude while fasting: “Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the LORD

my God, and made confession” (Daniel 9:3-4).

The early Church observed the Day of Atonement. More than 30 years after Christ's death, Luke still referred to the time and seasons by mentioning this day, stating that “sailing was now dangerous because *the Fast* was already over” (Acts 27:9). Almost all Bible commentaries and dictionaries acknowledge that “the Fast” refers to the Day of Atonement.

Yet another important lesson comes to us through the Day of Atonement. We have already seen that the slain goat represented the sacrifice in our place of Jesus Christ, who took on Himself the death penalty we have earned by sinning. But Jesus Christ did not stay dead; *He came back to life*. What does the Day of Atonement teach us about Christ's role *after His resurrection*?

Leviticus 16:15-19 describes a solemn ceremony that was carried out only once each year, on the Day of Atonement. The high priest was to take the blood of the slain goat into the Most Holy Place—the holiest part of the tabernacle—and to the mercy seat. The mercy seat was symbolic of the very throne of Almighty God. The high priest acted out the function Christ performs for repentant Christians. Having ascended to the very throne of God to present the blood of His sacrifice, Christ intercedes for us—as He has since His resurrection—as *our High Priest*.

The book of Hebrews makes this symbolism clear. “But Christ came as *High Priest* of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this [physical] creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, *but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place* once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Because of Christ's sacrifice, we enjoy direct access to *the true mercy seat*—the throne of our merciful, loving God. This was dramatically and miraculously demonstrated at the moment of Christ's death, when “the veil of the temple,” covering the entrance to the Most Holy Place, “was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). This massive curtain was torn asunder in a dramatic testimony to the access we now have to God's throne.

Many verses in Hebrews mention Christ's role as our High Priest and intercessor. Because of His sacrifice for us, we can “*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). The Day of Atonement thus pictures the *loving reconciliation all people can have with God through Christ's sacrifice*. It also shows the remarkable truth that Satan, the author of sin, will eventually be removed so that humanity can at last attain reconciliation with God on a universal basis.

The Day of Atonement serves as a vital preparatory step in anticipation of the next milestone in God's glorious Holy Day plan, beautifully depicted by the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles: Jesus Christ Reigns Over All the Earth

In his first inspired sermon after receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostle Peter summed up God's instruction for mankind: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that *times of refreshing* may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive *until the times of restoration of all things*, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

But what are these “times of refreshing” and “times of restoration” of which Peter spoke?

God's plan for mankind involves *restoration*. The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the restoration process, which will start with the return of Jesus Christ, pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, and the banishment of Satan, depicted by the Day of Atonement. Once these events have taken place, as represented by the previous Holy Days, the foundation is in place for the restoration of the creation to peace and harmony with God.

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, which begins with an annual Holy Day (Leviticus 23:34-35), pictures the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ over the earth after His second coming (see Revelation 20:4). This period is often called the *Millennium*, which simply means “1,000 years.”

That age to come, a wonderful “rest” following the hardships of the present age, is symbolized every seven days by the weekly Sabbath (Hebrews 4:1-11) and every year by the Feast of Tabernacles. Also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16), it celebrates the great harvest of humanity when all people who are alive on earth will learn God's ways. Humanity will at last be restored to a right relationship with God (Isaiah 11:9-10).

In the beginning, God created mankind to cooperate with Him in a beautiful relationship characterized by love, peace and obedience to His laws. At the completion of His creation, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). This time of peace and harmony abruptly ended because of Satan's deception and man's disobedience (Genesis 3:1-6). Disobedience cut mankind off from God's way (verses 21-24). The Bible describes the tragic result: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent

of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

This broken relationship between God and man has continued through history to our time. Paul reflected on this state: “Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus *death spread to all men, because all sinned*” (Romans 5:12).

Paul knew that the breach created by man’s disobedience is healed through Jesus Christ: “For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so *in Christ all shall be made alive*” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Isaiah prophesied the restoration of the world

God used the prophet Isaiah to reveal parts of His magnificent plan for restoring the world. Written at a time during which Israel faced punishment for continued disobedience, the book of Isaiah was inspired by God to give the nation encouragement through the promise of a better world to come.

