

The Holy Festivals of God

When God delivered the nation of Israel from captivity in Egypt, He commanded the nation to participate in special worship during the harvest seasons of the year, there are three harvest seasons in the land of Israel. Each of these seasons is accompanied by special festivals God instituted that outline His plan for "harvesting" human beings for salvation **Exodus 23:14-16; Deuteronomy 16:1-17**. God's annual festivals or feasts and the Holy Days of rest and worship are listed in **Leviticus 23**. In progression, each builds on preceding ones making the sum greater than the individual parts. Understand what these feasts portray and you will understand God's master plan of salvation.

The three harvest seasons of the year show the major framework of the periods in which God intends to save mankind. Through the observance of these feasts, God's people focus on and are reminded throughout the year of the work of Jesus the Messiah. It is through preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the divine calling to a new way of life that we see the building up of the Church as the family of God. Through Christ as our focal point, we begin to understand the special meaning behind the annual feasts.

Sadly, most who profess to be Christians today do not observe God's festivals, typically calling them "Jewish" feasts and claiming they are obsolete. Yet God said they are His feasts and He commands that they still be observed, even in the New Testament. God defined these celebrations as His festivals, or "the feasts of the Lord" **Leviticus 23:2-4**. Because people do not observe these festivals as God commands, they do not understand their meaning. Obeying God's commands would give them better understanding. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. His praise endures forever. **Psalms 111:10**.

The gospel message and God's plan of salvation are enriched by understanding that the physical harvests of food crops are types of the spiritual harvests of humans through God's gift of salvation by Jesus Christ **Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35; 15:1-8; Colossians 2:16-17**.

God's system of annual feasts is a group of interacting and interdependent elements forming a complex whole. For example, the human body is made up of a number of systems, each a group of functionally related organs. Likewise, the salvation of humankind is accomplished through a systematic plan entailing steps portrayed in seven annual festivals.

With the early spring barley season comes the Passover and the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. With the later spring wheat season comes the Feast of Harvest or First fruits, also known as the Day of Pentecost and with the late summer and fall ingathering season come four festivals, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day, now referred to as the Last Great Day.

The seven annual Holy Days are annual Sabbaths; they are holy occasions and commanded assemblies of God's people. These days are holy because they are sanctified (set apart) by God. He commands His people to assemble for worship and to learn about Him and His plan. His command goes further than worship only; it includes fellowshiping and rejoicing together **Leviticus 23:1-4; Deuteronomy 14:23-26; Nehemiah 8:1-12.**

The Holy Days in the New Testament

The New Testament record shows the observance of these days by Jesus Christ, his disciples and the New Testament Church. From Jesus' earliest childhood years, He observed the Holy Days with His parents. "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover," **Luke 2:41**. The following verses describe Jesus, at age 12, engaging the theologians of His day in a spirited discussion during this festival season **Luke 2:42-48**. Clearly, He astonished these religious leaders with His understanding and insight. John writes of Jesus continuing to observe the annual Holy Days as an adult during His ministry **John 2:23; John 4:45**.

Jesus observed these festivals, and we as His followers are told to walk as He walked **John 7:8-14; 1 John 2:6**. The New Testament Church began on an annual festival, the Day of Pentecost **Acts 2:1-4**. The apostles and disciples of the early Church continued to observe these festivals long after Jesus' death and resurrection **Acts 18:21; 20:16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8**. Paul upholds their observance and presents them as continuing "shadows" or outlines of the great events in God's plan of salvation that are yet to be fulfilled **Colossians 2:16-17**. He also instructed the congregation in Corinth, "Let us keep the feast" **1 Corinthians 5:8**.

In one of the most instructive examples, Jesus risked His personal safety to attend two of the festivals, the annual Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day **John 7:1-2, 7-10, 14**. "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" **John 7:37-39**.

Paul told his followers to "imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ," and "keep the traditions as I delivered them to you." **1 Corinthians 11:1-2**. 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'" **1 Corinthians 23-24**.

The biblical record of Paul's ministry repeatedly depicts the Holy Days as important observances, milestones in his life. He told the Ephesians that "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 the time of year as after "the Fast," a reference to the Day of Atonement. Paul, unable to arrive at Jerusalem for the Passover, "remained at Philippi to celebrate it and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Paul and all the apostles taught a consistent message of the believer'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 believers ¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths **Colossians 2:16**. This scripture Shows Gentile believers Kept the Holy Days" and from all these references we can conclude only that the practice of the early Church was to continue the observance of these God-given festivals, the first of which is the Passover.

