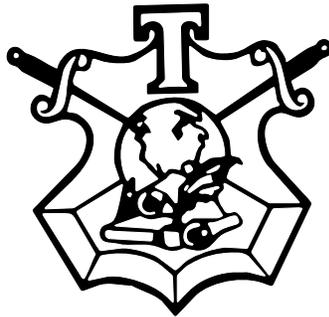


**Pagan Holidays
Versus God's
Biblical Holy Days**

—

**the Awesome Plan of
God Revealed**

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Foreword

Just how important are God's Biblical Holy Days? Were they just instituted for ancient Israel, as part of the "Old Covenant"? Are they effectively abolished under the "New Covenant"?

If so, then why did Christ say He came "NOT" to "abolish" the Law, but to fulfill it – to make it "COMPLETE"? (Matt.5:17). Why did He say not a "jot" or a "tittle" would pass from the Law till heaven and earth passed away into oblivion? (Matt.5:18-19).

Why would God institute holy days "FOR EVER" and then turn right around and "abolish" them? Is God fickle? Is He "changeable"?

In Malachi, God says, "I CHANBE NOT" (Mal.3:8).

God also says His holly days are created to last "FOREVER" (1Leviticus 23, Exo.14:12).

Why did the visible worldwide so-called "Christian" church ignore God's Biblical holy days and substitute in their place ancient pagan days of worship of pagan gods like the goddess "Easter," "Isis," Eastre," "Ashtarte," the day people observe as "Easter Sunday," supposedly in worship of Christ?

Why did they institute "Christmas" on December 25 and call it Christ's birthday when He wasn't born anywhere near that date, but it was the "birthday" and "worship day" of the [pagan SUN GOD?

Why, indeed! In this book we will reveal the startling truth of how the world swerved into paganism and rejected God's true holy days which picture God's plan of salvation for mankind!

Chapter 1

Mystery Babylon – How Paganism Masked Itself as the “Christian” Church!

The world’s attention has been caught by an explosive new movie and book, called “The Da Vinci Code.” Multiple millions have read the book and the new movie, starring Tom Hanks, is no doubt going to be a smash hit around the world. The movie and book, in novel form, powerfully contends that Christianity itself is a fraud, and that the Catholic Church in particular has been guilty of covering up the supposed “truth” that Jesus Christ was married, had children, and that vast evidence has been covered up and hidden which allegedly “proves” this to be the case – that Jesus Christ was not the “Son of God,” but rather a great human teacher and prophet. The book suggests that many other “gospels” were written which show this, contrary to the gospels in the authorized canon of the New Testament.

Many of these claims are pure bunkum. Yet for the uninformed, they throw great clouds of dust in the air, creating doubt as to the authenticity of God’s Word, particularly the New Testament!

Historically, the canon of the New Testament, as we have it today, is absolutely accurate and was the accepted canon of books *used in the early centuries of the church*. In the days of Jesus Christ, there was a body of literature called “The Scriptures” which was commonly regarded by the Jews as having come from God. They called it the Word of God, and Christ Himself acknowledged it (John 10:35; 5:39). As the first century writings of the apostles appeared, they were added to these Jewish Scriptures and held in the same sacred regard throughout the new scattered churches. By widespread and common acceptance, they came to be regarded as inspired Scripture as well. They were put together into an “canon,” or list of original and authorized list of books, by the apostle Paul, and finally by the apostle John, that last remaining apostle who died about 90 A.D. Any writings by any Christians after that date were automatically excluded.

While the apostles were yet living, they had begun under their own supervision collecting their writings to be made use of by the churches. Paul claimed his teaching was inspired by God (I Cor.2:7-3; 14:37; I Thess.2:13). Peter accepted Paul's writings as inspired "Scripture" (II Pet.3:15-16). John also claimed the book of Revelation was "revealed" to him by Christ (Rev.1:1-2). These writings were intended to be read in the churches (Col.4:16; I Thess.5:27; II Thess.2:15), including after their "departure" (II Pet.3:15; 3:1-2). Paul quoted as "Scripture", the declaration, "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (I Tim.5:18), a statement found only in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7, thus categorizing those two gospels as inspired Scripture.

For more discussion and insight, I refer you to *Halley's Pocket Bible Handbook*, and various Bible Dictionaries, and F. F. Bruce's books, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, and *The Canon of Scripture*.

In the fourth century and thereabouts, various Gnostic sects arose, claiming other "inspired" books and made up their own "list" or "canon" of inspired writings, their own "New Testaments," as it were. As a result, at that time, to maintain order and to refute the Gnostic canons, the visible Church had to make up its own official "canon" of Scriptures. It was based on all the commonly accepted New Testament books which were then in use by the Christian churches throughout the Mediterranean region. It was because of these spurious "canons" coming on the scene, devised by heretics like Marcion (circa A.D. 140), and others, which compelled the Church at that time to designate and put its stamp of approval upon all those New Testament book which were already in common use in the Churches.

The canonization of the New Testament, itself, was no Catholic "conspiracy." This was a simple step of prudence – to make a final stamp of approval and authenticity upon those books already in common usage at that time. A formal decree recognizing the Christian canon was not made until 405 A.D. – long after Constantine's time.

The principle contention and focus of the novel is the supposed "marriage" of Jesus Christ to Mary Magdalene, and alleged descendants from that marriage called the Merovingians, and a mysterious group called the Priory of Zion, whose supposed task is to safeguard this "bombshell" knowledge and protect the alleged "heirs." Allegedly, Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo Da Vinci were among its members. However, there is no real evidence to support this fantasy. The truth is, the Priory of Zion documents were proven conclusively to have been an elaborate HOAX in the 1990s. The society, as Brown depicted it, never existed!

Was Jesus married, as the novel claims? The four gospels and New Testament clearly would have stated it if Christ has been married to a woman. But they do not. The Jewish historian Josephus plainly states that while most Jewish men of the first century married, certain ones who were holy men did not. This would include John the Baptist, Jeremiah, an earlier figure, and even the apostle Paul (I Cor.7:1-8). Knowing in advance that He was going to die for our sins a horrible death on a cross, Yeshua would not have

married a woman. His real bride is the CHURCH itself! (Matt.25:1-13; see also Rev.19:8).

The story that Christ had a “companion” is mentioned in a pseudo-gospel account called the Gospel of Philip, a work of Gnosticism which arose in the second century. However, the Greek word for “companion” is the same one used to denote a “coworker,” “business associate,” or a “companion in faith.” The true canonical gospels Matthew and Luke mention no marriage, and they date from the first century and are testified to by the apostle Paul himself as to their being inspired Scripture, as I mentioned previously. As the gospel writers show, it was not the purpose of Christ to marry and have physical children, but to come, preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and to give His life on the cross, deliberately, and knowingly, and thereby to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, dying in our stead (John 3:16).

A Darker Plot

However, another part of the Da Vinci Code is remarkably on target, pinpointing the outline of a vast conspiracy which did occur over hundreds of years, especially during the fourth century, the time of Constantine! When we separate the facts from the fiction, we find the Da Vinci Code touches briefly on the outline of a real, true “vast conspiracy” which occurred in the Christian church about that time, which if fully understood would shock and stun every Sunday-going Christian and church member of the mainstream churches, today!

Huge Christian churches may huff and puff, and remain in total denial, but the facts of history are salient and irrefutable. The Da Vinci Code is not all nonsense, as major Christian organizations claim. Portions of the Da Vinci code are absolutely “right on,” concerning the great changes made in the fourth century, during the time of Roman emperor Constantine. The novel gives an intriguing glimpse into this other “mystery,” which it nails.

Dan Brown has one of his antagonists point out that Emperor Constantine was a wily, clever man, whose empire was threatened with open revolt and division, because of warring religious interests. The character says, “Constantine converted the sun-worshipping pagans to Christianity. By fusing pagan symbols, dates, and rituals into the growing Christian tradition, he created a *kind of hybrid religion* that was acceptable to both parties” (p.252). The character goes on, “The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable. Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis nursing her miraculously conceived son Horus became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual – the miter, the altar, the doxology, and communion, the act of ‘God-eating’ – were taken directly from pagan mystery religions.”

Is this really true? The character continues, “The pre-Christian god Mithras – called the Son of God and the Light of the World – was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days. By the way, December 25 is

also the birthday of Osiris, Adonis, and Dionysus. The newborn Krishna was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans. . . Originally . . . Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun. . . . To this day, most churchgoers attend church on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute – *Sunday*” (*ibid.*).

This should certainly be “shocking,” if true? Is it really true? The answer is an overwhelming, thundering *YES!* It is absolutely *TRUE!*

The history of this “Great Deception,” or “Great Conspiracy,” is fascinating, and well documented. Far, far, far beyond and above the speculations of the *Da Vinci Code* and its “conspiracy theory,” there is a far more ancient, vast and fundamental conspiracy which has been “covered up” and hidden from view by the professing Christian and Catholic churches. This cover-up involves the very origins of the vast professing Christian churches around us, today!

Dan Brown's “conspiracy” only goes back to the fourth century, after Christ, but the true facts show that a tremendous, horrendous, awesome conspiracy concerning the church goes back much further than that – back to at least 2,000 years before Christ walked upon the planet earth!

The mind-blowing truth is that author Dan Brown touched tangentially on a far vaster conspiracy which HAS deceived the entire world. It foreshadowed the Messiahship of Christ and subsequently hi-jacked the infant, toddling Christian Church, subverting it from the inside out, cloaking itself with “Christian” code words!

This plot should have astounded the world – but the world is still *BLIND* to its existence, power, scope, and diabolical purpose and goal – the destruction of all humanity.

The “Christianity” we see all around us today, celebrating Easter, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and which parades itself as the true Church of Christ, is anything but “Christian.” Millions of people have been deceived – blind-sided – and have no idea of the truth!

Religious Deception Foretold

The plot was foretold long ago. In the Bible itself we read of “that serpent of old, called the Devil, and Satan, *who deceives the whole world*” (Rev.12:9). This vast, global and ancient conspiracy began in the earliest days of the human race, when that old serpent beguiled Eve in the garden of Eden, leading her to question God, His motives, His authority, and appealing to her desire for wisdom, tricked her into disobeying the commandment of God, and her husband with her (Gen.3:1-7). At that time, God promised Adam and Eve that one day there would be a “Seed” from the woman who would “bruise” the head of the devil (the deceiver), and deliver mankind from his

deceptive clutches – the first promise of a future Deliverer or Messiah (Gen.3:15). The Hebrew word for “bruise” here is *shuwph*, meaning “go gape, i.e. snap at, fig. to overwhelm: -- break, bruise, cover.” To “break” his head means to destroy him (Heb.2:14). When that would be fulfilled was not mentioned at that time.

From the beginning the devil tried to palm himself off as the true “God” and invented many religions to lead mankind to worship him in various guises and forms. He inspired men to begin different religions, to counterfeit the truth of God, to lead them away from the true God. Before the Flood, he used Adam’s son Cain to begin his diabolical apostasy and false religion. In this religion, the “cross” began to be worshiped and used as a talisman or good luck charm (supposedly the “mark” God placed on Cain to prevent men from killing him, after he had killed Abel his brother).

Cain saw himself as the “promised Messiah” and began his own religion, a religion of gross sensuality and wickedness, eventually leading the whole world before the Deluge into a time of corruption and violence, the end-result of religious perversion (Gen.6:11-12). This false religion was called “the way of Cain” (Jude 11). This is in contrast to “the Way” of the Christian, the “Way” which the world calls “a sect,” or “heresy” (Acts 24:14).

Cupid-Nimrod

This evil, seductive religious “way” manifested itself this side of the Flood, through the agency of Cush, the son of Ham, the son of Noah, and Cush’s son Nimrod and his wife Semiramis. Nimrod became the first “mighty man” after the Flood – the first world ruling tyrant and oppressor (Gen.10:8-10). He led the building of the Tower Babel, to “emancipate” mankind from the rulership of the God of heaven. He became the world’s first “Messiah” figure this side of the Flood, and became worshipped in many nations around the world of that time, under different names in different nations and languages.

One of his many names was “Cupid.” The origin of Cupid and his prominence in pagan religion is discussed in Hislop’s *Two Babylons*. He mentions that the ancient poet Aristophanes declared “we are informed that he from whom both ‘mighty ones’ and gods derived their origin, was none other than the winged boy Cupid.” In a footnote Hislop declares, “Aristophanes says that Eros or Cupid produced the ‘birds’ and ‘gods’ by ‘mingling all things.’ This evidently points to the meaning of the name Bel, which signifies at once ‘the mingler’ and ‘the confounder.’ This name properly belonged to the father of Nimrod, but, as the son is represented as identified with the father, we have evidence that the name descended to the son and others by inheritance” (page 40).

Cupid occupied the very same position as Ninus the “son” did to Rhea, the mother of the gods. Nimrod was the first of the “mighty ones” after the Flood, as we read in Genesis, “Cush became the father of *Nimrod*; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD” (Gen.10:8-9).

Thus Cupid, the god of love, was none other than the infant NIMROD, the one who taught rebellion against the LORD, Yahveh, after the Flood – the one who led the revolt against God’s laws, and who attempted to build the tower of Babel, to strike against heaven and the heavenly host! Cupid is pictured as a child hunter, with bow and arrows, and grew up to be “the mighty hunter before [i.e. *against*] the LORD.”

Among the pagans, “The ‘Heart’ was one of the sacred symbols of Osiris when he was born again, and appeared as Harpocrates, or the infant divinity, borne in the arms of his mother Isis” (*ibid.*, p.188). The fruit of the Egyptian persea plant was sacred to him as it resembled the human heart in shape. He was frequently represented with a heart, or the heart-shaped fruit of the persea, much as Cupid is often represented with a “heart.”

Says Hislop, “Thus the boy-god came to be regarded as the ‘god of the heart,’ in other words, as Cupid, or the god of love. To identify this infant divinity, with his father ‘the mighty hunter,’ he was equipped with ‘bow and arrows.’ In the hands of the poets, this sportive boy-god was celebrated as taking aim with his gold-tipped shafts at the hearts of mankind. His real character, however, as the above statement shows . . . was far higher and of a very different kind. He was the woman’s seed. Venus and her son Cupid, then, were none other than the Madonna and the child” (*ibid.*).

“The heart,” in Chaldee, is “Bel.” The worship of the “sacred Heart” is the worship of the “Sacred Bel,” the mighty one out of Babylon, or Nimrod! In time this became the “Sacred Heart” so prominent in the Roman Catholic Church.

Semiramis = Venus = Nemesis

Rhea, the mother of Ninus [Nimrod], was Semiramis, “the mother of the gods.” Semiramis also became Nimrod’s wife. Says Alexander Hislop, “The Chaldean Mysteries can be traced up to the days of Semiramis, who lived only a few centuries after the flood, and who is known to have impressed upon them the image of her own depraved and polluted mind. That beautiful but abandoned queen of Babylon was not only herself a paragon of unbridled lust and licentiousness, but in the Mysteries which she had a chief hand in forming, she was worshiped as Rhea, the great ‘MOTHER’ of the gods, with such atrocious rites as identified her with Venus, the MOTHER of all impurity, and raised the very city where she had reigned to a bad eminence among the nations, as the grand seat at once of idolatry and consecrated prostitution” (*Two Babylons*, p.5).

Cupid’s mother, Venus, is also called “Nemesis” by the ancients. Nemesis was the “goddess of revenge.” Pausanias comments on the stature of Nemesis, saying, “Among the Smyrneans, however, who possess the most holy images of Nemesis, I perceived afterwards that these statues had wings. For, as this goddess principally pertains to lovers, on this account they may be supposed to have given wings to Nemesis, as well as to love,” – that is, Cupid (Hislop, “Appendix,” page 291).

Hislop asserts, “Though a goddess of love and a goddess of revenge might seem very remote in their characters from one another, yet it is not difficult to see how this might have come about. The goddess who was revealed to the initiated in the Mysteries, in the most alluring manner, was also known to be most unmerciful and unrelenting in taking vengeance upon those who revealed these Mysteries; for every such one who was discovered was unsparingly put to death” (p.291).

Says Hislop, “Thus, then, the cup-bearing goddess was at once Venus, the goddess of licentiousness, and Nemesis, the stern and unmerciful one to all who rebelled against her authority. How remarkable a type of the woman, whom John saw, described in one aspect as the ‘Mother of harlots,’ and in another as ‘Drunken with the blood of the saints’” (*ibid.*; compare Rev.17:5-6).

Mother and Child

Therefore we see that the Mother of the gods, Venus-Nemesis-Rhea-Semiramis, was also the mother of Nimrod-Ninus-Cupid. This “mother-and-child” worship was a pagan perversion of the true Messiah, Yeshua or Jesus, the son of Mary. Mary was not a god or goddess, but a chosen vehicle to bear the Christ-child, and therefore highly favored and blessed among mankind. But she was not divine, nor was her conception “immaculate.” She was merely a human being, blessed of God to be the physical parent of Christ, when He came into human flesh (Matt.1:18-21; Luke 1:28-35).

But the arrogance and conceit of Nimrod and Semiramis knew no boundaries. Says Hislop, “The Babylonians, in their popular religion, supremely worshiped a goddess Mother and a Son, who was represented in pictures and in images as an infant or child in his mother’s arms. From Babylon this worship of the Mother and the Child spread to the ends of the earth. In Egypt, the Mother and the Child were worshiped under the names of Isis and Osiris. In India even to this day as Isi and Iswara; in Asia as Cybele and Deoius; in Pagan Rome as Fortuna and Jupiter-puer, or Jupiter, the boy; in Greece, as Ceres, the Great Mother, with the babe at her breast, or as Irene, the goddess of Peace, with the boy Plutus in her arms; and even in Tibet, in China, and Japan, the Jesuit missionaries were astonished to find the counterpart of Madonna and her child as devoutly worshiped as in Pagan Rome itself; Shing Moo, the Holy Mother in China, being represented with a child in her arms” (Hislop, p.20-21).

Semiramis was worshiped by the Babyonians and other eastern nations as Rhea, the great Goddess “Mother.” However, she derived her own glory from her son, as well as her claims to deification and divinity. Her son, Nimrod, or Cupid, was a person of great stature and immense powers, as well as personality and charisma – great personal magnetism. He was widely admired, and worshipped, and among the pagans was also known as Tammuz, and Bacchus, that is to say, “The Lamented One.” Thus Ninus-Nimrod-Cupid, the son of Semiramis, was a counterfeit “Son of God.” Women adored him. In the book of Daniel we read of an end-time world ruler who “shall pay no respect to the gods of his ancestors, *or to the one beloved by women*” (dan.11:37, NRSV) – or “the desire of women” (NKJV) – that is, Nimrod! He provoked many women to

jealousy, so much so that one idolatrous image of him was called “this image of jealousy.” This image stood in the gateway entrance north of the Temple of God, right in God’s face, as it were. God brought Ezekiel to this north gateway, “to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy,” “this image of jealousy,” where the people behaved by doing “great abominations” (Ezekiel 8:3, 5).

Some scholars think it was the image of Baal, others believe it was an image of Mars, and others Adonis or Tammuz. In reality, they were all at times representations of Nimrod! The image name agrees perfectly, however, with Adonis-Tammuz, or Cupid, represented as a beautiful youth, beloved by Venus (his mother and later wife!). In one myth, Mars, the paramour of Venus, was so jealous of Adonis that he sent a wild boar to attack him, which killed him with his two tusks. Hence it was the image of him who fell a victim to jealousy.