Jesus Christ, after reading in the synagogue one of Isaiah’s prophecies, acknowledged the special understanding given to the prophet: “These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him” (John 12:41). Isaiah prophesied not only of Christ’s earthly ministry, but also wrote of Christ’s return in power and glory (Isaiah 66:15-16).

The basis for the messianic rule of Jesus will be God’s law. Again, as Isaiah foretold, “it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

A world of peace and abundance

After Christ’s return, He will bring the creation in its entirety into harmony with God, and peace will no longer be the exception. King David said, “Great peace have those who love Your law” (Psalm 119:165). Imagine what the world will be like when everyone knows God’s law and lives by it!

Of course, more than just knowledge is needed to bring about this amazing transformation. A *spiritual change* will take place among people. God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, describes how it will happen: “I will give you *a new heart* and put *a new spirit* within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. *I will put My Spirit within you* and cause you to walk in My statutes, and *you will keep My judgments and do them*” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The Spirit of God will influence people to willingly and enthusiastically

obey God from their hearts. People will begin to place the interests of others before their own. They will start thinking of others as “better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3, KJV). Instead of exclusive self-concern, their goal will be to help their fellow human beings. Theft will cease. Disregard for others’ property and feelings



will be eliminated. Because the world will finally be at peace, countries will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; *nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*” (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).

During this 1,000-year period, God will change

During this 1,000-year period, God will change even the nature of wild animals, reflecting the peace that will descend upon society.

even the nature of wild animals, reflecting the peace that will descend upon society. Describing this idyllic time, Isaiah 11:7-9 says: “The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain . . .”

Reversing the effects of sin

God will heal physical infirmities. Isaiah 35:5-6 prophesies of this time during which “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing . . .”

Of even greater importance will be the *spiritual* healing that will take place. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ will complete the healing He began during His ministry on earth: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me *to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion . . .*” (Isaiah

61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19). The accumulated results of generations of people following Satan's sinful ways will begin to be reversed.

As already mentioned, the Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16). This name signified the completion of Israel's annual harvest. In this setting, God said, "You shall rejoice before the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 12:12, 18; 14:26). So this feast is a time of celebration for the abundance God has given.

The same bountiful harvest theme continues in the



At that time the earth will produce abundant harvests. "Behold, the days are coming," God says, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper . . ."

future fulfillment of the festival. Through Isaiah, God spoke of the desert becoming productive land: "For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (Isaiah 35:6-7).

At that time the earth will produce abundant harvests. "Behold, the days are coming," God says, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it" (Amos 9:13).

The significance of tabernacles

The name of the Feast of Tabernacles derives from God's command to ancient Israel to build temporary "tabernacles," sometimes called "booths," to live in during the festival. The Israelites left their houses and built temporary dwelling places (Hebrew *succah*, meaning "hut of woven boughs") to live in while rejoicing before God. These reminded them of their release from slavery and their dwelling in booths when God brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:34, 41-43). In stark contrast to the hardship of slavery, this festival emphasizes rest, peace and prosperity as it meets the needs of all people, including strangers, widows and the poor.

The Bible emphasizes that, as with booths or temporary dwellings, our physical life is transitory. The apostle Paul's writings reflect this theme: "For

we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:1-2, KJV).

Hebrews 11 recounts the examples of many of God's faithful servants down through the centuries. It then concludes that "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (verse 13).

The Feast of Tabernacles is an annual reminder of our temporary state and that we also "seek a homeland" (verse 14). This lesson is reinforced when we travel to a site of the Feast of Tabernacles and stay in temporary dwellings such as hotels and campgrounds.

This festival reminds us that, in spite of our material possessions, we are still mortals in need of a literal transformation so we may possess eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

In the accounts of the vision that has come to be called the "transfiguration," Jesus gave a glimpse of the Kingdom of God to Peter, James and John. Christ appeared in glory and was talking with Moses and Elijah. Peter's immediate response was to suggest that they quickly construct three tabernacles. He seemed to understand the important connection between tabernacles and the future age of God's Kingdom (see Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 9:27-36).