Theses seven annual festivals are seven Holy Days, which are annual Sabbaths. These Holy Days are the first and last days of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Although the Passover is a festival, it is not an annual Sabbath.

The plan of salvation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures is pictured in the meaning of these seven annual festivals. The annual cycle of the celebration of the festivals and Holy Days reminds Christ's disciples that He is working out His plan of extending

salvation from sin and death and offering the gift of eternal life in the family of God to all humanity, past, present and future.

God commands us to observe annual festivals

"These are the Lord's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times ..." **Leviticus 23:4**. 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 annual occasions on which we should gather with other believers. Just as with the weekly Sabbath, God commands special worship services on each of the Holy Days.

God revealed to the early believers 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 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 **Nehemiah 8:2**. 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 helped them to understand the reading" **Nehemiah 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, because the people had neglected God's festivals, they needed encouragement. "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.' 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" **Nehemiah 8:12**.

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 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 for the Holy Days does entail work, God says that this kind of effort is entirely appropriate. However, on the Day of Atonement we are to forgo all regular work including, of course, food preparation **Leviticus 23, 28, 30-31**.

Living by faith

Responding to God's instruction is a matter of faith. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" **2 Corinthians 5:7**. 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.

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

How to Observe God's Holy Days

Some of these festivals have designated methods of observance that set them apart from the others. 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. All these festival should include the believer bringing their best offering in the right attitude; God said to not come empty handed, but bring your best offering to present as a Holy offering unto him in reverence and thanksgiving. Proper observance of these days includes acknowledging their distinctions, which are designed to teach us spiritual lessons.

There are principles applicable to observing all of God's Holy Days. First, we must remember that these days are holy to God. They are "the feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy occasions," says God **Leviticus 23:2**.

God is the only one who can make anything holy. God places these days on a plane

higher than all human 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 worshiping God properly.

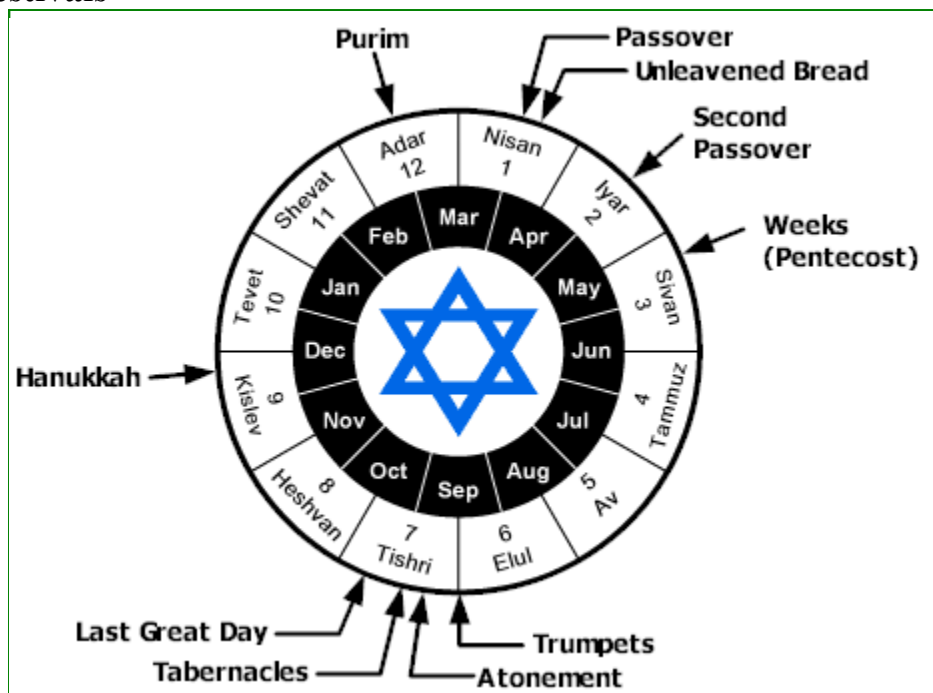
Our Creator desires that people willingly and in faith follow all of His instructions **Isaiah 66:2**. A cooperative, humble attitude stands in contrast to the frame of mind of those who want only to do as little as possible to get by. What matters is whether we really believe and love God. The apostle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

The Bible lists seven festivals to be celebrated each year **Leviticus 23**, and the New Testament shows many examples of Jesus, His apostles and the early Church celebrating them. The first, the Passover, is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. This is also when we renew our agreement to come under the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Passover Lamb for the forgiveness of our sins. We approach this period of the year with deep spiritual self observation. We commemorate the Passover on the 14th day of the first month of the sacred year with a service based on the instructions of **1 Corinthians 11:23-28** and the Gospel accounts of the New Testament Passover that Christ instituted.