Ezekiel 8:14 speaks of women “weeping for Tammuz,” the idol-god who had been slain. All scholars agree that Tammuz signifies Adonis. Says Adam Clarke, it is Adonis who is likely the one called “The dead” (Lev.19:27;28; Deut.14:9), because he is worshiped as one dead. The women represented as worshipping him were probably adulteresses, and had suffered the jealousies of their husbands. And the outrageous image of this sexual apostate and seducer provoked God Himself to jealousy over His people who were straying from the right path.

Notice how this whole pagan panoply of gods and traditions were a satanic COUNTERFEIT of the coming of the TRUE CHRIST, Yeshua the Messiah, who came and died for our sins on the stake in 30 A.D. Christ was the true “woman’s seed” who would one day defeat Satan the devil (Gen.3:15). But the pagans projected this great prophecy upon their own “Messiah”-“Saviour”, Nimrod, in his many forms and guises! They claimed he was the true “Christ”, a title which means “Anointed One.”

When in the fullness of time, the true Christ came on the scene, as recorded in the gospels of the New Testament, the old pagan Messiahs had preceded him, and even “died” in a counterfeit of the death of Christ, and were supposedly “resurrected”, in the pagan religious beliefs.

What very few people realize is how these ancient pagan beliefs, customs, and even religious holidays later became BLENDED in with the “Christianity” of the world, over the centuries, beginning most pronouncedly in the days of Constantine, emperor of Rome circa 325. A.D.!

Tracing the Subversion

The early apostles foretold it would occur. The apostle Peter wrote, warning, “There will be false teachers among you, who will SECRETLY bring in destructive heresies” (II Pet.2:1). He said, “Many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the WAY of TRUTH will be blasphemed” (v.2). The word translated “secretly” here is *pareisago* and means “to lead in aside,” “introduce surreptitiously.”

Jude also wrote, “For certain men have crept in UNNOTICED, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). The Greek word for “unnoticed” here is *pareisduno*, meaning “to settle in alongside,” “lodge stealthily,” “creep in unawares.”

It began happening during the first century itself. Paul warned the Galatian church, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a DIFFERENT GOSPEL” (Gal.1:6). He warned the church at Ephesus, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Soon whole churches began falling away from the truth and going astray. Paul warned, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned to fables” (II Tim.4:3-4). The apostasy spread quickly, so much so that Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me” (II Tim.1:15).

It had begun to happen, just as Paul had predicted. He described the process this way – “For the *MYSTERY* [“hidden truth,” margin] of lawlessness is already at work” (II Thess.2:7). The word for “mystery,” *musterion*, literally means “to shut the mouth,” “a secret or mystery (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites).”

This age-old conspiracy is called here the “MYSTERY of lawlessness,” or “the mystery of iniquity” (KJV), “secret power of lawlessness” (NIV), “Mysterious Wickedness” (Good News Bible), “The *Amplified Bible* describes it as “that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority.”

It infiltrated the church. It wormed its way inside and gradually “took over” the reins of the visible churches. It did this covertly, so that almost no one was the wiser. Only a few caught on to the destruction and corruption that was occurring in the church around the Mediterranean world. The ancient PAGAN gods were incorporated into the church as “saints,” their festivals as “Christian” festivals, renamed, and their rites and ceremonies were now “baptized” and sprinkled with “holy water” to make them acceptable to naïve and unsuspecting church members.

For example, today’s Easter celebration is universally believed to be “Christian” in origin. But it has its roots deep in ancient paganism – centuries before the birth of Christ – and its rites have scarcely changed.

Says Ralph Woodrow in *Babylon Mystery Religion*:

“The word itself, as the dictionaries and encyclopedias explain, comes from the name of a Pagan Goddess – the goddess of Spring. Easter is but

a more modern form of Ishtar, Eostre, Oostera, or Astarte. Ishtar, another name for Semiramis of Babylon, was pronounced as we pronounce 'Easter' today! And so the name of the Spring Festival, 'Easter,' is definitely paganistic, the name being taken from the name of the Goddess" (p. 152).

The Easter "egg" was a sacred symbol of the ancient Babylonians. They believed an old fable about a huge egg which supposedly fell from heaven into the Euphrates River. From this egg, says the legend, the goddess Astarte (Easter) was hatched. From Babylon the idea of the mystic, sacred egg spread abroad to many nations.

Admits the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

"The egg as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ancient Egyptians and Persians, who had also the custom of colouring and eating eggs during their spring festival" (article, "Easter").

Says Alexander Hislop regarding the festival of Easter:

"Then look at Easter. What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar" (*The Two Babylons*, p. 103).

Adds Hislop:

"Such is the history of Easter. The popular observances that still attend the period of its celebration amply confirm the testimony of history as to its Babylonian character. The hot cross buns of Good Friday, and the dyed eggs of Pasch or Easter Sunday, figured in the Chaldean rites just as they do now. The 'buns,' known too by that identical name, were used in the worship of the queen of heaven, the goddess Easter, as early as the days of Cecrops, the founder of Athens – that is, 1500 years before the Christian era" (p.108).

Says Woodrow:

"Now since the true saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, *in reality* did rise (not merely in nature, plants, etc.); and since his resurrection was in the *spring* of the year – though slightly earlier than the pagan festival of olden times – it was not too hard for the church of the fourth century (now greatly departed from the true faith anyway) to merge the pagan spring festival into Christianity – attaching the various phases of it to Christ. In this way, it would appear to be a *Christian* festival, yet at the same time, it would retain many of its ancient customs" (*op. cit.*, p. 157).

There is no record in the New Testament of the early Christians ever observing Easter. But there is evidence that, as Christ commanded, they continued observing the Passover each spring, *on the 15th of Nisan*, commemorating Christ's sacrifice for our

sins! How, then, did Easter creep into the professing Christian Church?

How Easter Replaced Passover

Says historian and scholar Alexander Hislop:

“The difference, in point of time, betwixt the Christian Pasch, as observed in Britain by the native Christians, and the Pagan Easter enforced by Rome, at the time of its enforcement, was *a whole month*; and it was *only by violence and bloodshed*, at last, that the Festival of the Anglo-Saxon or Chaldean goddess came to supersede that which had been held in honour of Christ” (*The Two Babylons*, p. 107).

After the New Testament was completely written and after all the original apostles had died, a change occurred. Church historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut describes the age that followed as “the Age of Shadows.”

Says Hurlbut: “For fifty years after. . . Paul’s life *a curtain hangs over the church*, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church *in many aspects very different* from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul” (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

Says Alan W. Watts in *Easter, Its Story and Meaning*: “It would be tedious to describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz, Adonis, Kore, Dionysus, and many others. . . . Some of them were celebrated at the vernal equinox, or thereabouts, and some at midsummer. But their universal theme – the drama of death and resurrection – makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter, and thus the *first ‘Easter services’*” (p. 58).

By the early fourth century A.D. nominal Christianity became established as a state religion of the Roman Empire. Almost everybody sought membership in the new Church and almost nobody was rejected. Says Hurlbut of this period: “The services of worship increased in splendor, but were less spiritual and hearty than those of former times. The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. *Some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship*” (*ibid.*, p. 79).

The church leaders of that day felt that for “Christianity” to conquer the world, it would be wise to compromise with pagans throughout the Empire. Since the common people were habituated to their pagan customs and reveled in their pagan holidays, church leaders devised a method to reconcile paganism and nominal Christianity. They simply “baptized” pagan customs, thereby making them “Christian” in appearance and name. The result? Pagans began to flock into the Church in droves. They kept the same days and performed the same rituals, but now they did it to “Christ” instead of to Astarte or Tammuz!

The Pagan Connection

The professing church, to build its membership, adopted paganism wholesale. Pagan spring religious customs were adopted by the Church. At the approach of Easter, women in Sicily sow wheat, lentils, and canary-seed in plates, which they keep in the dark and water every two days. The plants soon shoot up, the stalks are tied with red ribbons, and the plates are placed on sepulchers, with effigies of the dead Christ – “just as the gardens of Adonis were placed on the dead Adonis.” Says Sir James George Frazer, “The whole custom – sepulchres as well as plates of sprouting grain-may be *nothing but a continuation, under a different name, of the worship of Adonis*” (Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p.400).

Writes Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*,

“Now the death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and therefore as the most appropriate day for the revival of a god of vegetation who had been dead or sleeping throughout the winter. But according to an ancient and widespread tradition Christ suffered on the twenty-fifth of March, and accordingly some Christians regularly celebrated the Crucifixion on that day without any regard to the state of the moon. This custom was certainly observed in Phrygia, Cappadocia, and Gaul, and there seem to be grounds for thinking that at one time it was followed also in Rome. Thus the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the twenty-fifth of March was ancient and deeply rooted. *It is all the more remarkable because astronomical considerations prove that it can have had no historical foundation.* The inference appears to be inevitable that the passion of Christ must have been arbitrarily referred to that date *in order to harmonize with an older festival of the spring equinox*” (page 417-418).

How Easter Entered the Church

Before Easter was universally adopted, there was a bitter and protracted controversy. In the days of Emperor Commodus (A.D. 180-192), when Victor became bishop at Rome (A.D. 190), the dispute became severe. Declared the historian Eusebius:

“There was a considerable discussion raised about this time, in consequence of a difference of opinion respecting the observance of the paschal season. The churches of all Asia, guided by a remoter tradition, supposed that they ought to keep the *fourteenth day of the moon* for the festival of the *Saviour’s Passover*, in which day the Jews were commanded to kill the paschal lamb But . . . *it was not the custom to celebrate it in this manner in the churches throughout the rest of the world . . .*” (*Eccl. Hist.*, Book.V, chap.23).

Even at this late date, the Churches of God in Asia dissented from the majority viewpoint. Polycrates, their leader, wrote to Victor, bishop at Rome, saying: “We, therefore, observe *the genuine day, neither adding thereto nor taking there from*” (chap. XXIV). He cited New Testament Christians, including Philip and the apostle John and asserted: “All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith” (*ibid.*).

Upon receiving this letter, Victor, bishop at Rome, became furious. Reports

Eusebius: “Upon this, Victor the bishop of the church of Rome, forthwith endeavoured to cut off the churches of all Asia, together with the neighbouring churches, a heterodox, from the common unity. And he published abroad by letters, and proclaims, that all the brethren there are wholly excommunicated” (*ibid.*).

Although at that time Victor was restrained from carrying out this threat, the controversy continued until as late as the fourth century.

And so it is, today! Nothing much has changed! The visible church all around us, what is called “Mainstream” Christianity, from the Roman Catholic Church to the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and practically all others are BURIED AND MIRE IN PAGAN RITUALS, PRACTICES, AND FESTIVALS, including Easter itself!

Origin of Christmas

What about Christmas? Christians claim it celebrates the birth of Christ. But is this really true?

Although the whole world celebrates Christmas as a “Christian” holiday, including millions of non-Christians, Christmas is not really “Christian” at all! Satan has pulled the wool over the eyes of MILLIONS!

Consider this fact: Look high and low throughout the pages of the Bible, and you will find not *one single solitary word* of “Christmas” being celebrated by any of God’s people! It is not even mentioned once! Neither Christ nor any of His apostles ever observed this holiday, nor the New Testament Church!

Yet on the other hand the pagan, heathen world observed this day for thousands of years BEFORE Christ was even born!

We read in Werner Keller’s book *The Bible as History* the following admission:

“December 25 is referred to in documents as Christmas Day in A.D. 324 for the first time. Under the Roman emperor Justinian [A.D. 527-565] it was recognized as an official holiday. *An old Roman festival played a major part in the choice of this particular day. December 25 in ancient Rome was the ‘Dies Natali Invictus’ ‘the birthday of the unconquered,’ the day of the winter solstice and at the same time, in Rome, the last day of the Saturnalia, which had long since degenerated into a week of unbridled carnival . . .*” (p.331).

Writes Ralph Woodrow in *Babylon Mystery Religion*, December 25 “was the very day and season on which the pagans for centuries had celebrated the birth of the *Sun-god!*” He goes on, “In pagan days, this birth of the sun-god was especially popular among that branch of the ‘Mysteries’ known as Mithraism. . . . And not only was Mithra,

the sun-god of Mithraism, said to be born at this time of the year, but Osiris, Horus, Hercules, Bacchus, Adonis, Jupiter, Tammuz, and other sun-gods were also supposedly born at what is today called the ‘Christmas’ season – the winter solstice!” (page 163).

Says Woodrow, “Now the fact that the various sun-gods that were worshiped in different countries were all believed to be born at the same season (in the old fables), would seem to indicate that they were but different forms (under different names) of the original son of the sun-god, Tammuz, of Babylon, the land from which sun-worship originally spread” (*ibid.*).

Woodrow asserts, “In Babylon, the birthday of Tammuz was celebrated at the time of the winter solstice with great feasts, revelry, and drunkenness – the same way many celebrate it today! The ancient celebration spread and became so much an established custom that ‘in pagan Rome and Greece, in the days of the Teutonic barbarians, in the remote times of ancient Egyptian civilization, in the infancy of the race East and West and North and South, the period of the winter solstice was ever a period of rejoicing and festivity.’”

“When this mid-winter festival came to Rome, it was known as the Saturnalia – Saturn being but another name of Nimrod or Tammuz as ‘the hidden god.’ This feast was the most vile, immoral feast that ever disgraced pagan Rome. It was a season of license, drunkenness, and debauchery where all restraints of law were laid aside. And it was from this very feast at Rome that that the merry-making of this season passed into the Roman Catholic Church and on down to our present civilization!” (p.163-164).

In the book *History of Rome*, by Michael Grant, we read this startling revelation:

“Yet there was also another pagan belief during this same epoch, that much more nearly competed with Christ for the control of the Western world. This was the cult of the Sun, which was revered by millions of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, and its religion for a time even became the state worship. . . .

“In Rome, the divinity of the Sun came very early on; and then, centuries afterwards, in the superb dome of Hadrian’s Pantheon, the central opening, surrounded by star-like rosettes, represented the solar orb. . . . Before long, the emperor Aurelian established a massive temple of the Unconquerable Sun as the central and focal point of the entire religious system of the state (274). *The birthday of the god was to be on DECEMBER 25, AND THIS, TRANSFORMED INTO CHRISTMAS DAY, WAS ONE OF THE HERITAGES THAT CHRISTIANITY OWED TO HIS CULT*” (p.391-392, emphasis mine).

Notice! The world’s version of “Christianity” took over the birthday of the sun god, the cult of the sun, and by sleight of hand and devious “magic” transformed it into “CHRISTMAS,” the “birthday” of Jesus Christ! It was in reality the birth day of the pagan sun god, worshipped by millions throughout the Roman Empire! Our article, “The Shocking Origin of Christmas,” and “When Was Jesus Really Born?” show conclusively that Christ was born nowhere near December 25th or “Christmas.”

So why does the great and universal Christian religion observe this pagan day?

Historian Jack Finegan, in *Myth & Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World*, writes:

“. . . But the worship of the sun-god continued widely throughout the empire, and under Aurelian (A.D. 270-275) the cult was restored to its former high estate. In the year 274 Aurelian declared the god – now called Deus Sol Invictus – the official deity of the Roman Empire; he built a splendid temple of the sun in Rome . . . *and set the sun’s birthday celebration (naturalis solis invicti) ON DECEMBER 25, the date then accepted for the winter solstice (also in his solar character the BIRTHDAY OF MITHRAS)*. In the time of Constantine the cult of Deus Sol Invictus was still at its height, and the portrait of the sun-god was on the coins of Constantine Likewise it must have been in this time and with the intent to transform the significance of *AN EXISTING SACRED DATE that the birthday of Jesus*, which had been celebrated in the East on January 6 . . . *was placed in Rome ON DECEMBER 25, THE DATE OF THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF SOL INVICTUS*. This date appears in a list of dates probably compiled in A.D. 336 and published in the Roman city calendar, edited by Filocalus, for the year 354” (Finegan, p.211-212, emphasis mine).

Thus another diabolical deed was done. The Church threw away the divine Holy Days which God commands to be observed, and replaced them with pagan-originated festivals which were used in the worship of ancient Nimrod and Semiramis, the pagan Messiah and his whore mother!

Sir James Frazer, in his authoritative book *The Golden Bough*, discusses how the pagan celebration of the birth of the sun-god on December 25 weaved its way into the professing Roman Catholic “Christian” Church. Frazer points out that the contest for supremacy between the early Christians and the worshipers of Mithra was hanging in the balance in the early centuries of the church. Both religions were fighting for the hearts and minds of men. Frazer asserts that “there can be no doubt that the Mithraic religion proved a formidable rival to Christianity.”

Says Frazer:

“Indeed the issue of the conflict between the two faiths appears for a time to have hung in the balance. An instructive relic of the long struggle is preserved in our *festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival*. In the Julian calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning-point of the year. The ritual of the nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in *Syria and Egypt*, was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, ‘*The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!*’ The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the *image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth* and exhibited to his worshippers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the *great Oriental goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte*. Now Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the Unconquered Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December. The

Gospels say nothing as to the day of Christ's birth, and accordingly the early Church did not celebrate it. In time, however, the Christians of Egypt came to regard the sixth of January as the date of the Nativity, and the custom of commemorating the birth of the Saviour on that day gradually spread until by the fourth century it was universally established in the East. But at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century the *Western Church*, which had never recognized the sixth of January as the day of the Nativity, *adopted the twenty-fifth of December* as the true date, and in time its decision was accepted also by the Eastern Church. At Antioch the change was not introduced till about the year 375 A.D." (*The Golden Bough*, page 416).

What were the real motives for the church leaders to incorporate Christmas into the church's calendar of festivals? States Frazer, again:

"What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas? The motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. 'The reason,' he tells us, 'why the fathers transferred the celebration of the sixth of January to the twenty-fifth of December was this. It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and festivities the Christians also took part. Accordingly *when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival*, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January. Accordingly, along with this custom, the practice has prevailed of kindling fires till the sixth.' The heathen origin of Christmas is plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that solemn day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnized because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the nativity of Christ."

The "Mass" in Christmas

Alexander Hislop in his remarkable book *The Two Babylons*, points out that the "mass" is something that definitely goes back to ancient PAGAN customs and rites! He declares in plain and clear language:

"Therefore we find the women of Judah represented as simply 'burning incense, pouring out drink-offerings, and offering *CAKES to the queen of heaven*' (Jer. 44:19). The cakes were the 'unbloody sacrifice' she required. . . . *In the FOURTH CENTURY, when the queen of heaven, under the name of Mary, was beginning to be worshipped in the Christian Church, this 'unbloody sacrifice' also was brought in.* Epiphanius states that the practice of offering and eating it began among women of Arabia; and *at that time it was well known to have been ADOPTED FROM THE PAGANS.* The very shape of the unbloody sacrifice of Rome may indicate whence it came. It is a small thin, *round wafer*; and on its *roundness* the Church of Rome lays so much stress The importance, however, which Rome attaches to the *roundness* of the wafer, must have a reason; and that reason will be found, if we look at the altars of EGYPT. 'The thin, *round cake*,' says Wilkinson,

‘occurs on all altars.’ Almost every jot or tittle in the Egyptian worship had a symbolical meaning. The *round disk*, so frequent in the sacred emblems of Egypt, symbolized the *sun*” (*The Two Babylons*, p.159-160).

The “sun-god” in ancient Egypt was Osiris, another name for NIMROD. The round disk of the Egyptian “mass” symbolized the sun, and was an offering symbolizing the sun-god. He was considered the life and nourishment of the souls of men!