The role of the resurrected saints in the Millennium

The judgment of the inhabitants of the earth who live during the 1,000 years as pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles (Isaiah 2:4; 51:4-5) begins in earnest as Christ brings "many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). This judgment is a time of *universal opportunity* for salvation. And to this end, God has allocated 1,000 years during which the resurrected saints, the firstfruits of God's harvest, will reign with Christ on earth as kings and priests, leading the way so many others can enter God's Kingdom (Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Jesus promised that "he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give *power over the nations*" (Revelation 2:26). People whom God resurrects at Christ's return will experience the unparalleled opportunity to work with Him to help all nations build a right relationship with God. (For more details, be sure to download or request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

The foundation for this relationship begins with instruction in God's law, including the observance of these very festivals we are now studying. Notice the words of the prophet Zechariah: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from

year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and *to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*" (Zechariah 14:16). Other prophets described the time as an era of God's law covering the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

Many will assist Jesus Christ in this universal educational program of helping others understand God's way. Speaking of this time, Isaiah says teachers "will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-21).

The opportunity to help others understand and be reconciled to God is a wonderful calling. Each who serves in this way will be called "the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In" (Isaiah 58:12).

God calls people out of the world at this time to become His chosen people, sanctified and redeemed by Him (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1). They are to live exemplary lives as God prepares them for service during Christ's millennial reign and beyond.

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul," the apostle Peter wrote, "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

One final conflict

All through God's plan for saving humanity, He never forces anyone to obey Him. Every person is free to choose what he or she will do and whether to accept or reject God's way of life.

After the 1,000 years of the Millennium, God will allow Satan to test the spiritual convictions of the earth's inhabitants. Revelation 20:7-10 describes this time. God will loose the devil from his place of restraint and allow him to deceive those who are not convicted of the perfect righteousness of God's way. God will destroy by fire those who follow Satan in this rebellion. The devil's futile efforts will be thwarted. This final, tragic rebellion against God will come to nothing, and Satan's destructive, deceitful influence over humanity will finally draw to a close.

The stage will then be set for the events depicted by yet one more Holy Day. The Feast of Tabernacles offers a marvelous opportunity for salvation to those left alive at Christ's return, as well as their physical descendants during the Millennium. But what about the billions of people of past generations who have lived and died without ever understanding—or even hearing—God's truth? And what about those who will die in the cataclysmic upheaval preceding Christ's return? How will God offer them salvation?

The next chapter provides the answer.

The Eighth Day: Eternal Life Offered to All

The Bible makes abundantly clear in Acts 4:12 that "there is no other name under heaven" than that of Jesus Christ by which human beings can be saved.

This particular passage raises troubling questions for anyone who believes that God is desperately trying to save the whole world in this age. If this is the only time for salvation, we must conclude that Christ's



mission to save humanity has largely failed. After all, over the centuries billions of people have lived and died without once hearing the name of Jesus Christ. Even now thousands die every day never having heard of Christ.

In spite of the missionary zeal of so many over the centuries, far more human souls have been "lost" than "saved." If God is truly all powerful, why have so many not even heard the gospel of salvation? The traditional portrayal of conflict between God and Satan over mankind leaves God on the losing side of the struggle.

What is the fate of these people?

What does God have in mind for those who have never believed in Christ or understood any of God's truth? Are they lost forever without any hope of salvation?

What does God have in mind for those who have never believed in Christ or understood any of God's truth? How does the Creator provide for them in His plan? Are they lost forever without any hope of salvation?

We should not doubt God's saving power! Let's examine some common assumptions and come to an understanding of our Creator's marvelous solution!

Resolving the dilemma

Paul tells us that God “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter adds that God is “not willing that *any* should perish but that *all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). This is God’s overriding goal in dealing with mankind: He desires as many as possible to repent, come to the knowledge of the truth and receive His gift of salvation!

Jesus explained how this will come to pass. John 7:1-14 describes how Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. He appeared publicly and stood in the midst of the people. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

Christ’s message recorded here most likely was given on the seventh and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Scholars vary on whether this was the seventh day or the day following. This is because Leviticus 23 says that the Feast of Tabernacles lasts for seven days yet is followed by an annual Holy Day immediately afterward on “the eighth day” (verses 33-36, 39). But the weight of evidence and the series of events indicate that John 7 describes incidents on the seventh day while the setting moves to the eighth day in John 8 and 9.

The Eighth Day, the only name the Bible gives this day, has, based on the wording of John 7, come to be known to some as the Last Great Day. Yet it is evidently not “the last day, that great day of the feast” on which Jesus spoke.