The Jewish calendar

The Jewish calendar is primarily lunar with each month beginning on the new moon. An ordinary (non-leap) year has 12 months and about 354 days. Since 12 months are about 11 days shorter than a solar year a leap month is added about every 3 years to keep the calendar in tune with the seasons. The first month of the religious calendar is the month of Nisan. But the Jewish civil New Year is in Tishri, the seventh month.

The Holy Festivals



In the Torah (the first five books of Moses), there were seven sacred festivals instituted by God:

The Feast of Passover (Pesach) - celebrated the night when the angel passed over the Hebrew households in Egypt.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread - commemorated the first 7 days of the Exodus when the Hebrews left Egypt in such a hurry that they did not have time to add yeast to their dough.

The Feast of Weeks - also called the Pentecost (Shavuot). It marked the end of the harvest and offering of first fruits.

The Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah) - the blowing of a ram's horn, or shofar, to call the people to prepare for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Later this day became the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah).

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) - the most solemn day of the year. On this day, the High Priest sacrificed sin offerings to atone all the sins of the people and entered the Most Holy Place to offer incense.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) - celebrated the completion of the great fall harvest

and remembered the Hebrews in the Exodus living in tents for 40 years.

The Feast of the Last Great Day (Shmini Atzeret) - marked the conclusion of the festival year.

Table of Jewish calendar and Festivals

The following table summarizes the Jewish calendar and the sacred festivals. All Jewish holidays begin the evening before the date specified. This is because a Jewish day begins and ends at sunset, rather than at midnight.

Jewish Calendar	Length in a deficient year	Length in a regular year	Length in a complete year	Festivals and Holidays	Gregorian Calendar
1 NISAN	30	30	30	14 evening. Passover (Pesach) 15-21. The Feast of Unleavened Bread	March
2 IYAR	29	29	29	14. Second Passover (Pesach Sheni)	April
3 SIVAN	30	30	30	6. Weeks (Shavuot)	May
4 TAMMUZ	29	29	29		June
5 AV	30	30	30		July
6 ELUL	29	29	29		August
7 TISHRI	30	30	30	1. Trumpets (Yom Teruah) 10. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) 15-21. Tabernacles (Sukkot) 22. Last Great Day (Shmini Atzeret)	September
8 HESHVAN	29	29	30		October
9 KISLEV	29	30	30	25 - 2 Tevet. The Festival of Lights (Hanukkah)	November
10 TEVET	29	29	29		December
11 SHEVAT	30	30	30		January
12 ADAR I*	30 (leap year only)	30 (leap year only)	30 (leap year only)		February
13 ADAR II	29	29	29	14. Purim	March
Total	353 or 383 (leap year)	354 or 384 (leap year)	355 or 385 (leap year)		

* The month Adar I is present only in leap years. In an ordinary year, Adar II is simply called Adar.

Year	1. Purim	2. 1st day Passover	3. 1st day Shavuot	4. 1st day Rosh Hashanah	5. Yom Kippur	6. 1st day Sukkot	7. Shemini Atzeret	8. 1st day Hanukkah
2010	Feb. 28	March 30	May 19	Sept. 9	Sept. 18	Sept. 23	Sept. 30	Dec. 2
2011	March 20	April 19	June 8	Sept. 29	Oct. 8	Oct. 13	Oct. 20	Dec. 21
2012	March 8	April 7	May 27	Sept. 17	Sept. 26	Oct. 1	Oct. 8	Dec. 9
2013	Feb. 24	March 26	May 15	Sept. 5	Sept. 14	Sept. 19	Sept. 26	Nov. 28
2014	March 16	April 15	June 4	Sept. 25	Oct. 4	Oct. 9	Oct. 16	Dec. 17
2015	March 5	April 4	May 24	Sept. 14	Sept. 23	Sept. 28	Oct. 5	Dec. 7

NOTE: All holidays begin at sundown on the evening before the date given.