The “Christ-mass” therefore is nothing more than a spin-off of the old pagan “mysteries.” It is the celebration of the birth of the “sun-god” himself, the False Messiah, the False “Saviour” of the world, and the “mass” itself also represents the offering or “cakes” made to the queen of heaven, the “Mother” of the pagan Saviour, the “Queen of heaven.”

Truth Replaced by Superstition

Says Alexander Hislop, further:

“Indeed, it is admitted by the most learned and candid writers of all parties that the day of our Lord’s birth cannot be determined, and that within the Christian Church *no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance.* How, then, did the Romish Church fix on December the 25th as Christmas-day? Why, thus: Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that, *in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the SAME FESTIVAL WAS ADOPTED by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ.* This tendency on the part of Christians to MEET PAGANISM HALF-WAY was very early developed. . . . Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, *the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was SUBMERGED under PAGAN SUPERSTITION*” (p.93).

Hislop goes on,

“*That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival, is beyond all doubt.* The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin. In Egypt, the son of Isis, the Egyptian title for the queen of heaven, was born at this very time, ‘about the time of the winter solstice.’ The very name by which Christmas is popularly known among ourselves – Yule-day – proves at once its Pagan and Babylonian origin. ‘Yule’ is the Chaldee name for an ‘infant’ or ‘little child;’ and as the 25th of December was called by our Pagan Anglo-Saxon ancestors, ‘Yule-day,’ or the ‘Child’s day,’ and the night that preceded it, ‘Mother-night,’ long BEFORE they came in contact with Christianity, that sufficiently proves its real character” (pp.93-94).

It is a fact that December 25 was celebrated for thousands of years before the birth of Christ as the birth day of an ancient pagan god – THE SUN GOD!

The Great Conspiracy

Asserts James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*,

“Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the *heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental*. They mark the *compromise* which the Church in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals. The inflexible Protestantism of the primitive missionaries, with their fiery denunciations of heathendom, had been exchanged for the supple policy, the easy tolerance, the comprehensive charity of *shrewd ecclesiastics, who clearly perceived that if Christianity was to conquer the world it could do so only by relaxing the too rigid principles of its Founder*, by widening a little the narrow gate which leads to salvation” (page 419).

It is just absolutely amazing how ancient paganism has wrapped its tentacles around “Christianity,” so that the modern church is much more pagan than Christian.

As historian Will Durant wrote in *The Story of Civilization*, volume 3, “Caesar and Christ,” not long after the church began, the pagans began their onslaught to infiltrate it, subvert it, and destroy it. Says Durant,

“Christ was assimilated to the religious and philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic mind. Now the pagan world – even the ant-Semitic world – could accept him as its own. Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. The Greek mind, dying, came to a transmigrated life in the theology and liturgy of the Church . . . The Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other pagan cultures contributed to the syncretist result. From Egypt came the idea of a divine trinity . . . From Egypt the adoration of the Mother and Child, and the mystic theosophy that made Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and obscured the Christian creed. . . . From Phrygia came the worship of the Great Mother; from Syria the resurrection drama of Adonis; from Thrace, perhaps, the cult of Dionysus, the dying and saving god” (page 595).

In fact, says Durant,

“The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with inventing these similarities to mislead frail minds. **CHRISTIANITY WAS THE LAST GREAT CREATION OF THE ANCIENT PAGAN WORLD**” (*ibid.*).

This should be astonishing – shocking. Yet the evidence is irrefutable. What happened? What was the real significance of the submergence of Christian doctrine with pagan practices? What was the purpose and aim?

The “Mystery Babylon Code”

It was all part of Satan’s Great Deception! He instilled “Christian” code words to mask over ancient PAGAN observances! Instead of the foolishness of the Da Vinci Code, we see a REAL conspiracy, through the ages, of the ancient “Mystery-Babylon” Code!

The ancient “Mysteries” of the Chaldeans, have been incorporated into the far-flung “Christian” church to deceive millions into THINKING they are worshipping Christ, but are in reality worshipping the way of Satan the arch-deceiver of mankind!

Says Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*:

“When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith *on the old stock of paganism*, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis, which, as we have seen reason to believe, was celebrated in Syria at the same season. The type, created by Greek artists, of the sorrowful goddess with her dying lover in her arms, resembles and may have been the model of the *Pieta* of Christian art, the Virgin with the dead body of her divine Son in her lap, of which the most celebrated example is the one by Michael Angelo in St. Peters” (page 401).

Notice those words again. He declares, “When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the *OLD STOCK OF PAGANISM*, we may surmise that the Eastern celebration of the dead and risen Christ was *grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis*, which . . . was celebrated in Syria at the same season” (p. 401).

Astounding! Clearly paganism grew inside the professing Christian church like LEAVEN, until the whole lump was thoroughly leavened and saturated with SIN! The whole chemistry of the Church was changed with the yeast of PAGANISM! The body of the church became riddled with the infection of spiritual CANCER!

Ancient PAGANISM has now been COLOR-CODED AS “CHRISTIAN”! But it is still the beating, thumping, pumping heart of rebellion against God – the same PAGAN RELIGION BEGUN BY NIMROD AND SEMIRAMIS!

Only the “names” were changed. Thus paganism crept in and hi-jacked the Christian church as a whole. Names were changed to hide the disgusting, despicable truth. For example:

Pagan Name	Christian Name
Saturnalia	“Christmas”
Lupercalia	St. Valentine’s Day
Floralia	Pentecost
Festival of Tammuz	St. John’s Day
Worship of Rhea, Venus	Worship of Mary
Tammuz, Bacchus, Adonis	“Christ”
Samhain	Halloween
Pagan Trinity	“Christian” Trinity
Birth of Sol Invictus	Birth of Christ
Baal-Berith	Christmas Tree
Day of Cybele (mother of Babylonian messiah)	Annunciation Day

Ishtar, Astarte	“Easter”
Chaldean Lent	“Lent”
Apotheosis of Ariadne	Feast of the Assumption
Madonna of Babylon	Madonna of Rome
Pagan “Mass”	Sacrifice of the “Mass”
Pagan “Cross”	Veneration of the “Cross”
Pontifex Maximus	Pope, Pontiff
Pagan College of Pontiffs	College of Cardinals
Keys of Janus and Cybele	“Peter’s keys” (worn by Pope since 431 A.D.)

Says Alexander Hislop, in *The Two Babylons*, the pope laid claim to Peter’s keys in A.D. 431 and thereafter. “Some time was allowed to pass away, and then, when the secret working of the Mystery of iniquity had prepared the way for it, for the first time did the Pope publicly assert his eminence, as founded on the keys given to Peter. About 378 was he raised to the position which gave him, in Pagan estimation, the power of the keys referred to. In 431, and not before, did he publicly lay claim to the possession of Peter’s keys” (p.207).

Anciently there was a “Peter” at Rome who occupied the highest place in the pagan priesthood. In primitive Chaldee, his title was pronounced “Peter” – which meant, “the interpreter.” As the revealer of hidden things, he was decorated with the two keys of the divinities whose mysteries he unfolded. Thus the keys of Janus and Cybele came to be known as the “keys of Peter” – but not the Peter of the New Testament! This ancient “Peter” was Hermes Trismegistus, the great “Interpreter of the gods.”

Thus a pagan “Peter” came to be transformed into the apostle Peter – and the ancient Pagan Mysteries broadened and survived under new names.

Declares Hislop, “Hence, from the *mere jingle of words*, persons and things essentially different were CONFOUNDED; and Paganism and Christianity *jumbled together*, that the towering ambition of a wicked priest might be gratified; and so, to the BLINDED Christians of the APOSTACY, the Pope was the representative of Peter the apostle, while to the initiated Pagans, he was only the representative of Peter, the interpreter of their well-known Mysteries. Thus was the Pope the express counterpart of ‘Janus the double-faced.’ Oh! what an emphasis of meaning in the Scriptural expression, as applied to the Papacy, ‘The Mystery of Iniquity!’” (*Two Babylons*, page 210).

In analyzing the strange customs of the pagans and their astonishing similarity to certain “Christian” customs today, Alan W. Watts was moved to write,

“At first sight it is surprising to find so many of these stories and symbols of death-and-resurrection in so many different places. The points of resemblance between the Christ story, on the one hand, and the myth and ritual of ancient and ‘pagan’ cults, on the other, is at times *startling enough to look like a CONSPIRACY*” (*op. cit.* p. 22).

A “conspiracy”! Who would engineer such a conspiracy? The apostle John tells us in plain language:

“And the huge dragon was cast down and out – that age-old serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, he who is the *seducer (deceiver)* of ALL HUMANITY THE WORLD OVER . . .” (Rev.12:9, Amplified Parallel Bible).

What had happened? The answer is in the Bible – a conspiracy to introduce pagan customs under the name “Christian” had been formed in the days of the apostle Paul (see Gal.1:6-9; II Cor.1:13-15; II Tim. 4:3-4). By the last days of the apostle John, this conspiracy had grown so great that in some areas, *true* Christians were being cast out of the established local churches! (III John 9, 10). A few centuries later, the universal church was no longer observing the Biblical holidays, but replacing them with pagan holidays.

Time to Repent and Obey GOD!

What does the Word of God itself say about this matter? It is a very serious question. Is it all right in the sight of God for men to take pagan customs and traditions, and to observe them, calling them “Christian”? Is it all right to merge and combine *PAGAN* practices with the truth of God?

According to the prophet Malachi, God does not change (Mal.3:6). His laws and commandments are eternal (Psa.111:7-8). Does God say it is all right to observe the traditions and customs of the pagans?

God commanded ancient Israel, “I am the Lord your God. You must *NOT DO AS THEY DO IN EGYPT*, where you used to live, and you must *NOT DO AS THEY DO IN THE LAND OF CANAAN*, where I am bringing you. *DO NOT FOLLOW THEIR PRACTICES*. You must obey my laws, and be careful to follow my decrees” (Lev.18:2-4).

God hates idolatry! He detests it with vehement passion. He tells us, “. . . Be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.’ *YOU must NOT WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD IN THEIR WAY*, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of *DETESTABLE THINGS the LORD HATES*” (Deut.12:29-31).

Because of pagan idolatrous practices, God cast the Canaanites out of the Promised Land. They were worshippers of Baal, or Nimrod, Tammuz, the sun god, the

pagan Messiah, the god of wine and revelry. Their whole religious system stemmed from ancient Babylon, the fount of all heresy and apostasy.

Truly, the whole world has been deceived by Satan the devil and his clever masquerades and machinations (Rev.12:9). God Almighty thunders: “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your ancestors and go astray after their detestable things? . . . As I entered into judgment with your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord GOD. . . I will PURGE OUT THE REBELS among you, and those who transgress against me. . . As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go serve your idols, everyone of you now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but MY HOLY NAME you shall NO MORE PROFANE with your gifts and your idols” (Ezek.20:30-39, NRSV).

Jesus Christ said to His disciples, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will KNOW THE TRUTH, and the *truth will set you FREE*” – free from the shackles of error, superstition, mythology, and pagan deception! (John 8:32, NIV).

Observing pagan-originated holidays may seem so innocent and spiritual, on the surface. What could be wrong in sending Christmas gifts, hunting for Easter eggs, or sending valentines and gifts of candy, chocolates, or other things on these ancient pagan days? They have been given Christian sounding “CODE” names, to hide their despicable PAGAN origin, heart, and nature!

Should a true Christian have anything to do with such practices?

The simple answer is – GOD SAYS DON’T OBSERVE THEM! They act like a *snare* and a *trap* to lead people off into following the path way of Satan the devil, the architect of these pagan days and their supposed Christian transformation!

God says to His people, ‘Learn NOT the way of the heathen’ (Jeremiah 10:1). He says to His people today, “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [Baal, Nimrod, Bel, or Satan]? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the Temple of God with IDOLS? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be My people.’

“COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE, says the LORD. *DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN, and I will receive you.*’ I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (II Cor.6:14-18, NKVJ).

God Almighty thunders: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I

command you” (Deut.4:2).

In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, God warns and commands His true people, that this wicked, all-pervasive “Babylon the Great” world system and religion which surrounds us today is coming to a bitter, devastating end. The apostle John declares, “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, *COME OUT OF HER, my people, lest you share in her SINS, and lest you receive of her PLAGUES*. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Rev.18:4-5).

What should you do? Come OUT of this false, paganized, duplicitous, poisonous blending of false religion – this pernicious, volatile, lethal pagan religious cocktail! Don’t drink of it! Cast it aside! Flee far from it! (I Cor.6:18, Jer.50:28, 51:45).

Chapter 2

Does It *Really* Matter What DAYS We Keep?

Some observe Saturday, some observe Sunday; some keep Christmas and Easter "to Christ," others refuse, saying those days are pagan in origin; some keep the Jewish-Biblical holy days, others say they are abolished. Some Christians keep the Passover with the Jews, others keep "it" a day earlier. Some keep Pentecost when the Jews do, others observe "it" on Sunday every year. Why? Who sets the standards, anyway? Does it really matter what days we observe? What does GOD ALMIGHTY say about this question?

If it really doesn't matter at all, then I suppose a person could just as easily "go along with the crowd," and be a member of the "vast majority," insofar as observing spiritual or religious holidays. Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus have a whole set of different holidays than Christians and Jews.

But even Christians are dis-united and in disagreement over the subject of holy days. Catholics and Protestants observe most of the same holidays, particularly Sunday worship, Easter and Christmas, but Seventh-Day Adventists, and others, claim the Sabbath is on Saturday and that Sunday worship is nowhere sanctioned in the Bible. And they are right! Catholic theologians admit it, and claim "church authority" for their imposition of Sunday worship upon the western world!

Who decides what days Christians ought to worship, anyway? Is it a matter of "church authority"? If so, then I suppose it depends on which "church" you belong to!

For example, some churches I know observe Passover on Nisan 14, and when people point out that the Jews and the Old Testament plainly show Nisan 15 is the Feast day when the Passover was eaten, the ministers of those churches -- finding they cannot

contradict or disprove the proofs presented to them -- finally make their appeal to their own "church authority," and say people ought not to "rock the boat" or "sow discord among the brethren." Those who disagree with the church teaching on such an issue find themselves "booted out" of the church and branded from the pulpit as "trouble-makers."

Whose Opinion Counts?

However, it ought to be plain to anyone that despite what men and ministers, churches and religious leaders, say, the final authority belongs to ALMIGHTY GOD. He is the only One who has the right to tell us what days to observe and WHEN to observe them. To do anything CONTRARY to the word and will of Almighty God on this matter would constitute nothing less than insubordination and spiritual REBELLION, which God Himself says is as the sin of *witchcraft!* (I Sam.15:23). Therefore, let's see what the Scriptures say about which day we ought to observe -- if we desire to please God, and inherit eternal life!

Let's notice the plain principles outlined in the Word of God on this matter.

Principle #1 -- God Is Not Pleased with Pagan Worship

Does God have a set of holy days given in His Word? Are they commanded to be observed forever?

Few Christians have apparently given any thought to this question. They just go along with the crowd, and believe that Christmas and Easter are Christian in origin. However, every year newspapers and articles point out that Christmas antedates Christ by thousands of years, and December 25 was the celebration of the "birthday of Mithras," the sun god! Easter, also, derives its very name from Eostre, or Astarte, the pagan goddess of the spring. It also antedates the resurrection of Christ by thousands of years, and was celebrated as the festival of the resurrection of Attis, or Bacchus, or Tammuz, the pagan god who was "killed," and then supposedly "resurrected," thousands of years before Christ, soon after the Flood.

Historical documentation is easy to provide or obtain on the preceding truths. Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons* gets right to the point, showing the pagan origin of these holidays. Any reliable encyclopedia will also show you the origin of these days, and how the Catholic church in the fourth century began to adopt and "baptize" pagan days and to call them "Christian," even though historically they had nothing to do with Christ and were never observed by Jesus or the early apostles or early Church!

As Christians, then, should we observe such days?

Principle #1 in God's Word tells us: "**Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen . . . For the customs of the people are VAIN**" (Jeremiah 10:1-3). This chapter goes on to describe a pagan custom of cutting a tree out of the forest, bringing it home, decorating it with gold and silver, and fastening it so it will stand upright. This is

an obvious description of a "Christmas tree," and such "tree worship" goes back to ancient German times, long before Christ, and has nothing to do with Biblical Christianity!

But is it wrong to take pagan customs and traditions, and to dress them up in "Christian" garments, and to use pagan customs to worship the TRUE God?

God's Word tells us in no uncertain terms: **"When the LORD thy God shall cut off the [pagan] nations from before thee . . . Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them . . . and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God [that is, worship Him with pagan customs!]: For every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods . . . What thing soever I command you, observe to do IT: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it"** (Deut.12:30-32).

How plain it is! We must not worship the Lord our God by using PAGAN practices, methods, rituals, holidays, or the like. Rather, we are commanded to worship Him ONLY by the word and commandments HE has given to us, and *not to add anything to it from paganism, or from our OWN ideas or opinions!*

But what days does the Word of God command us to observe, if any? Are there any Biblically-commanded holy days?

Principle # 2 -- God's Holy Days Are Forever

Principle #2 in the Word of God tells us that indeed God has set forth holy days for His people to observe -- holy days which are commanded FOR EVER! God says in His Word: **"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it HOLY"** (Exodus 20:8). **"Keep the sabbath day, and sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee"** (Deut.5:12). **"Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual [eternal, everlasting] covenant"** (Exo.31:14-16).

The Sabbath day was part of the Law of God revealed to Israel through Moses. It was one of the very Ten Commandments. Not Sunday. Not Monday. Not Friday. But the seventh day of the week -- the Sabbath day! It is declared by God to be HOLY TIME, and must not be defiled or desecrated, defaced or corrupted. But how many Christians have been deluded by a master-magician devil to be deceived into thinking "Sunday," the first day of the week, is the proper day for worship? Unfortunately, the overwhelmingly vast majority! Indeed, Satan has done his dirty work very well -- and has deceived just about the entire world (Rev.12:9).

Along with the Sabbath day, God also commanded certain ANNUAL holy days to be observed by His people -- beginning with Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost -- the spring festivals. **"For I will pass through the land of Egypt this**

night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt . . . And THIS DAY shall be unto you for a MEMORIAL: and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance FOR EVER" (Exodus 12:12-14). The Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven day festival, was ordained by God to be observed "**in your generations by an ordinance for ever**" (Exo.12:17).

Fifty days after the Passover, came the feast of Pentecost, or Shavuot, the "Feast of Weeks," so named because it followed Passover by counting "seven weeks" (Deut.16:9; Lev.23:10-16). It also was "**a statute FOR EVER in all your dwellings throughout your generations**" (Lev.23:21). Other annual holy days God commanded His people to observe were held in the fall of the year, beginning with the Feast of Trumpets on Tishri 1 ("Rosh Hoshanah" or 'Yom Teruah'), the Day of Atonement on Tishri 10 ("Yom Kippur"), the seven day Feast of Tabernacles on Tishri 15-21 ("Sukkot"), followed by the Feast of the Eighth Day (or "Last Day," also known as "Shemini Atzeret") on Tishri 22nd. These feasts are all enumerated in Leviticus 23 where God says of them: "**These are the FEASTS of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons**" (Lev.23:4).