The Eighth Day, we should realize, is a separate festival with its own distinct meaning. Nevertheless, its attachment to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles shows that themes of the weeklong celebration carry over into it. And the words Jesus spoke at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles anticipated not only what will happen during His 1,000-year reign, but also what will happen on an even greater scale immediately afterward.

Symbolism of Christ's teaching

What was the significance of Christ’s teaching about “living water”? In His day, according to tradition, during the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would bring golden vessels of water from the Pool of Siloam on the south side of Jerusalem and pour it over the altar. Joyous celebration along with the sounding of trumpets marked this ceremony as the people sang the words of Isaiah: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). They were looking to God to provide needed rains for their crops and, in an ultimate sense, for Him to pour out His Holy Spirit on them (see Isaiah 44:3).

Jesus stood where all could hear Him and drew a lesson from the water, revealing that all who were thirsty could come to *Him* and be refreshed—*forever*. In Christ’s statement, too, the water represented the Holy Spirit, which those who believed in Jesus would receive (John 7:39). He showed that the basic wants of spiritual thirst and hunger could be satisfied only

by Him as “the bread of life” (John 6:48) and the source of living water.

With all this in mind we should ask: When would God’s Spirit become available to all who are spiritually thirsty? Consider that even though thousands came to believe in Christ soon afterward, the vast majority of the ancient pagan world of His day still remained in darkness—as did most of the Jewish people. And not much has changed over the centuries, as even many of those who profess Christianity don’t really understand Christ’s teachings.

Humanity still hungers and thirsts for the message Christ brought—and for the means to live as they ought to and find true happiness. God’s promise to “pour out My Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28) has not yet been fulfilled except in a small, preliminary way among the few He has called in this age. Only when Christ returns will this be fulfilled on a global scale. But billions have died with their deepest spiritual needs unrealized. When will *they* be refreshed by the life-giving power of God’s Spirit?

A physical resurrection to an opportunity for salvation

Many prophecies in Scripture speak of a restored and reunited nation of Israel. On one level this will be fulfilled when Christ returns and rules over Israel and all nations.

But notice another prophecy in Ezekiel 37:3-6. This passage describes Ezekiel’s vision of a valley full of bones. God asks, “Son of man, can these bones live?” To which the prophet replies: “O Lord GOD, You know.” God then says to the bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.”

In this vision a physical resurrection takes place. The account acknowledges the hopeless situation in which these people had found themselves: “Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!” (verse 11).

Their Creator, however, offers them the hope of *a resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit* in the setting of a reunited nation. In this dramatic vision, ancient Israel serves as the model for all peoples, whom God will resurrect to physical life. God said: “Behold, O My people, *I will open your graves* and cause you to come up from your graves . . . *I will put My Spirit in you*, and you shall live” (verses 12, 14). At this future time God will make freely available the life-giving spiritual water of His Holy Spirit.

God will “*make a covenant of peace with them*, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them . . . My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed *I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (verses 26-27).

The apostle Paul also referred to this yet-future event: “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:1-2). As Paul wrote, “all Israel will

be saved” (verse 26).

Yet not only Israel, but all who have never had a chance to drink from the living waters of God's Word and His Holy Spirit will at last be able to do so (Romans 9:22-26). God will freely offer them the opportunity for eternal life.

The Great White Throne Judgment

In Revelation 20:5 John writes that “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” Here John makes a clear distinction between the *first* resurrection, which occurs at Christ's second coming (verses 4, 6), and the *second* resurrection, which takes place at the end of Christ's millennial reign. Remember that the first resurrection is to *eternal life*. By contrast, God raises those in the second resurrection to a *physical, flesh-and-blood existence*.

John discusses this same second



Jesus was describing a time during which the long-dead people of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh and the biblical Queen of Sheba from Solomon's time will rise with those from Christ's generation and live at the same time.

resurrection to physical life that Ezekiel wrote about: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (verses 11-13).

The dead who stand before their Creator are all those who died never knowing the true God. Like Ezekiel's vision of dry bones coming back to life, these people emerge from their graves and begin to know their God. The books (*biblia* in Greek, from which we get the word *Bible*) apparently are the Scriptures, the only source of the knowledge of eternal life. Finally all will have an opportunity to fully understand God's plan of salvation.