1. Feast of Lots. Purim: 1 day.
2. Feast of Unleavened Bread. Passover: 7 days;
3. Hebrew Pentecost; or Feast of Weeks, or of Harvest, or of First Fruits. Shavuot: 1 day
4. Jewish New Year. Rosh Hashanah: 1 day
5. Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur: 1 day
6. Feast of Tabernacles, or of the Ingathering. Sukkot: 7 days
7. Assembly of the Eighth Day. Shemini Atzeret: 1 day
8. Festival of Lights. Hanukkah: 8 days.

1. Passover

Commanded in Old Testament:

Leviticus 23:5

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

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

God revealed the Passover festival to the ancient Israelites during the process of freeing them from captivity in Egypt. In it the Israelites brushed their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificial lamb **Exodus 12:7**. This sacrifice was symbolic of the later shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ as the "Lamb of God" and "our Passover" to take away sin and its penalty **John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7**.

The Passover teaches us that Jesus Christ was sinless and as the true Lamb of God, gave

His life so that the sins of humanity could be forgiven and the death penalty removed **1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 3:25**. Passover, although not observed as a Holy Day, is the first festival of the year.

The Passover is the first feast in the cycle. It represents the crucial first step in God's plan to save mankind, without which the other steps would not be possible.

Without the fulfillment of the Passover feast, there would be no salvation. Remission or forgiveness of sins comes through Jesus' shed blood when one repents **Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22; Acts 2:38**. Through acceptance of His blood in faith we are justified or made right with God the Father **Romans 5:9**. Yet salvation itself is accomplished through Jesus' resurrected life: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" **Romans 5:10**. Nevertheless, the reconciliation that comes through accepting Jesus' Passover sacrifice clearly provides a foundation for salvation.

In observing this festival today, we do not sacrifice a lamb but partake of the unleavened bread and wine of Passover as symbolic of Christ's sacrificed body and blood as He instructed **Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25**.

This solemn service begins with a brief explanation of its purpose, followed by foot-washing (based on Christ's example and instructions in **John 13**). Then the minister gives an explanation of the symbols of the Passover, unleavened bread and wine, which represent the body and blood of our Savior. Each baptized member of the Church eats a small piece of the unleavened bread and drinks a small glass of the wine **Mark 14:22-24**. Passover is the only festival that does not also include a Holy Day (annual Sabbath), followed by the call to bring an offering (God said to not come empty handed but bring your best offering to present as a Holy offering unto him).

The Passover **Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5** begins on the evening of the fourteenth day of Nisan (our March-April), the first month in the Jewish calendar and lasts for 7 days. The first and last days of the festival are days on which no work was permitted. It is the first of the three major Jewish festivals (the other two are Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles). All adult males were required to travel to the sanctuary to take part. It combined two celebrations that were originally separated: Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread **Leviticus 23:6-8**). The two were closely linked. Passover celebrated the night when the angel passed over the Hebrew households in Egypt; the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the fact that the Hebrews left Egypt in such a hurry that they did not have time to add leaven (i.e. yeast) to their dough. Eventually the

Jewish people merged the two celebrations into one.

Jesus - The Final Passover Lamb

Jesus is the final Passover Lamb **1 Corinthians 5:7-8**. He entered Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan, the same day when the Passover Lamb was brought into home. The night before Good Friday He was examined by Pilate and was found no fault, thus fulfilling the requirements of the Passover Lamb being a "male without defect." On Good Friday, the day of the Passover celebration, Jesus was crucified **John 19:14**. Jesus said, "It is finished" and died. This was the time when the Passover Lamb was to be slaughtered. Further, when the lamb was roasted and eaten, none of its bones were to be broken. This was prophesized for the Messiah, whose bones were not to be broken **Psalms 34:20**. It was customary for the soldiers to break the leg bones of the crucified person after a few hours in order to hasten their death. The only way a person could breathe when hanging on a cross was to push up with his legs. By breaking the legs, the person could no longer push up to breathe and death soon followed. However they did not break Jesus' bones since He was already dead

Second Passover (Pesach Sheni)

The 14th day of Iyar was the Second Passover. This day served as a "second chance" for those who were unable to attend the Passover one month earlier because of being unclean or being away on a journey.

The circumstances that led to the Second Passover was recorded in **Numbers 9:1-14**. There were some men who were unclean through contact with a dead body and were not allowed to participate in the Passover. They came to Moses and Aaron and voiced their concern that when the Passover sacrifice was offered, they were ritually impure and therefore unable to participate in this sacred obligation. It was then God instituted the Second Passover so that they could present their offering one month later.