No mention at all of "Christmas," or "Easter," or "Halloween," or "St. Patrick's Day," or "Valentine's Day," or any other holiday observed in the world today! These worldly holidays are NOT FROM THE BIBLE! They are not sanctioned by the Word of God! Unlike the Biblical holy days, these other days are *pagan in origin and trace back to ancient PAGAN RITES, FESTIVITIES, AND HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS in honor of pagan deities, divinities, and idolatrous gods and goddesses!*

"But wait a minute," some might object. "I thought the 'Law' of God was abolished. Wasn't the Sabbath and annual festivals all abolished by Jesus Christ? Are we not now 'FREE' from having to observe that old 'Law'?"

Principle #3 -- God's Law Is Forever

Principle #3 is -- When God does something, it is forever. He is not a fickle Person who constantly "changes His mind." He doesn't make mistakes. Everything He does is GOOD (Gen.1:31).

Never assume anything! God does not lie, or repent. You may have been taught by various and sundry ministers that the holy days of God are no longer required under the New Covenant teaching of Christ, but BEWARE! Many "liars" have gone out into the world, called "Antichrists" by the apostle John, and are spreading heresy, lies, and false doctrine which is an abomination in the sight of God! Think for a minute! What's wrong with the holy days which God Almighty Himself gave to His people? Would God give them something evil, or harmful? The holy days of God are a tremendous spiritual GIFT to His people, which keep them in mind of the True God, and which impart valuable spiritual lessons when observed properly -- unlike the mistle-toe nonsense and pagan revelry of Christmas and the foolery of Easter, with its chocolate bunnies laying

brightly-colored "eggs"! The apostle James writes: "Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (Jas.1:17).

Have the holy days of God been abolished? Once God introduced them, and said they are ordained **FOR EVER**, is there any way He would turn around and "abolish" them? Wouldn't that make Him out to be a LIAR, who said one thing, and did another? The apostle Paul wrote of "**God, that cannot lie**" (Titus 1:2). The prophet Samuel declared of God, "**The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent**" (I Sam.15:29). The prophet Malachi quotes God as saying: "**For I am the LORD, I change not . . .**" (Mal.3:6). Goes does not change -- He does not lie - - He does not repent. Therefore, HIS LAW OF THE ANNUAL HOLY DAYS *HAS TO STILL BE IN FORCE TODAY, JUST AS HE SAID IT WOULD ALWAYS BE!*

"But didn't Jesus Christ come to do away with the Old Covenant? Doesn't that fact abolish the holy days and Sabbath days?" Ay, there is the rub. That's what millions believe. But is it true? Does it, or doesn't it?

***Principle #4 -- Christ Did Not Come
To Abolish the LAW!***

Principle #4 is -- Jesus Christ did not come to do away with anything that God the Father established on a perpetual basis. He did not come to abolish ANY "eternal" law of God, or any law God established "forever." Notice what Jesus Himself said on this matter! He, like God the Father, cannot lie. He is the personification of pure Truth (John 14:6). He said, "**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in NO WAY pass from the LAW, till ALL be fulfilled**" (Matthew 5:17-18). Wow! Did you get that? WOW!!!

Those are very heavy words. Jesus said "verily," that is, "Of a truth," and then proceeded to knock the socks off all the anti-Law preachers, ministers, and pseudo-saints, priests, popes, and pontificating prelates -- He leaves them all stripped NAKED before the Law of God! He said "IN NO WAY" would anything pass from the Law -- not even a smidgeon, not even a tiny vowel point, not even a little flick of the pen -- till heaven and earth passed away -- till ALL the plan of God is completely fulfilled, and there is a New Heavens and a New Earth!

Obviously, "all" has not yet been fulfilled. And God's Law is very much in force, today, just as it was when Jesus said these words 2,000 years ago, and when the Law was given to Moses 3,500 years ago, when it was observed by Abraham some 4,000 years ago (Gen.26:5), and all the way back to Adam and Eve. Why Adam and Eve? Because God's LAW has ALWAYS been in force -- as summarized by the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath Day itself was given to mankind AT CREATION (compare Genesis 2:1-3 and Mark 2:27-28).

Transgression of God's Law is what defines SIN (I John 3:4). The wages of SIN is death (Rom.6:23). The apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] SIN entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death passed upon all men, *for that all have sinned* (Rom.5:12). Since sin has been in the world ever since Adam and Eve, and all men have "sinned," and since "SIN IS the transgression of the LAW" of God (I John 3:4), this proves that *God's LAW has always been in existence from the time of ADAM!* At Mount Sinai, God merely reiterated the Law, and enumerated its fine points. Paul explained, "(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed where there is no LAW. Nevertheless, DEATH [the penalty of SIN] reigned from Adam to Moses . . ." (Rom.5:13-14). Death could not have reigned, if there had been no LAW.

The truth is plain. Without Law, there can be no such thing as "SIN." By definition, sin is transgressing the LAW of God. That is why Jesus Christ was so adamant about His not having come to "do away" with the Law of God! He came to pay the penalty for our sins, by taking our "death penalty" upon Himself (John 3:16), becoming a sin-offering and sacrifice for us (II Cor.5:21), just as Isaiah the prophet foretold some 712 years before (Isaiah 53:3-9).

Can you imagine? If there were no spiritual Law in existence, then there would be no such thing as "SIN." That means, murder would be legal; adultery would be legal; robbery and theft would be legal; cursing and swearing and foul language would be legal; massacre and mayhem would be legal; rape, rapine, violence, lying, cheating, swearing falsely, butchering innocent people -- EVERYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF, WOULD BE PERFECTLY LEGAL!

There would be no law against ANY INHUMAN CONDUCT!

Complete CHAOS would reign! Only the truly wicked and malevolent would desire such a situation. Suffering, misery, inhumanity, cruelty, terror, horror, unbelievable crime and unspeakable brutality would fill the earth. Only the devil, or those with his spirit, would be happy in such a sick, empty, worthless world!

No, Christ did not come to abolish the Law, or to change a single holy day of God. He Himself said to a young rich man, "**If thou wilt enter into life [eternal life], KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS**" (Matthew 19:16-17). When the young rich man asked Him, "Which?" Jesus replied, listing some of the Ten Commandments as examples, showing which system of Laws He was speaking about -- that is, GOD'S LAWS, *given at Mount Sinai!*

"But," some might still wonder, "Doesn't the New Covenant itself replace those Old Testament Laws"?

***Principle #5 -- the New Covenant Does
NOT Abolish God's Laws, Either!***

Principle #5 tells us that nothing is done away unless God's Word tells us its done

away. The New Covenant does not abolish God's Laws, it ENHANCES AND MAGNIFIES God's Laws! Propheying of Christ, Isaiah the prophet wrote, "**The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will MAGNIFY the law, and make it honorable**" (Isa.42:21).

Paul explains the true relationship between the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant" in Hebrew, chapter 8. We read, "**For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with THEM [that is, the PEOPLE!], he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . .**" (Hebrews 8:7-8).

Notice! The fault was in the PEOPLE -- not in the Laws of the Old Covenant! The people were rebellious, disobeyed, and broke the covenant -- that was the problem! How is God going to SOLVE that problem with the "New Covenant"?

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put MY LAWS into their MIND, and write them in their HEARTS: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb.8:9-10). Notice! Same LAWS -- but this time they won't just be written on stone, or on scrolls -- they will be written in the minds and hearts of God's people! How will He do this? By the Holy Spirit of God! God will, in the future, pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and then He will write His laws into their hearts and minds and subconscious -- indelibly and eternally. **"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"** (Rom.8:14-17). **"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"** (Rom.8:9). **"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"** (II Tim.1:7).

Principle #6 -- Jesus Christ Does Not Change

Principle #6 is that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever -- like His Father, He also "changes not." The apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote: **"Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever"** (Heb.13:8). He teaches the very same things today that He taught 2,000 years ago. His message does not change. He Himself observed God's Law and the annual holy days of God when He was on this earth, 2,000 years ago -- including the Passover (Luke 2:41-43; John 2:13; John 2:23; 5:1; 11:55-57), and the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2, 8-11, 37-39).

Since Christ does not change, even as God the Father does not change (Malachi 3:6), then He would never change or alter an ETERNAL LAW of Almighty God! He is not a disobedient Son, or an unruly Son, who the Father cannot trust. He came to preach the words the Father gave Him to say -- nothing more, nothing less! Jesus Himself declared: **"I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of my Father which hath sent me"**

(John 5:30). Jesus added: "**My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me**" (John 7:16). Furthermore, He explained that He NEVER contradicted the Father! He declared, "**For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father, which hath sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak**" (John 12:49).

Jesus Christ and the Father are perfectly united in thought, word and deed. There is no division between them. Both of them uphold the Laws of God, which they originally ordained forever. As we read in the Psalms: "**The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his *commandments* are sure. They stand fast FOR EVER AND EVER, and are done in truth and uprightness**" (Psalm 111:7-8).

Principle #7 -- God's Law Is PERFECT

Why would God or Christ CHANGE something that is "perfect"? To change something that is "perfect" would be to render it "imperfect." There can only be one perfection. And David said of God's Law, which includes His holy days, "**The law of the LORD is PERFECT, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes**" (Psalm 19:7-8).

We must not "tamper" with PERFECTION! God's Holy Days are perfectly designed to accomplish their purpose in teaching mankind vital truths about the Plan of Salvation, the Plan of God. They are the KEYS to solving the "mystery of the ages."

This is why David wrote, "**Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law**" (Psalm 119:18). He added: "**Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked who forsake thy law. Thy statutes [God's holy days are "statutes" of God -- see Leviticus 23:21, 31, 41] have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage**" (Psalm 119:53-54).

God's Law is perfection. Therefore it can and will never be changed. Why, then, did Christ come, if not to "change" the Law, as so many preach? As we have already seen, one reason Christ came was to teach us to OBEY God's Law! But even more than that . . .

Principle #8 -- To Set Us An EXAMPLE

Peter tells us that Christ left us an *example*, "**that ye should follow his steps**" (I Pet.2:21). John confirms this, writing, "**He that sayeth he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked**" (I John 2:6).

Jesus Christ observed God's annual holy days -- but He never observed Christmas or Easter or the pagan-origin holidays the professing Christian church observes today. Obviously, a great apostasy has occurred, and many have departed from the true faith (Gal.1:6-9). Many false ministers have led millions astray from the truth (II Cor.11:13-

15).

There are many "antichrists" in the world, teaching contrary to the example set by Christ, and contrary to His very words, His message, and commandments (I John 2:18-19; II John 7). Those who deny Christ are antichrists (I John 2:22). **"They profess that they know God; but *in works* they deny him, being abominable, and *disobedient*, and unto every good work reprobate"** (Titus 1:16). *The spirit of "antichrist" is the spirit of DISOBEDIENCE to the Law of God! They deny Him in their "works." They do not follow His example, and observe the same days He did, setting us a perfect EXAMPLE, that we should follow HIS STEPS!*

Principle #8, therefore, tells us that Christ set us an EXAMPLE, of how we ought to live. We ought to imitate Christ every way. As the apostle Paul wrote, **"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"** (I Cor.11:1).

Jesus Christ observed the Passover throughout His life on earth. The gospel of John makes it clear that He observed it throughout His ministry. He observed it at the very same time that the Jewish people did (Luke 2:41-42). They never accused Him of observing the wrong day, nor did He ever accuse them of observing the wrong day or wrong time. They were in perfect harmony at least on this issue.

Jesus Christ set us a PERFECT example of obeying the Laws of God, including the annual holy days. He Himself taught their observance. He proclaimed, **"The sabbath was MADE FOR MAN, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath"** (Mark 2:27-28). The term "Sabbath" includes both the weekly Sabbath Days, as well as the annual Sabbath days (see Leviticus 23:24, 32, 38, 39).

Paul said he followed Christ's example, and we are to follow his. Did Paul continue to observe God's annual holy days, after his conversion? He most certainly did! Paul told the church at Ephesus, **"I must by all means keep this FEAST that cometh in Jerusalem"** (Acts 18:21). At the city of Philippi, he observed **"the days of unleavened bread"** (Acts 20:6), and then sailed away to Troas. This was in 60 A.D. Paul had been converted by a miracle in 32 A.D., spent three years in Arabia being taught the word of God by Christ (Galatians 1:16-18), and had been an apostle for about 25 years. Yet we read in the book of Acts, that Paul **"hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost"** (Acts 20:16).

As a Pharisee, Paul would have observed this Feast Day on Sivan 5, 6, or 7, counting the "omer" from the second day of Passover, or Nisan 16th (see Acts 23:6-7). Paul said he was, **"as touching the law, a Pharisee"** (Phil.3:5), and he said he was, **"as touching the righteousness which in the law, BLAMELESS"** (Philippians 3:6). As a Pharisee, he would have observed the Feast of Shavuot or Pentecost, fifty days after Passover, or Sivan 5, 6 or 7 -- and not a "Sunday" Pentecost, as some churches and Messianic Jews do, today! He would have observed the same date as the Orthodox and Conservative Jews do, today, who are the rabbinical descendants of the ancient Pharisees!

Luke, the author of the book of Acts, also mentions that when Paul was sailing to Rome, in bonds, it was late in the year and a dangerous time to sail -- "**because the FAST was already past**" (Acts 23:7). What "fast" was this? This was the holy day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which was a day of fasting and affliction of the self (see Lev.23:27-32).

Thus Paul was faithful in observing the Holy Days of God throughout his ministry. He never taught against them. In fact, while before Festus, while he was on trial, he exclaimed, "**Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple . . . have I offended anything at all**" (Acts 25:8). And later, while in Rome, he told the Jews at Rome, "**Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans**" (Acts 28:17).

Paul therefore followed Christ in observing God's annual Holy Days. And he also taught the Church to do this as well, for we read in his epistle to the Corinthian church, "**Purge out therefore the old leaven . . . as ye are [physically] unleavened [they were observing the Days of Unleavened Bread]. For even Christ OUR PASSOVER is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us KEEP THE FEAST . . .**" (I Cor.5:7-8). The Church was in the process of observing the days of Unleavened Bread, having put out the old leaven. Paul exhorted them to *keep the Feast of Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread!*

Principle #9 -- Who Sits in Moses' Seat?

Who has the "authority" to determine matters of observance of God's Law? Which religious leaders sit in "Moses' seat"? Was it the Sadducees, of whom Jesus said, "**Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God**" (Matt.22:29)? The Sadducees did not even believe in angels, spirits, demons, or the resurrection from the dead (Matt.22:23; Acts 23:6-8).

In fact, Jesus said to His disciples, "**The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, THAT OBSERVE AND DO . . .**" (Matthew 23:1-3). Jesus acknowledged that the spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation were the scribes and Pharisees. They were the true teachers of the Law, and had authority which was passed down from Moses' time. He actually said that *they sat in Moses' seat* -- that is, that they were the modern representatives and descendants of the long line of religious teachers that came down from Moses, through Ezra the scribe, and down to His own generation.

In acknowledging this authority, Jesus said His followers were to also acknowledge it, and observe "whatsoever they bid you observe." Jesus was discussing the LAWS of God, the Torah -- the teachings derived from Moses! He was not of course referring to the "traditions" that the Pharisees "added" to the laws of God (compare Matthew 15:1-9), but only the LAWS of God derived from Moses. Therefore, what Jesus

referred to here would certainly include the annual HOLY DAYS of God! His words, "whatsoever they bid you observe," would clearly refer to the annual holy days, the holy calendar, and the appointed festivals of the Lord.

Principle #9 implies that we should pay special attention to the teachings and practices of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees observed Passover by killing the lambs at the Temple courtyard, in Jerusalem, in the late afternoon of Nisan 14, and then taking the lambs home and roasting them that evening (Exodus 12:6), until they were thoroughly cooked -- and then celebrated the Passover dinner, or "seder" -- which means, "setting forth," or "order" -- that very night of Nisan 15th (Exodus 12:8), the very night the "death angel" or Lord killed the firstborn of the Egyptians and "passed over" the houses of the Israelites (Exo.12:12, 29).

In Christ's day, the Passover lambs were being killed at the Temple of God at the very same time that Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), was being slain on the stake, and died for our sins, on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple site.

This means, then, that true Christians, and Messianic Christians, ought to observe this same practice, and observe the Passover the very same time, manner, and date that the early Christians, Christ and the apostles, and the Jewish people, led by the scribes and Pharisees, observed it some 2,000 years ago -- on the night of the 15th of Nisan! To observe it on another night or an earlier would be to miss the entire point of the Passover! It would be a worthless endeavor -- a useless ritual. It would be just as bad as if some foolish ancient Israelite had gotten his days mixed up, and back in Egypt had killed and roasted *his* lamb a night earlier, or a different night, and daubed his door posts with its blood on a different night. No death angel appeared that night. But the *true night*, when he should have done it, he would have not done so -- and he would NOT HAVE BEEN PASSED OVER! The firstborn in his family -- even if it were he himself -- would have been SLAIN!

Principle # 10 -- the Passover Is a Season of JOY

The Passover of God was a time of great deliverance from slavery and oppression. It represented release from onerous slavery and newfound FREEDOM and LIBERTY. The Jewish people call it "The Festival of Freedom." And so it is. Passover night God rescued His people from Egypt, destroying all the Egyptian firstborn. Then He said to Israel, "**It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt: THIS IS THAT NIGHT OF THE LORD to be observed OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL in their generations**" (Exodus 12:42). It is a time of festive celebrating, joyous laughter, exuberance and excitement for the family, led by the father or elder present at the seder table.

But thousands of people who believe in observing the Passover, today, have been taught that Christ CHANGED the Passover from observing a Passover dinner-seder, in which the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt is told in a family setting, to abolishing the dinner, with bitter herbs, matzah (unleavened bread), and a wonderful

celebration with songs and story-telling in which everybody participates, to a dreary, mournful, funereal service like a "mass" with nothing but a tiny piece of matzah and a thimble of wine. And, they have been taught, He changed it from the beginning (night-portion) of Nisan 15 to the beginning (night portion) of Nisan 14. And many have been observing this mournful "rite" for decades, without realizing that what they call the Passover has absolutely no connection with the Bible's *Passover* celebration! *They have been observing a fraudulent, imitation, false "Passover" for decades without realizing how seriously they have been misled by erring, ignorant teachers and ministers!*

The truth is, *they have never observed the TRUE PASSOVER in all their lives!*

Shocking to some as it may seem, thousands have been deceived. They have NEVER EVER OBSERVED THE TRUE PASSOVER -- yet they THINK that they have been doing so for many years!

Truly, as Solomon wrote in warning 3,000 years ago: "**There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death**" (Prov.14:12; 16:25).

Principle #11 -- Prove ALL Things!

Principle #11 is that God warns His people to "**Prove all things; hold fast that which is good**" (I Thess.5:21). People who have been mistaught, and misled, have no excuse to continue following error. God commands all people everywhere: "**And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth ALL MEN to REPENT [that is, to change, about-face, and begin OBEYING the Laws of God]**" (Acts 17:30). Too many of us have assumed too much over the years, without studying God's Word and PROVING the truth of God for ourselves.

Paul praised the Bereans because they took this responsibility seriously. They did not "assume." They did not just "believe the preacher," no matter how impressive his "credentials" appeared to be on the surface. Luke wrote of the Bereans, "**These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with ALL READINESS OF MIND, and SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, whether those things were so**" (Acts 17:11).