This physical resurrection is *not* a second chance for salvation. For these people it is a *first* opportunity to really know the Creator. The resurrected are “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (verse 12). This judgment will involve a period during which they will enjoy the opportunity to hear, understand and grow in God's way of life, having their names inscribed in the Book of Life (verse 15). During this time billions of people will gain access to God's gift of eternal life.

This final commanded festival of the year shows how deep and far reaching are the merciful judgments of God. Jesus Christ spoke of the wonderful truth depicted by this day when He compared three cities that failed to respond to His miraculous works with three cities of the ancient world:

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon [ancient pagan cities], they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:21-24).

The inhabitants of ancient Tyre, Sidon and Sodom—cities that had incurred the anger of God for their depravity—will receive mercy in the day of judgment. Unlike Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum of Christ's day, these cities of old had little opportunity to know God. Yet He will ultimately resurrect these people just after the first 1,000 years of Christ's reign over the world, including them in the time of judgment when even those who lived in bygone ages will be reconciled to God.

In similar examples, Jesus refers to the people of the ancient pagan city of Nineveh, to the queen of the South (of Sheba) of Solomon's time and again to ancient Sodom along with Gomorrah, these serving as the epitome of wickedness (Matthew 10:14-15; 12:41-42). God doesn't tolerate perversion and sinfulness, but it is evident that He has not finished working in the lives of the people of these ancient generations. This requires that they be resurrected—brought to life again—and at last instructed in God's ways.

Jesus was describing a time during which people from all past ages—the long-dead people of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh and the biblical Queen of Sheba from Solomon's time will rise with those from His generation and live at the same time. Together they will all come to understand the truth about who Christ was and the purpose of life. It will be a time of *universal knowledge of God*. From the least to the greatest, all will know Him (Hebrews 8:11). Those whom Jesus specifically mentioned, and countless more like them, will at last experience their opportunity for salvation.

This final period of judgment completes God's plan of salvation for the world. It will be a time of love, deep mercy and the unsearchable judgment of God. The chance to drink of the life-giving waters of the Holy Spirit will indeed quench the deepest thirsts of men and women. This time of righteous judgment will bring back to life those long forgotten by humanity, but never forgotten by God.

What is the fate of those who die with no real knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? What hope is there for the billions who have lived and died without knowledge of God's purpose? The Scriptures show that these are not cut off without hope. He will bring them back to life and give them their opportunity for eternal salvation!

God will see His plan through and bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). His promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28) will find its fullest manifestation. The thirst-quenching waters of the Holy Spirit will be available to all in the time depicted by the Eighth Day, the last of God's annual festivals.

What a marvelous plan these biblical festivals portray. How great would be our lack of understanding without them!

What Is the Fate of the Unrepentant?

Although God will bountifully extend the opportunity for salvation to all those who have never known God, some will still refuse to repent, submit to God and receive His gift of eternal life.

What is their fate? The Bible reveals that, rather than suffering forever in an ever-burning hell, they will simply *cease to exist*. It will be as though they had never been.

Revelation 20:15 tells us that, after the final judgment depicted by the Eighth Day, "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

Revelation 21:8 adds, "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, *which is the second death*."

Notice that their fate is clearly *death*, not eternal life in continual punishment.

Paul, too, understood that death is the punishment of the wicked. "For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ

Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

He contrasts *death*, which is what we earn because of our sins, with *life*, which is God's free gift to us because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our place.

The prophet Malachi made clear the fate of the incorrigibly wicked: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming *shall burn them up*," says the LORD of hosts, "that will leave them neither root nor branch.

"But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for *they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet* on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1-3).

To learn more about hellfire and the fate of those who ultimately refuse to follow God, download or send for our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

How Should We Observe God's Festivals?

After we come to realize that God's festivals are vitally important to mankind and eminently applicable to our modern world, we naturally want to learn more about how to observe them.

Where should we celebrate them? Should we keep them at home or in some kind of religious service? What should we do on these days? Does God mind if we do our normal work on these days, or should we reserve them for other purposes? How will the observance of these days affect our families and jobs?

These are all important questions we must consider upon learning about God's festivals. Let's examine some biblical principles we should consider in dealing with these real-life issues.

Some of these festivals have designated methods of observance that set them apart from the others. For example, only the Passover involves partaking of bread and wine as symbols of Christ's death. The Days of Unleavened Bread are the only feast days during which God tells us to remove leaven from our homes. The Day of Atonement also stands alone as the one Holy Day observed by fasting. Proper observance of these days includes acknowledging their distinctions, each of which are designed to teach us spiritual lessons.