The significance of the Second Passover reminds us of God's grace. He always gives us a second chance when we sinned (became unclean) or departed away from Him (away on a journey) so that we can always come back to Him and rectify our wrong doings in the past.

The next festival shows how we should live following the acceptance of the sacrificial death of our Passover, Jesus Christ.

2. Feast of Unleavened Bread

Commanded in Old Testament:

Leviticus 23:6-8

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

Matthew 26:17

Mark 14:12

Luke 2:41-42, 22:1, 7

Acts 20:6

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

The Feast of Unleavened Bread teaches us that we have been called to reject lawlessness and repent of sin. We are to live by every word of God and according to the teachings of Jesus Christ **1 Corinthians 5:8; Matthew 4:4**. During this festival, leaven symbolizes sin and, as such, is removed from our homes for the seven days of the festival **1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Exodus 12:19**. By eating unleavened bread we picture living a life of sincerity and truth, free from sin.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is vitally important to a Christian's salvation; it shows us what God expects of us beyond accepting Jesus' shed blood for forgiveness.

Leaven is an agent, such as yeast, that causes bread dough to expand and rise during baking. God commanded that for the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, leaven is to be removed from our homes and not eaten and we are to instead eat unleavened bread during this period **Leviticus 23:6**.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul applied the symbol of leaven to sin **1 Corinthians 5:6-7**. Conversely, he explained that unleavened bread represents sincerity and truth righteousness and holiness **1 Corinthians 5:8**.

God set aside seven full days, the number seven representing completion and perfection in Scripture, for His followers to remember that He is holy, and that we should become holy as He is **1 Peter 1:16**, striving to put sin out of our lives. Yet we can only do this with the guidance and help of Jesus Christ.

The ancient Israelites departed from Egypt during the Days of Unleavened Bread, following a pillar of cloud and fire. The One the Israelites knew as God was in that cloud **Exodus 13:21**. And this divine Being who accompanied them later came to the earth as Jesus Christ **1 Corinthians 10:4**.

It is also important to note that when the Israelites later came to the Promised Land, they were to present a special grain offering on the first day of the week during the Feast of Unleavened Bread a sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest, which was waved before God for His acceptance **Leviticus 23:9-14**.

This represented Jesus Christ as the initial first fruits of salvation **1 Corinthians 15:23** who was accepted in heaven this day after being resurrected during the festival.

Our ultimate example of living the unleavened life is Christ, and we must follow Him in faith to salvation and eternal life. Yet this is actually possible only through what is pictured in the next festival.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is symbolic of the Christian's responsibility to strive to live a sin-free life. We prepare for the Feast of Unleavened Bread by removing leaven and leavened products (bread or other baked items that are made with yeast, baking powder, baking soda or potassium bicarbonate) from our homes **Exodus 12:18-19**. We also do not eat bread products made with leaven during the seven days of the Unleavened Bread festival in keeping with God's instructions.

This festival begins and ends with an annual Holy Day on which church services are held similar to the kind of services we hold our weekly Sabbath. However, on each of the annual Holy Days, the messages focus on various aspects of the meaning of the day we are observing.

The meetings begin with congregational singing, followed by a prayer; a message is delivered, followed by the call to bring an offering (God said to not come empty handed but bring your best offering to present as a Holy offering unto him) in accordance with **Deuteronomy 16:16-17**. More congregational singing may follow, or a choir or musicians may present special music.

All of the messages provide guidance, encouragement and education to the membership,

as well as help us worship God. The service ends with a final congregational hymn and a closing prayer.

Then on the 15th, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began **Leviticus 23:6-8**. For the next 7 days until the 21st, the people ate unleavened bread.

The first and seventh days of the festival were days on which there was no work and the people came to a holy gathering **Leviticus 23:7, Numbers 28:18, 25**.

3. Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of First fruits

Commanded in Old Testament:

Leviticus 23:15-22

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

Acts 2:1-21; 20:16

1 Corinthians 16:8

The Feast of Pentecost or first fruits, teaches us that Jesus Christ came to build His Church. This festival pictures the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church. They have been empowered with the Holy Spirit, which creates in each one a new heart and nature to live by the commandments of God **Exodus 23:16; Acts 2:1-4, 37-39; 5:32; James 1:18**.

Pentecost is the New Testament term for the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which was also called the Feast of Harvest or Feast of First fruits. The word Pentecost means "fiftieth," as the Israelites were to count 50 days starting with the day of the wave-sheaf offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so that the last day of the count would be the day after seven complete weeks, when a new grain offering was to be brought **Leviticus 23:15-16**.