It is the obligation of each and every one of us before the throne of God to RESEARCH into these things, and PROVE them to ourselves -- like the Bereans did. We have no excuse. God will accept no excuses. God commands, "**STUDY to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, RIGHTLY DIVIDING the word of God**" (II Tim.2:15). God tells us the right attitude we should have in our study. Isaiah declared, "**Thus saith the LORD . . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite [humble] spirit, and trembleth at my word**" (Isaiah 66:2).

Principle #12 -- BEWARE OF MEN!

Principle #12 is to remember the words of Jesus Christ, and "**BEWARE OF MEN**" (Matthew 10:17). David also warned, "**It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man**" (Psalm 118:8). Also, "**It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes [leaders, ministers, those with supposed "authority" to lead and teach]**" (verse 9). And, God warns every one of us, regardless of our background: "**Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish**" (Psalm 146:3-4).

Many people put their trust in ministers in the Worldwide Church of God, United Church of God, Global Church of God, Philadelphia Church of God, International Church of God, or some other offshoot of Worldwide, or some Messianic group, only to see their trust and faith shattered. When will we learn the lesson? What will it take? Many, over the years, put their faith in Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God, whom God indeed used to reveal many wonderful truths to this end-time generation.

But faith in a man, or human being, is always misplaced. Herbert W. Armstrong made many mistakes, and God did not reveal all truth to him. More and more truth is being revealed as we near the END of this age. As Daniel the prophet foretold, "**But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and KNOWLEDGE shall be increased**" (Daniel 12:4).

The question is -- are we willing to FACE this new knowledge, and prove it, and accept it, when God leads us to it? Are we willing to "**OBEY God rather than man**" (Acts 5:29)???

Principle #13 -- Fear GOD!

Principle #13 is that "**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction**" (Proverbs 1:7). To learn the knowledge of God, we must fear Him -- stand in AWE of Him, and His Word. As king David wrote, "**Stand in AWE, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness [obedience to God's commandments -- see Psalm 119:172], and put your trust in the LORD**" (Psalm 4:4-5). To have knowledge -- and to refuse to obey it -- is sin. The apostle James wrote: "**Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is SIN**" (James 4:17).

The fear of God is the beginning of right knowledge. It sets us on the right path. If we fear God properly, then we will study His Word with a desire to learn exactly and precisely what God wants us to do in our lives -- regardless of what various "men" try to tell us!

The lack of the fear of God leads to a lack of the right kind of knowledge -- the knowledge of God and His Word. Only those who FEAR God will spend the necessary

time in diligent Bible study to insure that they are never misled by erring ministers and false teachers.

The prophet Hosea warned, "**My people are *destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast REJECTED KNOWLEDGE, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest [or, minister or servant of God] to me; seeing thou hast FORGOTTEN THE LAW of thy God, I will also forget thy children***" (Hosea 4:6).

Lack of fear of God leads to lack of true knowledge, and lack of true knowledge leads to disobedience to the Laws of God. A shallow, peripheral, surface understanding of God's Holy Days and "Passover" is not enough. To observe any of His Holy Days *at the wrong time* is unworthy of a true Christian and servant of the living God! To continue to do so, when the truth is available and can be proved, is tantamount to stubbornness and REBELLION! As the prophet Samuel told king Saul of ancient Israel, "**For rebellion is as the sin of WITCHCRAFT, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast REJECTED the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king**" (I Samuel 15:23).

Principle #14 --There are No SMALL SINS in God's Sight!

Does it really matter what "days" we observe? Is it a "small thing" to err by just "one day" as to the correct time and date to observe Passover? Is it only a "small thing" to keep it in a different manner than God's people have observed it for countless generations -- as a funereal "wake" instead of a joyous family celebration of life and liberty?

According to the Word of God, it makes a great deal of difference. Old king Saul may have thought that it was a "SMALL THING" that he had not *precisely* obeyed God's commandment to kill all the Amalekites, including their king and their cattle (I Samuel 15:1-9). He returned from the battle with booty, much cattle, and sheep, and "**would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile, and refuse, that they destroyed utterly**" (I Sam.15:9). Then God said to Samuel, "**It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath NOT performed my commandments**" (verse 10).

Saul disobeyed. It may have seemed a "small matter" in his own sight. Just a "technical detail." But not so in the eyes of Almighty GOD! What seems trivial and unimportant to a man may be a MAJOR SIN in the sight of God!

God demands perfection. He said to Abraham, "**I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect**" (Genesis 17:1). Jesus Christ declared, in the Sermon on the Mount, "**Be ye therefore PERFECT, even as your Father in heaven is perfect**" (Matthew 5:48).

How dare we "trivialize" God's commandments!

Principle #15 -- Separate the Clean and Unclean

Principle #15 is that the Word of God declares that we MUST understand and discern the DIFFERENCE between the "clean and unclean" -- good and evil -- obedience to God and disobedience. When God says "Jump," we should immediately "jump." Not when some "minister" or "human being" says "jump."

Malachi wrote, "**Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not**" (Malachi 3:16-18).

Isaiah wrote: "**Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, TOUCH NO UNCLEAN THING; go ye out of the midst of her [churches that have Babylonian doctrines]; BE YE CLEAN, that bear the vessels of the LORD. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward [that is, rear guard]**" (Isa.52:11-12). In other words, God says we must DEPART from false teachings, Babylonian customs, and counterfeit doctrines that have a "semblance" of truth but which are Satanic counterfeits and frauds and spiritual forgeries!

Ezekiel foretold the end-time apostasy among God's people, and His churches -- the end-time branches of His true Church. Ezekiel was told by God, "**There is a conspiracy of her prophets [religious leaders and ministers] in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things [gotten rich and wealthy off the tithes and offerings of God's people!]; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have VIOLATED MY LAW, and have profaned MY HOLY THINGS [including HOLY DAYS]: they have put NO DIFFERENCE between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from MY SABBATHS, and I was profaned among them**" (Ezek.22:25-26).

Let's understand this matter! God means business. All those end-time ministers who teach observing Passover on the *wrong day*, and in the *wrong manner*, who thus *violate God's holy Law*, will be held strictly accountable for profaning God's Sabbaths, and His truth. They will be judged very severely for having put no difference between the "clean" and "unclean," and for having substituted PAGAN "mass" funereal-like "passover services" -- UNCLEAN in God's sight -- for the true, wonderful, delightful Passover God commanded!

Ezekiel continues: "**Her princes in the midst thereof are like WOLVES [in sheep's clothing! --Matt.7:15] ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered**

[untrustworthy] mortar, seeing vanity, and divining LIES unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken" (Ezek.22:27-28).

These wicked end-time ministers will not profit the people of God at all. In the end, they will lead them to utter destruction, if they don't repent. And that warning applies to the thousands of people who have been misled by them as well! **"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"** (Galatians 6:7).

Principle #16 -- Beware of VAIN Worship

Did you know that it is possible to really "worship" Christ, to worship God, and to do it all IN VAIN?

Millions are guilty of that very thing, today, because their worship is not formulated by the Word of God, and they have replaced the truth of God with human, man-made *traditions!*

Modern ministers, unfortunately, are very much like the Pharisees of Christ's time, who tended to substitute man-made "traditions" in place of the commandments of God. Jesus Christ warned them: **"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? . . . Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah the prophet prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"** (Matthew 15:3-9).

Christ made much the same assertion in the gospel of Mark. He declared, **"Howbeit IN VAIN do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the *tradition of men*, and the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own *tradition*"** (Mark 7:7-9).

Is "church tradition" more important than the commandments of God? Some seem to think so. Some seem to feel that since they have been observing "Passover" a certain way, at a certain time and date, for twenty or thirty years, or more, that their "practice" has become "hallowed" by age -- it has become a "church tradition." They see or feel no obligation or compunction to change their practice, now, at this time. What was "good enough" for Herbert W. Armstrong, and the Church of God, from the 1930's until his death in 1986, seems to be "good enough" for them, at this time.

But Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah, said plainly, with no sugar-coating, that such worship is **"IN VAIN."** His words are recorded by both Matthew and Mark -- God

saw fit that we be exposed to this example and teaching **TWICE**.

Obviously, this subject was and is very important to God. How important is it to us?

Principle #17 -- It DOES Make a Difference!

One individual recently said to a group of people, concerning the Passover celebration, "The one sure command we have is for the Passover. Do you do it on the 14th or 15th? You will have to answer in judgment from your understanding. But it does not appear to be the most 'weighty matter of the law!'"

Who says so?

Is the proper time and observance of Passover not a "weighty" matter to God? One is either right -- or wrong. There are not two "Passovers." God only ordained ONE. To fail to distinguish between right and wrong, the clean and unclean, in God's sight, is an abomination! To keep Passover on the wrong day would be like keeping the Sabbath on the wrong day! Those who desecrated God's Sabbath days, by observing false forgeries, like Sunday, or a false "Passover" a day early, or a false Sunday Pentecost, are guilty before God of profaning His Holy Days and sacrilege! God says, "**But the house of Israel REBELLED against me . . . they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments . . . and MY SABBATHS THEY GREATLY POLLUTED: then I said, I would pour out MY FURY upon them in the wilderness to consume them**" (Ezekiel 20:13).

Does Sabbath keeping matter? God commands: "**I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and HALLOW MY SABBATHS; and they shall be a SIGN between me and you, that ye may KNOW that I am the LORD your God**" (Ezekiel 20:19-20).

It does matter to Almighty GOD! It does make a difference what days we observe -- in the eyes of Almighty God!

Principle #18 -- Beware the "Least Commandment" Syndrome

How important is "obedience" to God? Some teachers are making "excuses" for people's disobedience. One writer goes so far as to say, ". . . we should become less fussy about difficult details of dates and times." He goes so far as to say, "Even though the Dead Sea scrolls and Jewish history show that controversies existed in regard to calendars and the keeping of holy days, the New Testament writers make *virtually no effort to try to clear up any of it*. There is not even a short section dedicated to 'how to count Pentecost' or something like that."

He goes on to say, "What do we believe we will be asked in the judgment? Will

our first few questions be to explain the timing of the Passover in the Old and New Testaments? Honestly, it is much easier for most people to learn and give a technical explanation of Passover, than it is to *do* all of the things mentioned above in a righteous manner" ("Passover in Perspective," by Norm Edwards, Bible Study Notes, 4/3/98).

Does any of this make sense? Should we become "less fussy" about the date and timing of the Passover, or the holy day of Pentecost?

GOD FORBID! God desires PERFECTION on the part of His people. He has given us NO EXCUSE! If it is so easy for most people to give a technical explanation of Passover, then there is NO EXCUSE FOR GETTING IT WRONG!

Furthermore, the reason New Testament writers made no effort to "clear up" controversies about the holy days and Jewish calendar during the first century is really very simple -- JESUS CHRIST SAID THE PHARISEES SAT IN MOSES' SEAT, and further, He said we are to DO AS "THEY BID YOU OBSERVE AND DO"! What could be CLEARER than that? That statement resolves ALL CONTROVERSIES about which calendar they would be using, and WHICH Holy Days they would be keeping! It would have been those approved and sanctioned by the PHARISEES!

Therefore, I shudder to think of what God in heaven must think of this wishy-washy, compromising, willy-nilly paper on "Passover in Perspective," by Norm Edwards. What may seem so trivial and unimportant to *him* may be of enormous importance to GOD, showing the difference between the clean and the unclean, the pure and the defiled, the ones who are righteous, and the ones who are unrighteous!

Perhaps to some, like Norm Edwards, the Passover -- the first of God's annual Holy Days -- may "not appear to be the most 'weighty matter of the law!' "

But Almighty God thunders, "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts**" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Is the subject of true Passover observance not a "weighty matter of the law"? What could be weightier? It is a premier annual Holy Day of God, commanded to be observed FOREVER. It is the BEGINNING of the plan of God. It sets the pattern for all the Holy Days to follow. If we get it wrong, then we are screwed up *from the very beginning!*

The Passover, its correct observance, and understanding of its true meaning, is the KEY TO SALVATION! It is a terrible SIN to minimize it, belittle it, or denigrate it!

Herbert Armstrong used to say, "I will not bend one iota, I will not compromise one scintilla, of God's Law!" His attitude was right, even though his knowledge was less than perfect in many areas, including Holy Day observance.

To compromise with the TRUTH of God, which Jesus Christ said would make us "FREE" (John 8:32), would be to submit to error, and to become *enslaved in SIN once again!* To carelessly reject truth is to follow Satan the devil, the father of liars (John 8:44). And the end result? *Death!* Death for ALL ETERNITY!

Does it really matter if we get Passover wrong, and observe it on the wrong day? Or Pentecost? Ignorance of the law is one thing; but careless, slothfulness, laziness, and unwillingness to "prove all things," is something else again!

The apostle James wrote, "**For whosoever shall keep the WHOLE LAW, AND YET OFFEND IN ONE POINT, he is guilty of ALL**" (James 2:10) -- that is, he is guilty of SIN! (I John 3:4).

And, Paul wrote plainly, "**The wages of SIN is DEATH**" (Romans 6:23).

Therefore, it sounds like it is very important in God's eyes that we strive to obey God and keep His commandments -- all of them -- rightly, and avoid all excuses for compromise and disobedience!

Jesus Christ said, concerning those who would minimize the commandments of God: "**Whosoever therefore shall break one of these *least commandments*, and shall teach men so, he shall be called *the least* in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall DO AND TEACH THEM, *the same shall be called GREAT* in the kingdom of heaven. . .**" (Matt.5:19).

Those who refuse to boldly teach GOD'S TRUTH -- who are AFRAID to stand up, and stand out, and who fear persecution for proclaiming the TRUTH of God without compromise, fear, or favor of men -- the same will answer to the judgment seat of Christ!

And those who think it doesn't really matter which days we observe, or keep, will also stand before the Judgment seat of God, to give account of themselves, and their lives, and their disobedience. What excuses will they have -- then?

Jesus Christ declared of that day, "**Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that DOETH THE WILL of my Father which is in heaven**" (Matt.7:21). Isn't it the Father's will that we observe HIS annual holy days, that HE gave to mankind -- at the proper "appointed times"?

Jesus went further, and said, "**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out demons? and in thy name done many wondrous works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you: DEPART FROM ME, ye that work iniquity***" (Matt.7:22-23).

Does it really matter? You bet it does! "**Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is SIN**" -- that is, lawlessness (James 4:17).

Is it a "light thing" with you? Ahab thought it a "**light thing for him to walk in**

the sins of Jeroboam" (I Kings 16:31), who changed the dates and observance of God's holy days (I Kings 12:32. What do YOU think?

Chapter 3

Amazing Mysteries of the **PASSOVER**

What is the hidden meaning of the Passover celebration, and WHY are so many so ignorant of the profound and deep significance of the various emblems of Passover? Many thousands, missing these vital ingredients, have been woefully misled into stunning error and misunderstanding! In this article, we take a deep look into the fascinating inner mysteries of the Passover celebration.

Around the middle of the second millennium before the present era, or about 3,500 years ago, the family of Jacob numbering about 70 souls, went down to Egypt to escape famine in the land of Canaan. As they remained in Egypt, and grew into a numerous nation of about three million people, the Egyptians came to distrust these "Asiatics," and reduced them to slavery and bondage. As the slavery increased in pressure and constant power, the children of Israel began to cry out to God for deliverance. Many sank into apathy and exhaustion. Many caved in to the Egyptian masters, and adopted Egyptian customs. But as the people's cry reached heaven, God sent a man, Moses, to be their deliverer.

Through a remarkable series of miracles, God used Moses to rescue His people from the Egyptian servitude and bondage. After an incredible series of ten plagues upon the Egyptians, on the night of the Passover, Pharaoh finally relented, and gave the Israelites their freedom -- and commanded them to make haste, and leave the country, "ASAP" -- as soon as possible -- for the Egyptians were fearful they would all perish in the calamity and catastrophe which had befallen Egypt.

Says Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*:

"During the night, as their firstborn were struck down, the Egyptians urged the

Israelites to leave, taking their flocks and belongings with them. And so, already dressed for a hasty getaway, 600,000 Israelite men, plus women and children (said to have totaled three million), walked out of the house of bondage.

"Realizing the valuable resource he had released, Pharaoh reneged -- just as he had following every other plague, once he was out of immediate danger. He sent his chariots and soldiers after the Israelites . . . who were immediately ready to turn tail and resubjugate themselves to Pharaoh rather than die in the wilderness. It would be one of their many expressions of losing faith, indications that getting the people out of slavery was much easier than getting the slavery out of the people" (*Celebrate!*, page 4).

At the Red Sea, God miraculously delivered His people once again -- causing the waters to roll back, creating a dry roadway for Israel to walk through to freedom, but when the Egyptian army assayed to follow them, He caused the sea waters to return, drowning every last one of the Egyptian soldiers.

Passover Commanded To Be Observed FOREVER

God in His Word commanded His people to observe this miraculous deliverance and salvation of an entire nation as an annual festival, called the Passover, or Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. He commanded:

"And this day shall be unto you for a MEMORIAL; and ye shall keep it a FEAST to the LORD *throughout your generations*; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance FOR EVER. *Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread*; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses . . ." (Exodus 12:14-15).

The Passover, therefore, has a very clear historical connection. It is, on one level, the celebration of an ancient and very meaningful historical event -- the deliverance of our ancestors from Egyptian slavery. However, in a deep sense, it is much more than that. Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time*, writes about the Passover celebration, saying:

"The liberation from slavery in Egypt marks the birth of the Jewish [or Israelitish] nation; it also serves as a symbol for all periods of exile and redemption in Jewish history. The exodus represents deliverance, not just from oppression in Egypt but from all exiles in the past, present, and future. It speaks both to the inevitability of oppression throughout history, as well as to the trust in an equally inescapable liberation. The event serves not only as a marker of turning points in the development of the Jewish people; it is also symbolic of critical moments in our own lives. For this reason, we read in the *Hagaddah* that 'each of us is obligated to consider ourselves as coming out of Egypt.' The coming out of Egypt is an archetypal image of life transition. It embodies every narrow passage we traverse as we give birth to ourselves: leaving home, career changes, marriage, divorce, birth, sickness, death, addiction, and recovery from trauma" (p.61-62).

Along this theme, Ziff points out that the inevitable difficulties of life from time to time can overwhelm us, leaving us feeling defeated, hopeless, and depressed. He goes on:

"If we view these experiences solely as oppressive events, we find ourselves also enslaved in Egypt and unable to escape. The stress can destroy our will, energy, and capacity to respond constructively. The story of slavery in Egypt offers us a different possibility: the Israelites not only overcome the adversity; they develop into a nation. Viewing our lives through the mirror of the Israelites' experience, we may be able to envision a similar outcome for ourselves in which we not only overcome difficulties but also develop new capacities in the process" (p.62).

The period of slavery in Egypt was not an "accident," Ziff points out. It was part of God's Plan that Israel should go down to Egypt, and there multiply into a nation. It was also part of His Plan that they should become enslaved, so that they could experience the process and the events of the Exodus -- the redemptive process which involved the participation of the Israelites, and the miraculous intervention of Almighty God. The primary lesson this should teach us is that since God is ultimately in control of the Universe, and everything within it, there is always "hope" for the future, no matter how bleak or desperate the present circumstances.

Egypt the Womb and Narrow Passage

How can we understand the Exodus in a positive way, and apply it to our own lives?

The Hebrew word for "Egypt" is *mitzrayim*, and means "narrow place." If you look at a map, you will see that the Nile river runs from the south of Egypt to the north, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. Most all life and population in Egypt is along this thin line, the Nile, located within twenty miles or less of the river. The rest of Egypt is trackless desert, for the most part.