Taken as a whole, however, there are principles applicable to observing all of God's festivals. First, we must remember that these observances are *holy to God*. They are "the *feasts of the LORD*, which you shall proclaim to be *holy convocations*," says God (Leviticus 23:2).

God is the only one who can make anything holy. God places these particular days on a plane higher than all humanly devised celebrations. Men and women can dedicate time to God for a special purpose, but God alone can set time aside as holy (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8, 11). When we exercise proper respect and appreciation for these special annual occasions, we also honor God Himself by acknowledging His authority over our lives. Understanding this principle is important to worshipping God properly.

Our Creator desires that people willingly and in faith follow all of His instructions (Isaiah 66:2). A cooperative, humble attitude stands in contrast to the frame of mind of those who want to do only as little as possible to get by. The heart of the matter is whether we really *believe and love God*. The apostle John illustrated the attitude God desires when he wrote:

“For *this* is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

God commands annual assemblies

But how does God want us to conduct ourselves on these days? Consider His basic instruction: “These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the *sacred assemblies* you are to proclaim at their appointed times . . .” (Leviticus 23:4, NIV). Other versions of the Bible, such as the King James and New King James, use the phrase “*holy convocations*,” but the meaning is the same. These are special occasions on which we should gather with other believers. As with the weekly Sabbath, God commands special worship services on each of His Holy Days.

God revealed to the



These festivals are special occasions on which we should gather with other believers. As with the weekly Sabbath, God commands special worship services on each of His Holy Days.

early Christians the principle of meeting with others of like mind on the Sabbaths and Holy Days: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, *but exhorting one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day [of Christ’s return] approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25). What better time to encourage and exhort each other than on the days that depict God’s great plan of salvation!

When we assemble at the times of these annual festivals, we allow ourselves a wonderful opportunity to learn more about God’s plan of salvation. Nehemiah 8 records a striking instance of God’s people gathering to observe the Feast of Trumpets (verse 2). During their religious service, the leaders “helped the people to understand the Law . . . So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (verses 7-8). The early Church continued to keep these yearly feast days according to these same principles, but with much greater spiritual understanding (Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

In Nehemiah’s day the people needed encouragement because they had neglected God’s festivals. “And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘*This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.*’

Colossians 2:16 Shows Gentile Christians Observed the Biblical Holy Days

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come . . .” wrote the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:16-17 (KJV). This passage is often misinterpreted. What does it really say?

Paul was combating a local heresy. False teachers had introduced their own religious philosophy, which was a blend of Jewish and gentile concepts. Their distorted ideas were founded on human “tradition” and “principles of the world,” not on the Word of God. Paul warned the Colossians to “beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (verse 8).

These false teachers introduced their own rules and regulations for their idea of proper conduct (verses 20-22). The content of Paul’s warning to the Colossian church strongly indicates that these heretics were the forerunners of a major heresy that developed into gnosticism—a belief system maintaining that secret knowledge (*gnosis* is Greek for “knowledge,” hence the term *gnosticism*) can enhance one’s religion. Gnostics claimed to be so spiritual that they disdained virtually everything physical, regarding it as beneath them.

The false teachers in Colosse rejected the physical—the perishable things that could be touched, tasted or handled (verses 21-22)—particularly when it related to worship. Their philosophy encouraged neglect of the physical needs of the body to attain heightened spiritual-

ity. In reality, however, their self-imposed religion did nothing of the sort and accomplished nothing in combating human nature. As Paul wrote, it was of “no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (verse 23).

The Christians in Colosse obeyed God. They kept His Sabbath and Holy Days, and they rejoiced on them, following biblical instruction (Deuteronomy 16:10-11, 13-14).

The heretics condemned the Colossian church for the manner in which the Colossians observed the Holy Days. Notice that they didn’t challenge the days themselves. It was the *physical enjoyment* of them—rejoicing and feasting—that provoked the objections of these false teachers.

Notice Paul’s words again: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding [Greek *meros*, meaning ‘part,’ or ‘regarding any portion of’] a festival or a new moon or sabbath” (Colossians 2:16). Paul was telling the Colossians to ignore these heretics’ judgments and criticisms about their enjoyment of the eating and drinking aspects of God’s festivals.