This offering was also to be a first fruits offering waved before God, taken from the wheat harvest and baked into two loaves of bread **Leviticus 23:17, 20; Exodus 34:22**). Symbolized here are the faithful believers whom God calls the first fruits of all His harvests **James 1:18**. These have "the first fruits of the Spirit." **Romans 8:23**

According to **Acts 2**, it was on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' death and

resurrection that His followers received God's Holy Spirit with a miraculous display of divine power. Thousands more were then converted on this day, also receiving the Spirit upon repentance and baptism.

Modern professing Christians acknowledge the fulfilled promise of the gift of God's Spirit to humankind on this occasion. However, many effectively deny the power of it, not understanding that one must obey God to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit **Acts 5:32**. And receiving the Spirit in turn enables further and sustained obedience **Romans 5:5; 1 John 5:3**.

This is part of the great meaning of Pentecost; along with the fact that God's people of this age are counted as the first fruits of salvation, in anticipation of other fruits to follow in the age to come.

Pentecost is the last of the spring festivals, the last of those that portray events relating to the time of Christ's first coming and the present age. The feasts that follow in the autumn in the land of Israel look ahead to His second coming.

After the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, the second day was observed as "the Feast of First fruits". On this day, a priest waved a sheaf of barley to consecrate the coming harvest **Leviticus 23:10-12**. It was similar to the first fruits celebration of the Feast of Weeks, except that it was in celebration of the barley harvest, while the Feast of Weeks was for the wheat harvest.

Jesus - The First fruit

The Feast of First fruits falls on "the day after the Sabbath" **Leviticus 23:11**, or Nisan 16, which was the very same day when Jesus was resurrected. Thus Jesus has fulfilled being the first fruit of resurrection **1 Corinthians 15:20**.

* Pentecost (reminding us of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Church of God) All Holy Days are high day annual Sabbaths, so Christians do not perform their regular work on them, resting in the same way that they do on every weekly Sabbath.

4. Feast of Trumpets

Commanded in Old Testament:

Leviticus 23:23-25

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

Matthew 24:30-31

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Revelation 11:15

The Feast of Trumpets teaches us that Jesus Christ will visibly return to the earth at the end of this age. At that time He will resurrect the saints who are no longer living and instantly change those saints who are still alive to immortal spirit beings **Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17**. This festival commemorates the blowing of the trumpets that will precede His return. Seven angels with seven trumpets are described in **Revelation 8-10**. Christ will return with the blowing of the seventh trumpet **Revelation 11:15**.

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.

As mentioned earlier, the great ingathering harvest in Israel came in late summer and early fall. It was celebrated with the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles **Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:16**, but the festival period actually commenced with the Feast of Trumpets two weeks earlier.

On this day there was a "memorial of blowing of trumpets" **Leviticus 23:24**. This represents the time of the coming of the Messiah to take over the rule of the world, as Jesus will do when He returns **Revelation 19:11-21; 12:10; compare Zechariah 14; Isaiah 11:1-10**.

Jesus' second coming will be heralded by supernatural trumpet blasts. During a period known as "the day of the Lord" and "the great day of His wrath" **Revelation 6:17**, God will bring judgment on the rebellious nations of the earth. **Revelation 8-9** presents the cataclysmic circumstances that will follow the blowing of six successive trumpets.

Revelation 11:15 then describes the blowing of the seventh trumpet, when this world's governments are transferred over to the rule of the returning Christ. It is also the time of the rewarding of God's saints, His faithful servants of this age **Revelation 11:18**. They

will, at this last trumpet, be resurrected from the dead **1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16** at last receiving ultimate salvation from death through transformation into immortal spirit beings.

The seventh trumpet also heralds further judgment on those who remain defiant, who persist in destroying the earth and its inhabitants **Revelation 11:18**.

Jesus Christ, through the meaning of the Feast of Trumpets, directs His attention to saving His people as well as the rest of humankind **Revelation 19:11-21**, breaking the power of the world's leaders and humbling the nations to the point that they will accept His intervention and rule.

But the major obstacle to mankind learning God's ways will still have to be removed, and that is pictured in the next occasion God instructs us to observe.

* The Feast of Trumpets (picturing the return of Jesus Christ). All Holy Days are high day annual Sabbaths, so Christians do not perform their regular work on them, resting in the same way that they do on every weekly Sabbath.