Egypt, then, represents a narrow, confining, constricting place or passage. Shneur Zalman, the founder of modern Hasidic Judaism, associates Egypt with the narrowness of the womb. Just as Egypt offered sanctuary to Jacob and his family, initially, so the womb offers warmth, sustenance and protection for a newly conceived baby. But as the fetus reaches full term, and is ready for delivery, the womb becomes a constricting, oppressive place. It is time for the "birth" to take place, and for the new baby to be "ejected" from the narrow, oppressive "womb."

So it was in Egypt. What was at first a place of refuge became, in time, a narrow and oppressive reality. Says Joel Ziff, "The image of the splitting of the sea [the Red Sea when Israel left Egypt] is suggestive of the breaking of the waters that occurs just before birth. The exodus becomes the passage through the birth canal."

In essence, the Israelites in Egypt were just as helpless as a baby in a mother's womb, totally dependent on the womb, placenta, and mother's sustenance. Says Ziff,

"The journey through these straits cannot be accomplished without outside intervention. The Israelites cannot mobilize to fight their oppressors: they can only cry out in their suffering. They are reluctant even to support Moses

as he begins his struggle. The God of the exodus is all-knowing, an omniscient God who hears the cries of the Israelites ascending to heaven and descends to earth to see their plight. The God of the exodus is all-powerful, an omnipotent God who calls Moses from the burning bush, brings ten plagues upon the Egyptians, and leads the people out of Egypt with an outstretched arm" (p.65).

As we see our lives from this vantage point, and in this mirror image, we can validate our own personal struggle to cope with situations, life's pains and sufferings, and crises that rock our own existence. Like Israel, we can acknowledge our own powerlessness and helplessness, and cry out to the Most High God for help, escape, and relief from oppression.

In the midst of crisis, we can cry out to God, and He who changes not will reach down and rescue us from trouble and suffering, affliction and pain, just as He did for Israel 3,500 years ago. The theme of Passover is an eternal, on-going, everlasting theme -- the theme of deliverance, redemption, and salvation.

Egypt -- the Smelting Furnace

The Word of God tells us, "But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance" (Deut.4:20). Egypt is compared here to an "iron furnace." Furnaces that smelt iron ore create very intense heat, in order to melt the ore into a liquid form. Raw metal is exposed to extreme heat. As the ore melts, impurities are separated from the pure liquefied metal, and the metal can now be mixed with other metals to create a new, stronger substance.

Even so, in the heat and fire of oppression, spiritual impurities can be smelted out and removed from the people, transforming their character. As Joel Ziff explains, "In the heat of the fire of crisis, the old Ego melts, the impurities within ourselves can similarly be removed, and the Essence can be reshaped, allowing for creation of a new material, a new Ego that is suited to the new conditions we face" (p.67).

Says Ziff:

"Each of these images -- the birth, the seed, and the smelting furnace -- not only suggest an external change, they also provide an image of internal transformation: a baby is born, the seed germinates, and a new substance is created" (*ibid.*).

Thus for the change and transformation to take place, the heat and fire of crisis -- oppression -- spiritual Egypt -- is necessary! It is the conditioning agent that accelerates the process of change, and new spiritual growth and development!

Egypt, then, is a symbol for slavery, confinement, oppression. In *The Secrets of the Haggadah: A Commentary on the Passover Hagaddah*, by M. Glazerson, we read:

"What was Pharaoh's underlying reason for oppressing the Jews? He wanted to break down the barriers which separated Jew from Egyptian; he wanted the Jews [or, Israelites] to *assimilate and to mingle* with his people. What factor protected the Jews from the dangers and consequences of assimilation? Their having preserved

their unique language. It guaranteed their separation, their distinctiveness, and their sanctity" (p.11).

Satan the devil has always sought to break down the barriers which separate God's people from the world -- society at large. The friendship of the world, the apostle John warns us, is a great danger. He said, "Love not the world [Egypt], neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). "Assimilation" is one of Satan's chief tactics to destroy God's people.

Liberation from Slavery

The first key to redemption, the first step, actually, is to recognize our problem, and our hopelessness without outside help, and then to cry out for that help.

Many people, in various kinds of "slavery," are in denial of their problem, and so long as they deny they have a problem -- whether it is alcohol or drug addiction, or smoking, or some other noxious habit -- they cannot overcome it or be freed from it. First they must acknowledge the true situation -- the true plight -- their "problem." They must face it.

Writes Joel Ziff on this problem:

"Although the Israelites were unable to mobilize to free themselves, their ability to know they were enslaved and their willingness to cry out literally moved the heavens, bringing God to earth. Their cries were so powerful that God initiated the redemption . . .

"As we experience the suffering of our condition and our inability to make changes in it, we begin to cry out for help. . . When we feel buffeted by circumstances beyond our control and find ourselves unable to act effectively, we can identify with the powerlessness of the Israelites in their slavery and find our own pain reflected in the mirror of the story. The expression of our pain is not a negative quality: it marks the end of denial and illusion, it acknowledges the reality of our powerlessness, and it implies hope that help is possible.

"When we cry out for help, we are beginning to reconnect with the Essence of life . . ." (*Mirrors in Time*, p.72).

The freeing of the Israelite slaves required many steps. Ten plagues were poured out on the Egyptians, before they were ready to allow the slaves to depart. The slaves themselves had to see their condition, and cry out to heaven in agony and desperation, for help. Says Joel Ziff:

"The liberation from slavery involved two seemingly contradictory qualities: (1) acknowledging powerlessness as a basis for hope and (2) a commitment to act in spite of powerlessness. Both qualities are needed in this phase of self-development. We need to trust we will receive help even though we are powerless; we also need encouragement to be self-reliant and take initiative to change our situation" (p.74).

Hope impels action. Urgency and crisis drive us to seize the initiative to do

something about the problem before us. Says Ziff, "Paradoxically, the more we acknowledge our powerlessness, the more our hope is reinforced. The acknowledgment of powerlessness serves as a foundation for building hope. The oppression of slavery inevitably gives way to liberation" (p.76).

"The liberation from slavery requires active intervention from God, but human initiative and action are also required in the process. Only when the Israelites cry out does God respond with miracles of the plagues. At the time of the last plague, the Israelites are asked to slaughter a lamb . . . and to mark their doorways with its blood. When Pharaoh finally allows them to leave, the Israelites immediately act to escape from their slavery: they leave in the middle of the night, not even waiting for their bread to rise. At the sea, when the Israelites are unable to cross, Moses turns to God. God promises to respond, but the Israelites must take the first step. Nachshon, one of the Israelites, acting on faith, enters the water. When the water reaches his nostrils, the sea splits" (p.77).

The Paradigm of Slavery to Freedom

Irving Greenberg in *The Jewish Way*, also points out that there is much more to the festival of the Passover than just an ancient historical event. He writes:

"On another level, however, the entire experience is highly paradigmatic. Slavery is merely an exaggerated version of the reality endured by most human beings. Oppression and deprivation are not that dissimilar. The most devastating effect of slavery, ultimately, is that the slave internalizes the master's values and accepts the condition of slavery as his proper status. People who live in chronic conditions of poverty, hunger, and sickness tend to show similar patterns of acceptance and passivity. . . .

"The freeing of the slaves testified that *human beings are meant to be free*. History will not be finished until all are free. The Exodus shows that God is independent of human control. Once this is understood by tyrants and their victims then all human power is made relative. Freedom is the inexorable outcome, for only God's absolute power can be morally legitimate.

"The Exodus further proves that *God is concerned*. God heard the cries of the Israelites, saw their suffering, and redeemed them. But the God of Israel who acted in the Exodus is the God of the whole world; God's love encompasses all of humankind. . . . In Jewish history, Exodus morality, from which Jewish ethics and Jewish rituals are derived, was made universal and applied to ever-widening circles of humankind. So the Messiah and the concept of a messianic realm are really implicit in the Exodus model itself. Messianic redemption is the Exodus writ large" (p.35).

Every year, therefore, on the anniversary of its occurrence, the Exodus saga is re-enacted at the Passover table. Every Jewish family recreates the Exodus from slavery to freedom at the Passover seder, or dinner, in song, story, food, and dress. This observance creates a marvelous sense of family unity, cohesiveness, and togetherness -- a bond that cannot be broken. The proper celebration of the Passover creates a fusion of a transcendental reality, establishing a reality and foundation so powerful that it can never be shaken or destroyed.

The goal of celebrating the Passover is not just merry-making and frivolity. The goal is to go back thousands of years, "and to experience, first, the crushing bitterness and despair of slavery and, next, the wild, exhilarating release of freedom. The reenactment stretches for seven days . . . On the first nights at the festive meal or seder, through use of the haggadah, the family re-stages the night of the actual exit from Egypt." This reenactment becomes a very personal, and even private, experience, as we relate the story of the Passover deliverance to our own personal lives, with our own problems, afflictions, trials, and difficulties.

Greenberg goes on:

"Properly staged, the seder is the climax of liberation. On this night oblivion yields up its prey. Pharaoh's tyranny and genocide stalk the land again. But the [Israelitish] people rise up and set out for the Promised Land -- slave again, free again, born again" (*The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, p.40).

The Celebration of Passover in Ancient Times . . .

After the time of Joshua and the elders who outlived him, the Israelites pursued an on-again-off-again relationship with God, and the book of Judges records many apostasies and revivals of true worship, until the time of Samuel, who restored true worship. Apostasy set in again in the latter part of Solomon's reign. The next mention of Passover being restored is in the reign of king Hezekiah, and then it was ignored again until the reign of Josiah, shortly before the destruction of the First Temple in 587-86 B.C. The book of Chronicles states, "Since the time of the prophet Samuel, no passover like that one had ever been kept in Israel" (II Chron.35:18).

The Jews who were exiled to Babylon after the destruction of the Temple, continued to celebrate the Passover as a model for their own hoped-for deliverance. Even those who remained in foreign lands and did not return to Judea after the Persian king Cyrus made it possible, still observed Passover, long after others returned to the Promised Land, when the Temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. Of course, those who remained in foreign countries, observed the Passover without the sacrifice of the lamb, which could only be done at the Temple.

Passover observance was restored in Judea under Ezra and Nehemiah, and continued until the apostasy of the Macabbean period, when the evil king Antiochus Epiphanes subdued the nation, and slaughtered those Jews who remained faithful to God. Many of the faithful rebelled, however, leading to the Macabbean revolt in 167-164 B.C. From that time on, Passover continued to be widely celebrated among the Jews.

. . . And During the Time of Christ

Describing the Passover scene in and around Jerusalem, during the time leading up to and including the time of Christ, Lesli Koppelman Ross vividly writes:

"The residents of Jerusalem welcomed the population-doubling pilgrims into their homes, providing free accommodations (the city was considered the common property of all the people); the travelers customarily left the skins of the paschal lambs for their hosts in appreciation. Overflow crowds stayed in surrounding villages or camped in the fields. A carnival atmosphere pervaded, the days and nights filled with festive meals, music, Torah study, and Temple pageantry, which began on the morning of erev Pesakh (Nisan 14).

"Through a series of signals from the Temple, and the Mount of Olives opposite, the people were informed when to stop eating leavened foods, and when to destroy any leavened food left in their possession. Starting at noon on Nisan 14, in three groups successively crowding the Temple courtyard, the Israelites brought their paschal offerings, and unlike the other sacrifices, slaughtered the animals themselves with the assistance of the priests and to the accompaniment of the Levite orchestra.

"As prescribed by Torah, each family unit roasted its own lamb on a portable clay stove set up in the home courtyards. Dressed in white, groups embracing different status and economic strata joined together. With biblical references, they told the story of the night of the Exodus, based on Torah's commandment to pass it on to one's children (Exodus 12:26-27, 13:8, 13:14; Deuteronomy 6:20)" (*Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*, p.8).

During the last century prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisees dominated the religious life of the Jewish people. Says Lesli Koppelman Ross,

"During the Roman occupation, Passover's theme of redemption fanned the hopes of a messianic deliverance. Having long believed that God would again provide miracles such as those experienced at the Exodus, the Jews anticipated a new Moses who would lead them to freedom on the eve of Passover. With this expectation the Jews continued to celebrate Pesakh as a commemoration of the first deliverance and the imminent occurrence of the second" (*ibid.*, page 8).

In the time of Jesus Christ, the Jews were observing the Passover with a distinctive Messianic hope and expectancy. Little did they know that their Messiah had come, right on schedule, but that He had come as the "suffering Passover lamb," and not as the conquering King, as they expected. He came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the suffering servant who would give His life for His people (Isaiah 53), as the Passover Lamb, to be sacrificed for the sins of the entire world.

During that time, the Passover was celebrated throughout Judea and the Diaspora, even by those who were unable to go up to Jerusalem. Says Lesli Koppelman Ross:

"Outside Jerusalem, where the sacrifice could not be made (some people symbolically ate roast lamb), Passover was observed with services at the local synagogue and at home with the same family service performed at the capital. It consisted of a *kiddush* (sanctification over wine); eating herbs -- or some spring vegetable -- dipped in vinegar or red wine; three questions asked by a child about the out-of-the-ordinary rituals being performed at the table; the household head's answers to the questions personalized according to the child's level of comprehension; explanations of the significance of the night of Nisan 14; a meal of the paschal lamb, *matzah*, bitter herbs (*maror*), and a pasty mixture of fruit, nuts and wine called *kharoset*; a cup of wine following the post-meal grace; and for those who had eaten the actual paschal lamb (in Jerusalem only),

chanting of *Hallel* (Psalms of Praise, 113-118)" (p.8).

Thus the observance of the Passover during the time of Christ was remarkably similar to the customary Jewish observance as it is done, today, around the world. Note, however, that no lambs were sacrificed outside of Jerusalem, where the Temple stood. In all out-lying regions, the Passover was celebrated without the Passover lamb itself, because it was forbidden by God Himself for any sacrifices to be made outside of the Temple precincts. For God had commanded explicitly in the book of Deuteronomy:

"Thou mayest NOT sacrifice the passover *within any of thy gates*, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But *at the place the LORD thy God shall choose to PLACE HIS NAME IN, THERE thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun*, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it *in the place which the LORD thy God SHALL CHOOSE*: and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents" (Deut.16:5-7).

The Jewish people observed this Festival with great joy and rejoicing, during the time of Christ. As a youth, Jesus Himself observed it "as the custom was" with His own family, and relatives. We read in the book of Luke, "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem *after the custom of the feast*" (Luke 2:41-42).

In so doing, of course, *He set an example for us*, His followers -- Jews and non-Jews alike -- to *do as He did* (see John 2::13, 23; 5:1; 11:55-56; I Pet.2:21; I John 2:6).

The Passover Lamb -- the First Step Toward Liberation

Greenberg goes on to tell us, "Jewish tradition understood the sacrifice of the lamb to be the *first step* of liberation. Even when God is the deliverer, freedom cannot simply be bestowed. People must participate in their own emancipation." The death of the lambs, then, in effect, was *only the beginning* of the story of redemption and salvation. There was much that the people had to do, in participating in their own redemption and salvation. They had to *apply* the blood of the lamb to their door-posts. They had to get ready to leave Egypt. They had to eat the Passover, and then they had to work -- hike -- out of Egypt, beginning early the next morning!

We read in the Scriptures:

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill in in the evening [*ben ha arbayim*, a Hebrew expression which means, literally, "between the two evenings" -- the latter part of the afternoon, generally from about 3-5 PM]" (Exodus 12:5-6).

Says Irving Greenberg about the Passover sacrifice of the lambs:

"In biblical times, the Paschal sacrifice was so central that the word Pesach (Passover), simply used, could refer either to the sacrifice or to the holiday. Failure to join in the Passover sacrifice meal meant cutting oneself off from the Jewish people, denying the common destiny experience of the folk. When the Temple was destroyed, ending all sacrifice, the central ritual act was ripped out of the Passover holiday, so rabbinic Jews expanded every other procedure to focus on communicating the lesson of liberation. What the sacramental Temple sacrifice could not fully accomplish, the participatory seder could" (p.40).

The first step to freedom and liberation from slavery was the ritual of the Passover lamb. The Israelites had to choose their lambs on Nisan 10, then keep them until the 14th (Exodus 12:3-6). Toward the end of the 14th, when the sun was descending in the afternoon sky (Deut.16:6), they had to slay their lambs, and then take of their blood and strike it on the door-posts (Exo.12:7), and then roast the lambs and eat them that night -- with "unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (verse 8). The Passover lamb was the first step, and the central event, of the Passover holiday. Everything revolved around it.

Further insight into the Passover is given in the book *The Essence of the Holy Days: Insights from the Jewish Sages*, written by Avraham Yaakov Finkel.

The Festival of Our Freedom

We read of the Passover: "Passover, the *festival of our freedom*, is the first in the cycle of the three pilgrimage holidays. On this holiday we relive the agony of Egyptian bondage and the glorious events of the Exodus that led to the emergence of the Jewish people." The author points out that this festival is celebrated in the month of Nisan, in the spring, when the dormant earth begins to blossom, and nature is "born anew." He adds, "Like every birth, the genesis of the Jewish nation was accompanied by harrowing birth pangs" (p.139).

For 210 years, Finkel points out, the people of Israel had been enslaved by the Egyptians, toiling in the hot sun, under the task-masters' whips, doing backbreaking, mind-numbing labor. Broken in body and spirit, they descended to the depths of despair, to a "spiritual nadir, where only physical survival occupied their mind and where spiritual values were all but forgotten." He relates:

"The sages tell us that they passed through the 'forty-ninth gate of spiritual impurity.' Had they passed the fiftieth gate, they would have been irretrievably lost. The metaphor implies that the people of Israel adopted the cultural mores of Egypt and became virtually indistinguishable from their overlords" (p.140).

Egypt, then, was a type of "sin" -- all the sins and evils of the flesh and spirit. It represents the power of sin and evil in our life -- the evil tendency or inclination. While in Egyptian slavery, our forefathers descended into the depths of sin -- they plunged into the nadir of hell. They adopted Egyptian customs and beliefs, and idolatry, and lost most of their knowledge of the true God and His commandments. They even lost count of the weekly Sabbath day, being forced to work in slave-labor for seven days a week. If Israel had become completely "evil" and "corrupt," represented by the fiftieth gate of

corruption, they would have been unredeemable -- unsalvageable -- and irretrievably lost.

Avraham Finkel goes on, explaining how the 49 steps of spiritual contamination, of Egypt ($7 \times 7 = 49$), are countered by the seven weeks (7×7) or 49 days of "counting the omer," a daily ritual which begins the second day of Passover (Nisan 16th). He writes:

"The forty-nine levels of wisdom are represented by the forty-nine days of the counting of the *Omer*. The fiftieth day, Shavuot, the day of the Giving of the Torah, parallels the fiftieth Level of Wisdom.

"As a counterpart to the fifty levels of Wisdom and Holiness, there are fifty Levels of Spiritual Contamination, because God created the world in perfect balance, making 'the one opposite the other' (Ecclesiastes 7:1): the good and the evil inclination, the forces of holiness opposite the forces of impurity.

"In Egypt, the people of Israel degenerated, declining morally to the forty-ninth Level of Spiritual Contamination. They needed to be extricated from that state. God wanted to lift Israel gradually from these forty-nine Levels of Immorality by illuminating on each of the days between Pesach and Shavuot the Level of Holiness corresponding to the Gate of Spiritual Contamination on the opposite side of the scale. We relive this *tikkum*, correction or restoration, of gradual ascent to *kedushah*, holiness, each year in the Counting of the Omer on the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot. Shavuot thus represents the illumination of the fiftieth Gate of *Binah*, Understanding, and *Kedusha*, Holiness" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, Finkel, p.162).