Rather than showing disregard for the days God established as holy, Paul’s comments in this passage actually confirm that the Colossian Christians—who were primarily gentiles (Colossians 2:13)—were observing the weekly Sabbath and Holy Days of God more than 30 years after Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

Had they not been observing these days, the heretics would have had no basis for their objections to the eating and drinking aspects—the feasting portion—of the Sabbath and the Holy Days.

For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength'" (Nehemiah 8:9-10). Then, after they were taught God's law, "all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them" (verse 12).

These special days are meant to be enjoyed by the whole family—everyone who attends! Especially at the Feast of Tabernacles, sufficient time is available for proper family activities and recreation, as well as rejoicing over the spiritual knowledge God reveals.

To properly rejoice on God's days of celebration, we are not to do our customary work (Leviticus 23:3, 7-8, 21, 25, 35-36). Notice that, even though preparing food on the annual Holy Days does entail work, God says that this kind of effort is allowable and appropriate (Exodus 12:16). However, on the Day of Atonement we are to forgo all regular work including, of course, food preparation (verses 28, 30-31).

We also demonstrate our obedience and commitment to God by arranging time off from our jobs so we can observe the Holy Days. With proper planning and respectful communication with employers, most people can work out the details required to be able to take these days off. It is our responsibility to use wisdom and patience when informing family members of our decision to observe God's festivals.

Living by faith

Responding to God's instruction is a matter of faith. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith, not by sight." It is, therefore, important for us to start keeping the Holy Days *when* we learn about them. Even though we may not understand everything at first, we will learn a great deal more as we actually begin observing them.

If you would like to learn more about observing the annual festivals, please contact our office for your country or region listed in the back of this booklet. If you so desire, we would be glad to forward your request to a minister near you. He can let you know the times and locations of annual Holy Day and weekly Sabbath services nearest you.

In summary, the annual feast days are a time of happiness, not just because of their meaning for us, but because of the marvelous hope they promise *for all mankind*. Observing God's Holy Days reminds us of His great love for humanity. Worshipping Him in this way is a joy and pleasure. These festivals truly are wonderful gifts from God to His people!

What About God's Other Holy Day?

Why did God command the weekly Sabbath day to be kept as one of the Ten Commandments? And why is this command almost universally ignored?

The most misunderstood and misapplied of God's Ten Commandments is His instruction to *remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy* (Exodus 20:8). Many view the Sabbath as a quaint relic of history, perhaps a nice idea at some time in the past but altogether impractical in today's busy world.

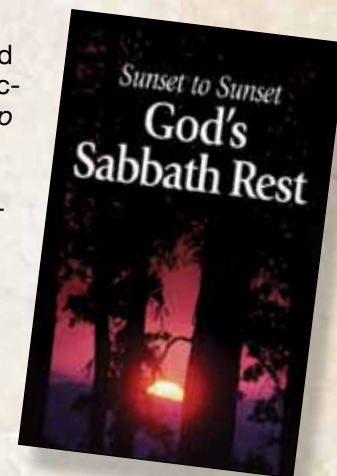
Some believe that Sunday is the Sabbath and that spending an hour or two at church fulfills the intent of the Fourth Commandment.

Others believe that Jesus Christ did away with a specific day of rest and the need to worship on a particular day, that whatever time we choose to revere God is holy. Many assume that the apostle Paul or the early Church changed the preferred day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection, calling it the Lord's Day.

Why did God even command a day of rest every week? Did He have a purpose for it, and if so, what is that purpose? Is the Sabbath relevant? Does it make sense in today's world? Why should there be such confusion about one of the 10 basic guiding principles and laws God gave mankind?

What is the truth? And why is there such controversy over this one commandment when most people, including religious leaders and their churches, have little quarrel with the other nine?

You need to understand the answers to these important questions. Discover them for yourself in *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. You'll be surprised to find what the Bible really says! Contact us today for your free copy. Turn the page for a list of addresses worldwide, or download or request a copy at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.



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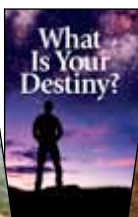
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The United Church of God is committed to understanding and practicing New Testament Christianity. We desire to share God's way of life with those who earnestly seek to follow our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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