5. The Day of Atonement

**Commanded in Old Testament:
Leviticus 23:26-32**

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

Acts 27:9

The Day of Atonement teaches us that Jesus Christ gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. It also points to the time when Satan will be bound for 1,000 years **Leviticus 16:29-30, 20-22; Revelation 20:1-3**. This Holy Day pictures our High Priest, Jesus Christ, making atonement for our sins, which allows us to be reconciled to God and enter into the "holiest of all" **Hebrews 9:8-14; 10:19-20**. By fasting on this day, we draw closer to God and picture the reconciliation of mankind to God. Christ is essential in this process as our High Priest **Hebrews 4:14-15; 5:4-5, 10** and as our eternal sacrifice for sin **Hebrews 9:26-28**.

The next of God's appointed times are a solemn day of drawing near to Him through fasting **Leviticus 23:26-32**. On this day, the Israelites were to sacrifice a goat to represent the Lord, the high priest was to take its blood into the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle (the only time he went in during the year) and he was to confess the people's sins over a live goat, which was then driven off into the wilderness **Leviticus 16**.

The sacrifice of the first goat, representing the Lord, along with the high priest taking its blood into the Most Holy Place signified the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His intercessory work as High Priest. This was to bring atonement, a word meaning "at-one-ment" with God. Yet further atonement was required through the driving away of the second goat. What does this symbolize?

If the world knew that vast numbers of demons, powerful evil spirits led by the rebellious archangel now known as Satan the devil truly existed, that they hold sway over the earth and that their vowed purpose is to debase and destroy humankind, people might well turn to God to save them.

The reason they don't is obvious when you understand it. Satan, as the god of this age **2 Corinthians 4:4**, has blinded them from this fact. He has deceived the whole world, palming himself off as an angel of light, which he once was. He is now our adversary, who walks the earth like a roaring and devouring lion **Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8**.

Humanity has willingly turned from God and has come under Satan's dominion. Jesus said, "Their eyes they have closed" **Matthew 13:15**. Although Satan is ultimately responsible and accountable for mankind's blindness, we still have a responsibility in this great deception. We can repent and change.

The Day of Atonement is the appointed time for celebrating the removal of Satan and the demons from the world scene **Revelation 20:1-3; Isaiah 14:16-17**. With Satan's expulsion, human beings can truly experience "at-one-ment" with God, as God intends **John 17:20-21**. Indeed, God will remove all forces that have set themselves to destroy His plan, which is to expand His family through the salvation of billions of human beings.

The Day of Atonement is also a reminder of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice. Following Jesus' return, His sacrifice will begin to be applied to the world at large, as all are led to

accept it in repentance, being no longer under the influence of the devil.

For the first time in the history of mankind, we will fully experience peace on earth, with God's will for people no longer being resisted by Satan.

* The Day of Atonement has a unique aspect to it, in that God instructs us to "fast" or to go without food and drink. "Afflicted in soul" **Leviticus 23:29** meaning to humble oneself through fasting.

6. The Feast of Tabernacles

**Commanded in Old Testament:
Leviticus 23:33-43**

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

**John 7:1-2, 8, 10, 14
Acts 18:21**

The Feast of Tabernacles teaches us that when Jesus Christ returns, a new society will be established with Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Christ, assisted by the resurrected saints, will set up His government on the earth for 1,000 years **Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4; Leviticus 23:39-43; Matthew 17:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-9**. Rule under His laws will spread from Jerusalem throughout the world to usher in an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity **Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:13-14**.

Finally, what God had promised through the ages, to bring peace on earth **Luke 2:14, Isaiah 9:6-7** foretold both the first and second comings of the Messiah in stating: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" **Isaiah 9:6-7**.

As pictured in the Feast of Trumpets, Jesus will take over the rule of this world **Revelation 11:15**. Satan will be deposed and incarcerated, as shown in the Day of Atonement **Revelation 20:1-3**. Then Jesus and His resurrected and transformed saints will reign on the earth over all nations for 1,000 years, a millennium **Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6**.

During this 1,000 year messianic reign over physical nations of the earth, Christ will live with humankind. This is celebrated in the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, referring to tents or temporary dwellings **Leviticus 23:33-43**.

For the duration of this festival, God's people live in temporary dwellings, recalling in part the time when God "made the children of Israel dwell in booths" following the Exodus **Leviticus 23:43**. In fact, God Himself also dwelt in a tabernacle in journeying with the Israelites through the desert.

Yet this Feast also looks forward to the wonderful, though temporary, conditions of the millennial age, which anticipates a permanent new heaven and new earth to follow **Revelation 21-22**.