When God called His people out of this Egyptian servitude and bondage -- both physical and spiritual -- He did so by a mighty hand and stretched out arm. But in so doing, He began to bring them back to Him, by teaching them His ways and laws. In memory of the Passover deliverance which He gave them, He commanded them to observe the Passover "for ever," throughout all their generations.

The Passover holy days remind us of the power of God to miraculously deliver His people from slavery -- slavery to sin, to corruption, to Satan the devil, to human fleshly inclinations, and to human "nature." The Counting of the Omer, meanwhile, reminds us that we must be *overcomers* -- we must *change* and divest ourselves of the attitudes and sins we inculcated in Egypt, and we must become "a new creation," fashioned according to holiness and godliness. Each day as we leave Egypt and approach Sinai, "Revelation," we must put off sins and grow more in the character and likeness of God (see Eph.4:20-24; Col.3:1-17).

Says Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate!* --

"One lesson of the *Omer* period . . . is how easy it is to slide back into familiar ways. . . . Remember the ancient Israelites who, not a week out of Egypt, were ready to forego liberty and return to their miserable lives -- yearning for the comfort of the familiar evil over fear of the unknown.

"Slavery does offer a certain freedom that can be attractive: the freedom from

responsibility for yourself and others, the freedom from having to establish goals, figure out how to reach them, or think beyond the moment. It takes strength and guts to walk out of a known situation, which for all its pain, is predictable. It is human nature to want to stay put, within the stability of the status quo. The danger is that often in those situations you don't even know that you are mired in a negative situation, one you don't realize until too late" (p.14).

Thus we ought to be able to see the intimate, clear, and powerful connection between Passover and the counting of the Omer to Pentecost -- Shavuot -- which has been called "the eighth day of Passover, and which completes the Passover holy days. Passover represents the "beginning" of our salvation and deliverance; the counting of the Omer represents our overcoming and getting rid of sin and all contamination and spiritual corruption; and Shavuot represents the finishing of our salvation, when we meet God, at the Revelation of the Messiah. Passover represents the "cross of Christ," where it all began -- but that was just the beginning. It was not all "finished" at the cross -- rather, our salvation only BEGAN at the cross!

The Essence of True Freedom

The two words generally used for "freedom" in the Torah are *khofesh* and *deror*. However, these words are not applied to the Exodus "freedom," because they imply lack of restraint, complete self-determination -- undisciplined freedom, which in the end leads to further bondage and renewal of slavery to the desires of the flesh. The Israelites, however, were given the freedom of *kerah*, which is freedom to live a certain kind of life, one "according to God's system of discipline." It is the kind of freedom summarized in the Ten Commandments, which guarantees justice and freedom for everybody, the entire community -- freedom under law, regulated by laws of justice, and freedom which requires self-control.

This kind of Torah freedom is explained in *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*, by Lesli Koppelman Ross:

"The Jewish concept of freedom means the unrestrained ability to have a relationship with God, show obedience to Him, and accept Torah, which sets the Jew on the path to life that will allow him/her to fulfill his/her role in the overall plan for the world. The only way to be free to worship God is to be free of an earthly master. There is a universe of difference between being a servant (*ehved*) of Pharaoh and a servant -- like Moses -- of God (*ehved l'Elohim*). Under human oppression, those in bondage labor for the aggrandizement of others, or because someone wants to break their spirit. Under God, we can choose obligations that are aimed at the benefit for all" (p.11).

The Bitter Herbs -- Maror

God commanded the Israelites to eat along with the Passover lamb, and unleavened bread, "bitter herbs," or *maror* in Hebrew. The word means "bitterness." The purpose of the *maror*, or bitter herbs, at the Passover table, is to remind us of the bitterness our ancestors (or we, ourselves, as we put ourselves in their place) were forced to suffer in Egyptian bondage. For this reason, many use horseradish on Pesach night, and eat it along with other bitter herbs, such as romaine lettuce, endive, or even iceberg

lettuce. During the seder, *maror* is eaten twice -- once alone, and once with *matzah*, in a "sandwich."

A third item eaten at the Passover table is called *charoset*. It is a mixture of apples, figs, dates, or even pomegranates, walnuts, almonds, cinnamon, ginger, particularly those fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs (they serve as a metaphor for Israel), grated together to form a thick mixture. It symbolizes the mortar and clay (*khar-sit*) the Israelites were forced to mix and use to build Pharaoh's buildings. Red wine is added, to make the mixture appropriately pasty, reminding us of the blood shed by the Israelites in bondage, the blood of the male infants Pharaoh shed, and the blood of the first plague God put upon Egypt. The *charoset* is eaten together with the *maror*, and represents "hope," reminding us that even in affliction and suffering (*maror*) there is still hope for the future.

A fourth item of Passover is called *karpas*. Toward the beginning of the seder, a small piece of *karpas* -- parsley, celery, or even radish -- is dipped into salt water or vinegar and eaten. This reminds us of the bitterness of affliction, and the salt water reminds us of the tears shed by the Israelite slaves in Egypt.

Chametz and Matzah

Two of the vital elements of Passover involve bread. One kind we are to totally eliminate during the Passover holidays; the other kind we are to partake of daily. These are leavened bread and unleavened bread. The word for "leaven" in Hebrew is *chametz*. The word for unleavened bread is *matzah*. Says Avraham Finkel:

"The words *chametz*, and *matzah*, have two letters in common, the *mem* and the *tzadi*. They differ only in the third letter. *Chametz* has a *chet* whereas *matzah* has a *het*, two letters that are almost identical.

"Indeed, *chametz* and *matzah* bear many similarities. both are made of flour and water and baked in an oven. The difference is seen when we wait and do nothing. The dough of *chametz* begins to rise, and its taste becomes sour. However, producing *matzah* is very hard work, requiring constant kneading of the dough.

"*Matzah* stands for diligence and zealousness; *chametz* stands for idleness and sloth" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.148-149).

"*Chametz* is a metaphor for the *yetzer hara*, the evil tendency, which is rooted in pride. The leavened dough has the bloated shape of pompous self-importance and arrogance. Like the rising dough, pride grows continually. The search for *chametz*, in a figurative sense, is the self-examination we should undertake to pinpoint our evil tendencies. The burning of the *chametz* symbolizes the heart-felt elimination of our negative inclination" (p.149).

Thus we have two opposites -- two contrasts -- represented by the leavened bread and unleavened bread, during the Passover feast. One is full of sin and pride, the puffed up self-importance of pride and sin. That is the *chametz*, or leavened, bread. The other is the flat bread of *matzah* -- illustrating the character of God, humility, meekness, self-

control, temperance, holiness, purity, self-abnegation, sincerity and truth.

Writes Irving Greenberg, "Chametz is the Hebrew technical term for any one of five basic types of food grain (wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats) that is mixed with water and allowed to ferment. Fermentation generally takes eighteen minutes, assuming that the mixture is not worked or kneaded during this time." He goes on:

"In preparation for Passover, traditional Jews totally eliminate chametz -- not just bread but any and all forms of leaven -- from the house and the diet. This is a symbolic statement of cutting off from the old slave existence and entering the new condition of living as a free person. The decisive break with previous diet is the outward expression of the internal break with slavery and dependence. For the modern celebrant, it is a critical step in the process of liberation that finally leads to freedom" (*op cit.*, p.41).

Chametz signifies staleness, and deadening routine, a symbol of what is allowed to stand around. It symbolizes the fermentation that occurs when dough is exposed to the elements over time. It is, during the Passover celebration, a type of "corruption" and negative values.

Writes Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*:

"When we rout out *khametz*, we are really trying to rout out the negative, stale, deadening, enslaving elements, the egotism and subconscious habits that interfere with fully realizing our potential. Searching every corner of our homes is a physical reflection of a deep soul search, changing our diet an external expression of an internal transformation. Like the Israelites who made a break from accepting slavery and idolatry in Egypt, we can sweep away whatever it is that binds us to meaningless efforts -- whether it is outside influences or the internal compulsions that subjugate us to wasteful or harmful actions.

"There is only a thin line between virtue and vice, as between polar opposites (love and hate, brilliance and imbecility, pain and pleasure) or between the pride that gives us the impetus to accomplish good things in the world and the pride that makes us so arrogant that, like Pharaoh, we think we are God.

"The same is true of the difference between *khametz*, which we must completely eliminate during Passover, and *matzah*, which we must eat. The extension of a line of a letter (the η of, *matzah*, into the θ of, *khametz* is the form of *tzaddi*, . . . and the lapse of a second (flour of one of the five grains mixed with water and baked in 18:01 minutes instead of 17:59 minutes), is not *matzah* but *khametz*. If we stand back and let things develop unchecked, we have the prohibited *khametz*. If we step in to insure that protective boundaries are not violated, we have the permitted *matzah*. One small stroke, one brief moment, can make all the difference in what we create around us" (*Celebrate!*, p.34).

In other words, as the apostle Paul also wrote, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (I Cor.5:6). A little mold, allowed to grow, contaminates the whole product. So a little sin, allowed to remain, soon spoils the whole man!

Passover, then, is the annual holiday of breaking away from corruption and

tyranny, such as that caused by sin and oppression, and breaking free to a newfound freedom and energy. Says Irving Greenberg,

"On this, the breakthrough holiday, the Torah wishes to draw a line in the sand. Choose the God of freedom or choose the Baal of oppression. If you choose the freedom of God, then not a trace of the past servitude is allowed in your life" (p.42).

Greenberg goes on:

"If all this sounds like overkill, understand that it was the outgrowth of a fierce desire to really begin a new life.

"This whole process of chametz can be likened to preparation for an orbital mission. The goal is a successful lift-off into freedom. The final countdown begins on the day before Passover.

"Twenty-four hours to Passover!

"On the evening of 14 Nisan, after dark, preferably immediately after the stars come out, the house is given a final check. This is known as Bedikas Chametz, the chametz hunt. . . Every room in the house is searched thoroughly for chametz" (p.43).

The bread of leaven and all leavened products must be removed from the home and property before Passover can begin. There is very important significance to this. Leaven, as a type of sin, is incompatible with the righteousness of Passover. God's people must purify themselves, before God will intervene to save them. In other words, they must put away all "sin" that they are aware of in their lives. They must, in a word, "repent." Only then will the Passover sacrifice have any meaning and reality for them!

On the night of the beginning of Nisan 14, the evening before the Passover seder, or dinner, it is custom for each family to give their home a final "inspection," searching the nooks and crannies for any "leaven" that may not have been removed. This is by custom done by the light of a candle, with the children also involved. Each room where leaven might have been brought during the previous year should be searched. Before the search is begun, a blessing is said, praising God, "Who has commanded us concerning the removal of *chametz*."

After the search is finished, any *chametz* is wrapped up, and burned the following morning. At this time, the head of the family prays to God, asking Him that "any *chametz* which still might be in the house, undiscovered, is considered nullified, like the dust of the earth."

Matzah -- the "Bread of Freedom"

Irving Greenberg tells us, "Just as shunning chametz is the symbolic statement of leaving slavery behind, so is eating matzah the classic expression of entering freedom." *Matzah* is "the bread of freedom." It is called *lechem oni*, "the bread of poverty" (Deuteronomy 16:3). It was the hard "bread of affliction" same verse) made only with

flour and water. It was also the meager food given to the Israelites by their Egyptian exploitative task-masters.

How can bread of affliction or poverty also be a metaphor for *freedom*? What a paradox! Does this make any sense?

Finkel gives the answer from the Maharal in *Gevurot Hashem*:

"Incongruous as it may sound, the fact is that poverty is the underlying idea of freedom. Redemption means gaining independence. Unlike a slave who is bound to a master, a free and independent man has no ties to anyone or anything. A rich man is wealthy by dint of his possessions. Because his wealth is an inherent part of his existence and he is inseparably bound to it, he is not really free. Only a poor man who owns nothing at all can be considered absolutely free. *Matzah*, made of flour and water, without any enriching ingredients such as yeast and shortening, is the bread of poverty and therefore the perfect symbol of freedom and independence.

"This explains also why the redemption took place specifically in the first month. Freedom means being completely detached from any outside force or influence. The first month, being first in time, has no linkage to any moment that preceded it. The second month is not really independent; it is second because it follows the first month. Thus, the first month is the ideal month for the deliverance. To sum it up, liberation means divesting oneself from all outside factors and influences" (*Gevurot Hashem*, ch.51).

Irving Greenberg adds to this explanation, illustrating the paradox of how the bread of affliction can become the bread of freedom -- the exact opposite. He relates:

"*Matzah* is, therefore, both the bread of freedom and the erstwhile bread of slavery. It is not unusual for ex-slaves to invert the very symbols of slavery to express their rejection of the masters' values. But there is a deeper meaning in the double-edged symbolism of *matzah*. It would have been easy to set up a stark dichotomy: *Matzah* is the bread of the Exodus way, the bread of freedom; *chametz* is the bread eaten in the house of bondage, in Egypt. Or vice versa: *Matzah* is the hard ration, slave food; *chametz* is the rich, soft food to which free people treat themselves. That either/or would be too simplistic. Freedom is in the psyche, not in the bread.

"The halacha underscores the identity of *chametz* and *matzah* with the legal requirement that *matzah* can be made only out of grains that can become *chametz* -- that is, those grains that ferment if mixed with water and allowed to stand. *How the human prepares the dough is what decides whether it becomes chametz or matzah*. How you view the *matzah* is what decides whether it is the bread of liberty or of servitude.

"The point is subtle but essential. To be fully realized, an Exodus must include an *inner voyage, not just a march on the road out of Egypt*. The difference between slavery and freedom is not that slaves endure hard conditions, while free people enjoy ease. *The bread remained equally hard in both states, but the psychology of the Israelites shifted totally*. When the hard crust was given to them by tyrannical masters, the *matzah* they ate in passivity was the bread of slavery. But when the Jews [and all the Israelites] willingly went from green fertile deltas into the desert because they were determined to be free, when they refused to delay freedom and opted to eat unleavened bread rather than wait for the bread to rise, the hard crust became the bread of freedom"

(*The Jewish Way*, p.47).

We read in *The Secret of the Hagaddah* about the *matzah* as follows:

"Matazah has a dual nature. It symbolizes lowliness, being bread that did not rise. And yet, it also represents the sublime, the lofty. . . . Even on a literal level . . . **Matazah** is meager . . . the 'bread of poverty' . . .

"And yet meagerness and poverty were also Israel's strength, for these factors influence character development in a positive manner. A person who has suffered, readily identifies with the needs of others. One who has known affliction, truly appreciates the value of deeds of benevolence" (p.48).

Thus the bread of *matzah* connotes humility and lowliness of spirit. However, strange as it may seem, *matzah* also represents the bread of *warriors*. When soldiers go into battle, they often are given *hardtack*, or unleavened bread, as part of their rations. Soft, fluffy bread would not last and would be ridiculous for the battle field. But *matzah*, or unleavened hard bread, is perfect for the warrior.

The very word *matzah* itself, in Hebrew, alludes to the "warring nature of unleavened bread." The Hebrew word for *matzah* also connotes "battle," and "to attack," as well as "to extract." (Extraction, too, is an act that involves the use of force.)

Matazah, then, is what we could call "fighting bread." It is not the soft bread of idleness and ease, and affluence, but the hard bread of those waging war, and suffering hardship.

The eating of the *matzah* begins the first of the major segments of the Passover seder. It represents the *beginning steps* of our freedom from bondage and slavery.

"As we begin the seder with a broken, incomplete piece of *matzah*, we are encouraged to take the first steps toward change even if all the pieces are not in place. We cannot wait until the time is perfect . . ." (*Celebrate!*, Ross, p.14).

An illustration of this "first step of faith" is given in a story that has come down to us about the crossing of the Red Sea. Says Lesli Koppelman Ross:

"A *midrash* tells that when the Israelites were at the Red Sea, the Egyptians at their backs, they wailed and moaned and longed for the taskmaster's whip rather than the lash of the sea's raging waves. They hesitated. Moses prayed. And one man, Nakhshon ben Amminadab, recognizing the opportunity before them, plunged into the waters. Only then did the sea subside, allowing the Israelites to continue. Like Nakhshon ben Amminadab, we have to *forge ahead with faith that we will reach the goal* and the belief that the attempt to gain freedom is still better than stagnating in slavery" (*ibid.*).

The Meaning of "Passover"

The word "Passover" itself in Hebrew is *Pesach*, and comes from a verb meaning "to pass over," in the sense of "to spare" (Exodus 12:13, 27). The term is used both for

the lamb itself that is sacrificed, as well as for the entire seven-day holiday period (Ezek.45:21).

The word "Passover" in Hebrew is a composite of the words *peh*, "mouth," and *sach*, meaning "speaking." It is the holy day that we are to celebrate by using our mouth and speaking about the glorious deliverance God has given us through His Passover intervention on our behalf, personally, as well as for our ancestors.

In Egypt, our ancestors had no "freedom of speech." They could not complain about their condition of servitude, without being whipped and disciplined by their task-masters even more. They had to "groan and bear it." But Passover eliminated this condition, and allowed them to open their mouths freely once again. It enabled them to speak forth boldly and truthfully, as free men. And they were to use their organ of speech, the mouth and lips, to speak forth the story of their Passover deliverance by God through His miraculous wonders.

One of the greatest freedoms of a truly free people, is the precious right to "freedom of speech." When the Israelites were liberated from Egypt, they regained this precious right, their freedom of speech, and could sing out their praises of God. Therefore, on Passover night, at the seder, it is a *mitzvah* to speak out freely and praise God, telling the story of the Exodus as the time-cherished, honored saga that it is, reminding us of our own freedom from the clutches of this world's Satanic bondage, given to us through the ransom and redemption of Jesus Christ, Yeshua, our Saviour, by His shed blood in payment for our sins.

The Number "4"

During the Passover evening, the number "4" comes up repeatedly. In the telling of the Passover story, and during the course of the evening, we are presented with the Four Cups of wine, there are the Four expressions of Redemption, the Four Questions, the story of the Four sons. Why the number "4"?

In Hebrew, the number "4" is represented by the fourth letter of the alphabet, the *dalet*, which is shaped like a man bent over in total submission. Says Finkel, "It symbolizes the quality of self-effacing humility. It was such complete self-nullification that the people of Israel exhibited at the time of the Exodus, when, with unquestioning faith in God, they left their homes to follow God 'into the uncharted wilderness' (Jeremiah 2:2), without preparing any provisions for the long journey (Exo.12:39)" (page 157).

The Four Cups of wine correspond to the four stages of redemption. The first cup is called the Cup of Blessing, the second is called the Cup of Plagues (representing Judgment), the third is the Cup of Redemption, and the Fourth is the Cup of Praise. God promised the children of Israel, in Exodus 6:6-7, four things. He declared:

1. **"I will bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians"
2. **"I will rid you (deliver you)** out of their bondage"

3. **"I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm"
4. **"I will take you to me** for a people, and I will be your God"

Says Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate!* --

"The four cups are said to represent the four times Pharaoh's cup is mentioned in the story of Joseph's success at dream interpretation (Genesis 40:11-14) and the four kingdoms that subjugated Israel after the Exodus (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome). They also reflect the four expressions God used when he promised to bring us out of Egypt: 'bring you out' (*v'ho'tziti*), 'deliver you' (*v'hi tzalti*), 'redeem you' (*v'ga'alti*), and 'take you unto Me' (*v'lakakhti*) (Exodus 6:6-7)" (p.24).