As previously noted, this festival was also called the Feast of Ingathering **Exodus 23:16**, celebrating the great harvest of late summer and fall in the Promised Land.

This harvest depicted the ultimate spiritual harvest of humanity to come, the later fruits following the first fruits of this age. The future harvest begins with those who live through the terrible events at the end of this age and into the millennial period. It then continues with their progeny throughout the 1,000 years, generation after generation.

Under the righteous rule of God, humanity will live in unprecedented peace and unparalleled health and prosperity **Zechariah 14:8-11; Isaiah 2:1-4; 11; 35; Micah 4:1-8; Amos 9:13-15. Ezekiel 36:35** says the environment will be like the Garden of Eden: "So they will say, 'this land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'"

At that time, God will extend His New Covenant relationship to all mankind, beginning with Israel:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" **Hebrews 8:10-11**.

These conditions will continue into the period pictured in the next festival, which comes at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, though distinct and separate from it.

Most of the Holy Days are observed in local congregations, with the exception of the Feast of Tabernacles Church members and their families gather in centralized locations for that entire eight-day festival season. We observe this main festival season of the year with daily church services, including those days that are not annual or weekly Sabbaths. This festival is also a time of great spiritual and physical enjoyment and includes programs for families, seniors, teens and young adults.

7. Last Great Day, the Eighth Day

**Commanded in Old Testament:
Leviticus 23:36**

Observed by Jesus Christ, the apostles or the Church in the New Testament:

John 7:37-38

The Last Great Day, or eighth day, teaches us that Jesus Christ will complete His harvest of humans by raising from the dead and extending salvation to all human beings who have died in the past and have never been given a full opportunity for salvation **Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 11:25-27; Luke 11:31-32; Revelation 20:11-13.**

On the day following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles the eighth day the Israelites were to observe a final Holy Day in the annual cycle God gave **Leviticus 23:36, 39.**

Though a separate festival, the Eighth Day is connected to the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering because it further celebrates the future spiritual harvest of mankind, portraying events that will immediately follow the millennial reign of Christ and His resurrected and transformed saints.

The 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity for the entire global human family serves as a stepping stone to a vast increase in the late harvest of human lives. **Revelation 20:5** says that "the rest of the dead" will live again when the 1,000 years are finished. This includes all people who lived but were not converted to God's way from Adam to

Christ's second coming which could number in the scores of billions.

They will be raised to physical life and at last given the opportunity for salvation during a period of judgment **Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42; 1 Peter 2:12; Revelation 20:11-12**. This is sometimes called the Great White Throne Judgment, as **Revelation 20:11-12** describes the risen dead standing before such a throne.

The White Throne Judgment is not an instant sentencing but a period of evaluation and corrective measures spanning the new lifetime of those resurrected paralleling the lifetime judgment of God's saints today, whom He wants to save, not lose **1 Peter 4:17; 1 Corinthians 11:31-32**.

Sadly, not everyone will choose salvation. Those who ultimately refuse to repent will be destroyed in a lake of fire **Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8**. But the vast majority of mankind will be saved transformed into immortal spirit like those in the first resurrection.

Indeed, the whole creation will be transformed. The great beauty, peace and prosperity on earth during Christ's millennial reign will continue through the White Throne Judgment period. And after this, the present earth and sky will give way to, as mentioned earlier, a new heaven and new earth at which time God the Father as well as Jesus Christ will dwell with glorified humanity forever **Revelation 21-22**.

The Last Great Day; Church members and their families gather in centralized locations for that entire eight-day festival season. We observe this main festival season of the year with daily church services, including those days that are not annual or weekly Sabbaths. This festival is also a time of great spiritual and physical enjoyment and includes programs for families, seniors, teens and young adults.

Conclusion

God's festivals help us to solve the prophetic puzzle of how mankind is to be saved, bringing God's plan into focus.

From the harvest of Jesus Christ as the initial first fruits, to the harvest of the rest of the first fruits of this age and finally to the ultimate harvest of the remainder of mankind in the age to come, God's plan entails everyone, yet in a specific order.

And we are reminded of this plan each year through God's seven annual festivals, which come in accordance with the three major harvest seasons in the land of Israel.

What a great blessing and privilege it is to understand that God will ultimately offer salvation to everyone and that we have the opportunity to live according to His calling today!

God has told us to observe these days forever and keep them Holy unto him, so to truly serve God we should observe all the days he calls Holy, including the true Sabbath!