There are three basic symbols of the Passover -- the *pesach* or Paschal lamb, the *matzah* or unleavened bread, and the *maror* or bitter herbs. According to the sages of Israel, these correspond to the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In this light, the Four Cups of wine may be said to correspond to the four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. This typology is fitting, because God tells us in His Word that "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine" (Psalm 128:3).

Four times in the Torah we are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus to our sons (Exodus 12:26, 13:8, 13:14, and Deut.6:20). The Scriptures suggest different levels of comprehension on the part of the children, and so part of the Passover haggadah is the story of the "Four Sons," representing the four types of children.

The first son is the wise son, whose question indicates his depth of understanding and his love of Torah (God's truth). The second son is the wicked, mischievous son, who scorns the truth, and makes his question a mocking one. The third son is simple, needing to be taught in simple terms. The fourth son is the ignorant, naive son, who needs to be taught the very basics and rudiments.

Observes Lesli Koppelman Ross:

"The act of questioning reflects freedom, evidence that we are not restrained in seeking to satisfy our intellectual curiosity through probing and analysis. Questions, not answers, allow us to progress in our learning, to acquire knowledge that lifts us out of ignorance, which can be as brutal an oppressor as a tyrannical taskmaster.

"The four questions are not directly answered in the *seder*, a suggestion that formulating the right questions, and searching for the truth in response, is an ongoing process" (*Celebrate!*, p.26).

Noting the reoccurrence of the number "4" in the Passover seder, Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate!* observes:

"By now you've probably noticed that there are quite a few 'fours' in this ceremony (glasses of wine, questions, ritual foods, sons). The number is used to describe a long list of things with Jewish significance (matriarchs, epochs of the universe, groupings of the tribes in the wilderness, fringes [*tzitzit*] on the corners of ritual garments, species [of vegetation] used on the holiday of Sukkot [Tabernacles], and on and on). A mystical number in several religions, in Judaism the number four

suggests *stability and wholeness*, as in defining a square that is the base of a house, or the 'four corners of the earth' from which the Jews [and all Israelites] will be collected together at the time of redemption" (p.27).

The Matzah and Afikomen

Two of the greatest mysteries of the Passover are the *matzah* and the *afikomen*. What are they, and why are they so mysterious? The unleavened bread of *matzah*, commanded to be eaten during the seven days of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when all leavening is commanded to be destroyed and put out from one's premises, is a unique bread. It is not only unleavened, but during the preparation process, perforations are made in the dough with a sharp-toothed wheel or instrument to keep the dough from rising during baking.

God commanded His people, during the week of Passover and unleavened bread, "You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread." The children of Israel were told to leave Egypt in haste -- with urgency. There would be no time to allow their bread to rise. It only takes bread dough about 18 minutes to begin rising. Therefore, these instructions from God meant that the children of Israel had to begin their departure from Egypt almost *immediately*, upon getting the word from Moses. *This is why, during the original Passover, the Israelites were told to eat it fully dressed and clothed, with staff in hand, ready to flee Egypt.*

The elements of the Passover service, called the seder, have gradually evolved over time. Most of the changes in the past 1,800 years have been in the form of additional comments on the basic elements. Some of the portions of the Passover seder, as it is done today by the Jewish people, we know antedate the Maccabean period, which was about 165 years before Christ. Many of the basic elements and Passover rituals were already in practice during the time of the late Second Temple, that is, the time of Christ. Says Galen Peterson, in *The Everlasting Tradition*, "In other words, *the manner in which Passover is kept today is very much like the way it was kept in the days of Yeshua.*" The author goes on:

"When Yeshua and his disciples gathered for their last Passover together, they would have recited the phrase, 'Every person in every generation must regard himself as having been personally freed from Egypt.' They would have chanted the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) and said the blessings over four cups of wine. They would have eaten the lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. And they would have asked three of the four questions customarily recited today by a young boy about what makes Passover unique.

"Another custom, the section concerning the 'Four Sons,' was practiced in Yeshua's day. Traditionally, this portion is used to illustrate the reason for celebrating Passover. Each son represents a different type of person. One is wise, one is wicked, one is simple, and one is naive and unable to ask a question. When their questions are asked, the leader of the ceremony is presented with an opportunity to discuss the redemptive message of Passover" (*The Everlasting Tradition*, Galen Peterson, p.106).

About the Passover seder itself, Galen Peterson observes:

"Originally, the questions of the Four Sons were asked after a meal which incorporated several ceremonial rites. One rite involved the dipping of bitter herbs in salt water, symbolizing the tears shed in the bitter experience of slavery in Egypt. Another was a mysterious custom involving unleavened bread.

"During the *seder*, three pieces of *matzah* are used, said to represent unity. It is commonly thought that it is a unity of the priests, Levites, and Israelites. Many people use a special cloth cover with three compartments to hold the *matzah*. The middle wafer is taken out of the pocket and is broken in two. The smaller piece is returned to the pocket, and the larger piece is wrapped in a napkin and then hidden by the leader" (p.107).

The three pieces of *matzah* are said to represent the Priesthood, the Levites, and Israel. They are also said to represent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But in a real sense, they represent God the Father, the Messiah, and the true "Israel of God" (Gal.6:16).

A Puzzling Alteration in the Sequence

History shows that the questions of the Four Sons, asked Passover night, were originally asked *after* the Passover seder ceremonial rites were done. Today, the common Jewish custom is for the Four Questions to be asked at the *beginning* of the seder. Why was this change made? Says Galen Peterson:

"In Yeshua's day, the meal with its mysterious rites came first, followed by the questions and the explanation of all these things. The explanation would involve retelling God's deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. When the Mishnah (the codification of the Oral Law which comprises the first part of the Talmud) was completed around 200 C.E., this order was still in effect" (*ibid.*).

But by the time of the Gemara (the two centuries of commentary on the Mishnah, written after the codification of the Mishnah, which completes the rest of the Talmud), the order was reversed, with the Four Questions coming at the beginning of the seder service! This form makes little sense since the questions are asked *before* the symbols of the Passover are eaten, such as the bitter herbs, and *matzah*, which would normally provoke the questions.

David Daube, a Jewish Oxford scholar, in his noteworthy book *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, comments on this matter. He writes:

"In point of fact, the change found makes nonsense of the questions and indeed of the whole structure of the service. It seems to have taken place about the end of the second or the beginning of the third century.

"It is *one of the most tantalizing riddles in the history of Jewish liturgy*. A widely accepted solution is that an orderly putting of the questions and an orderly giving of the reply may have proved difficult after a meal which included wine; hence the meal with its ceremonies was placed at the end.

"But this is quite unconvincing. For one thing, had drunkenness constituted a problem, the simplest way to deal with it would have been to decree that no wine might be taken but what was required by the ritual itself. . . . For another thing, on the basis of the

solution under notice it becomes inexplicable why the second part of the Hallel . . . was not also placed before the meal. But it was not; it is still sung afterwards, as it was in the period of the New Testament and in that of the Mishnah" (p.194-195).

So then, why were the Four Questions moved to the beginning of the Passover service? Daube gives us the most fascinating answer. He concludes:

"It is much more likely that the transposition was undertaken in defence against Jewish Christian abuses. In the original arrangement -- (1) ceremonial meal, (2) questions, (3) interpretation of the ceremonies -- the nature of (2) and (3), the questions and the interpretation, must be largely determined by that of (1), the ceremonial meal. It is part (1), the performance of the usual gestures, that sets in motion and decides the direction of all that follows. . . . In Jewish Christian circles part (1), the meal, was certainly transformed in such a manner that the emphasis from the outset lay on the new deliverance; and parts (2) and (3), the questions and recital, would proceed along the lines thus laid down.

"By relegating part (1), the meal, to the end, the Rabbis took the life, or at least any undue vitality, out of it. The service now opened with some formal, orthodox questions; so formal that they referred to rites which had not yet even taken place. To these questions, an orthodox narrative would be given as reply. . . . The sequence mystifying gestures -- questions -- interpretation was replaced by the sequence formal questions -- reply -- fulfilment of prescribed ceremonies. The danger of the service being set on a wrong course was eliminated.

"None of the objections we raised against the prevalent explanation applies to that just advanced. The change round was a very clever means of preventing any fundamentally new significance being attached to the meal. . . ." (David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism, p.193-195).

Notice carefully! This commentary by a modern scholar shows plainly that *during the early Church times Jewish Christians were observing the Jewish PASSOVER just as their Jewish counterparts were doing -- with the same liturgy, rituals, and general Passover format. They were observing it at the same time and in the same manner as their Jewish brethren.*

The Mystery of the Afikomen

One of the customs of the Passover at that time was the usage of three matzos placed on the Passover table -- called the "Afikomen."

What does this strange-sounding custom involving the three pieces of *matzah*, and especially the middle portion, represent? It has been a part of the Passover ceremony since Second Temple times -- that is, during and after the Second Temple which was built in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Exactly when it began, we do not know. But it was part of the Jewish Passover service during the time of Messiah, Yeshua. Its origin is shrouded in mystery -- and its meaning as well is unknown to the Jewish people and Rabbis who have observed it every year for well over 2,500 years, at least since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The first part of the middle *matzah* is eaten toward the beginning of the Passover seder. The second part, called the *Afikomen*, is hidden away and brought back at the end of the evening festivities.

Says Lesli Koppelman Ross in *Celebrate!*,

"It used to be customary that when the middle *matzah* was broken during the service, a member of each household would be sent to neighbors to predict the messiah's arrival" (p.47).

Clearly, the middle *matzah* was tied in with the appearance of the long-awaited Messiah. It represented the expected arrival of the Messiah. But why was it broken in two? Why was part of it hidden away, till the end of the evening, and found and eaten at the completion of the Passover seder?

The word *Afikomen* is a Greek word! How did a Greek word enter into the sanctity of the ancient Hebrew Passover celebration of the redemption of the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt, and the miraculous deliverance of the children of Israel by the outstretched powerful hand of Almighty God?

Says Galen Peterson, in *The Everlasting Tradition*:

"The hidden piece of unleavened bread is called the *afikomen*. Toward the end of the *seder*, the children search for the *afikomen*, and when it is discovered, they hold it for ransom. The leader then redeems it by paying an agreed-upon price to the children. A piece is distributed to all participants who then eat their portion. It is a ceremony not well-understood today and has lost its original meaning. . . .

"The difficulty comes in the translation of the word. Peculiarly, it is a Greek word buried in the midst of Hebrew liturgy. Some linguists believe that it is derived from *epikomoi*, meaning 'dessert.' Others contend that it comes from *epi komon*, which means 'revelry' or 'entertainment.' These interpretations, widely accepted in contemporary Jewish observance, imply that there should not be anything eaten nor any party atmosphere after the meal.

"Unfortunately, both of these derivations convey a shallow meaning in a celebration replete in deep symbolism. A better choice is *aphikomenos*, a verb meaning 'he is coming.' This derivation is more closely transliterated from the Greek language. It also has direct messianic implications. Is there any further evidence to support this derivation over the others?

"Since the destruction of the Temple, many Rabbis have said that the *afikomen* is symbolic of the Passover lamb. Others say that the hiding ritual refers to the Messiah, the Hidden One. They reason that just as the *afikomen* is hidden away until the people are ready to eat it, Messiah is hidden until the people are ready to meet Him. Daube contends that during the Second Temple period the *afikomen* was a symbol of the expected Messiah" (*The Everlasting Tradition*, p.108-109).

The word *aphikomen* is derived from the Greek word *aphikneomai*, the root form

of the word. It becomes *aphiknomenos*, "THE COMING ONE," as a perfect passive participle, and it becomes *APHIKOMEN*, that is, "I CAME," in the aorist (PAST) tense. Thus literally and technically, the "afikomen" matzah pictures Christ, the Messiah, who had THEN COME (aorist -- past tense) -- He had already come, and was *in their midst*, during His very life on earth! AND, this word also pictures Him as "the coming One," or "He who comes," now, a second time, to finish the process of human redemption and salvation!!!

What an astounding witness the Jewish people attest to every time they partake of the Passover rituals, and especially the partaking of the "Messianic afikomen"!

Passover, of course, is a celebration of redemption. The central focus of the Passover was the Passover lamb, which every family took to the Temple, killed according to the commandment, took home, roasted with fire, and then ate that night. In ancient Egypt, the blood of the original Passover lambs was placed upon the door posts and lintels of each family's door, for protection from the plague which was to pass through the land that night. Only those families which had the blood of the lamb on their door-posts were spared the death of all the firstborn in their families. All the firstborn of the Egyptians, who did not observe the Passover, and place the blood of the lamb on their door-posts, were killed that very night (Exodus 12:21-29). In like manner, all who do not partake of the true Passover Lamb of God, Yeshua the Salvation of God, will also be condemned, for there is no salvation through any other (Acts 4:12).

The Afikomen = "He That Comes"

On the day Jesus Christ, Yeshua, was baptized by John the Baptist, John saw Him coming toward him, and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."

John went on to bare record, that as he baptized Yeshua, a marvelous thing happened. He said, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34). John saw Yeshua again, the next day, as He was walking, and exclaimed to his disciples, "Behold, the *Lamb of God!*" (John 1:36).

The Passover lambs which were sacrificed in Egypt, and all the Passover lambs which were sacrificed from the time of Moses until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., were a *Scriptural Type and Forerunner of the TRUE PASSOVER LAMB OF GOD - - YESHUA, the Anointed One of God!*

The apostle Paul reinforces this truth. He wrote, in plain language, "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump [unleavened spiritually], as ye are unleavened

[they were at that precise time celebrating the Days of Unleavened Bread, and had put out all the leaven from their homes]. *For even Christ OUR PASSOVER is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the FEAST [of the PASSOVER!], not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:7-8).*

For centuries the Jewish people have celebrated the Passover, and performed the ritual of the hiding of the *afikomen*, then having a child find it, and then ransoming it back, and then distributing it to all the celebrants to eat of it. In performing this part of the Passover, they have been unknowingly bearing witness to Christ the Messiah, who is the *afikomen*. He is the One who was represented by the expression, "he who comes." He was coming then, to be the Messiah, and to die for the sins of mankind, as Isaiah the prophet wrote so plainly in the 53rd chapter of his prophecy. And, as we celebrate the Passover today, we look forward to His *second* coming, when He will fulfill the rest of the prophecies of the Scriptures pertaining to the Messiah and His works, and when He will destroy the wicked, and usher in the Kingdom of God upon this earth.

Writes Galen Peterson in *The Everlasting Tradition*:

"Passover is a celebration of redemption. It recalls the redemption from bondage in Egypt some 3,500 years ago and looks forward to a final redemption. The coming Messiah, represented by the *afikomen*, gave the people of ancient Israel a source of great hope. Yeshua took a tradition that was already in use and revealed its fulfillment. This occurrence is supported by the context of the original Passover order of service.

"There is no question that the early Jewish believers in Yeshua included the afikomen in their seders. Some scholars say that they were the ones to originate the practice. Whether it preceded them, or they began it, this is a custom intimately linked to Yeshua. Incredibly, this messianic custom has become part of the modern observance of Passover throughout Judaism. Each year, this emblem of messianic testimony is handled and eaten, but greatly misunderstood.

"The messianic symbolism of the *afikomen matzah* is plentiful. It is the second of three pieces. It is baked without leavening. It has piercings. It has stripes from baking. It is broken. A price is paid to bring it back. It is hidden from the people and later revealed once again.

"Messiah, the Son of God, is the second person of God's tri-unity. He was **without sin**. He was **pierced** for our transgressions. By his **stripes** we are healed. He was **broken** on our behalf. He **paid the price** for our salvation. And though **hidden** from Israel for a time, He is being received by more Jewish people today than in any time in recent history. Truly this symbol is much more than dessert.

"The mystery of the *afikomen* becomes an enlightening revelation when the Passover is considered in its original format. As we have seen, the meal was eaten accompanied by several symbolic rites. The curiosity arising from these acts prompted a series of questions. The response to the question of the Wise Son -- "What is the meaning of Passover?" -- was the *afikomen*, the coming Messiah and now the One Who Came" (*ibid.*, p.109-110, emphasis mine).

The deep, hidden meaning of Passover, is revealed in the true understanding of

the mysterious ritual of the *Afikomen*. During the Passover seder, after the missing *afikomen* is found, it is taken by the leader, ransomed back, a blessing is said, and then it is eaten, portraying the broken, bruised, and scourged body of the Messiah, and His sufferings on our behalf. The imagery and visualization is a powerful witness and testimony of the true Messiah, and the sufferings He was to go through for us. As Jesus, Yeshua said, "Take, eat, this is my body." It represents Him and His suffering, His life, given for us on the tree.

Then, during the Passover seder, right after the eating of the *afikomen*, comes the Third Cup of wine -- called appropriately the Cup of Redemption. Says Galen Peterson:

"During the *seder*, the eating of the *afikomen* is followed by the drinking of the third cup of wine. It is traditionally called the Cup of Redemption or the Cup of Blessing. Redemption refers to God's actions on behalf of Israel both physically and spiritually. The additional title of Blessing refers to the blessing of being redeemed.

"This was the cup which Yeshua took and declared to represent the blood which he was about to shed, a sacrificial act that would allow our sins to be 'passed over' in the Day of Judgment. As one who lived a sinless life, he was the ultimate 'lamb without spot or blemish.' His death, in perfect divine timing, occurred at the very moment when the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in Jerusalem. Yeshua completed the work of redemption. And He is returning one day to reclaim His followers. *Meanwhile, the Passover continues to testify that He is the One who came and will come again*" (*The Everlasting Tradition*, p.110-111).

When we partake of this Passover symbolism, when we partake of the *afikomen* and drink the wine of the Cup of Redemption, in a very profound way we picture in bold relief the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb, for our sins, and our being "passed over" in judgment!

The Profound Meaning of Passover

When we stop, pause, and consider the full meaning of the Passover, we see that it is replete with important spiritual symbolism. It is a very meaningful observance for Jews and Christians alike. But how many Christians, today, really understand the awesome mysteries of the Passover? How many, today, observe the true Passover?

Many have been deceived into observing a false, fraudulent, so-called "Passover," instead of the real thing.

Some observe the pagan "Easter" in its place.

Others observe a thinly veiled "wine and wafer" ceremony a night before the true Passover -- and are mired in deep ignorance and spiritual sin, as a result.

They are not following the example of Jesus Christ and His disciples, who observed the traditional, Jewish Passover "after the custom of the feast" (Luke 2:42). They do not eat the bitter herbs, they do not recount the story of the Exodus, or partake of

the *afikomen*, on Passover night.

They do not observe the Biblical customs, nor do they observe the correct night! What they really observe, in ignorance, is a BABYLONIAN "MASS" instituted by Satan the devil to COUNTERFEIT God's true Passover and replace it with a PAGAN custom instead!

Many have never observed the TRUE Passover of God during their entire lives! They may have thought what they did was "the Passover," but it was nothing like a true Passover at all!

Isn't it time we worship God "in spirit and in TRUTH" (John 4:24)?

Chapter 4

When Should the PASSOVER Be Observed?

Never since the days of the Early New Testament Church has the Passover been correctly observed or understood! Some make it into a Church service; some observe it at the beginning of Nisan 14; others at the end of the 14th. What does the Bible say? When did Israel leave Egypt? When did Jesus Himself observe Passover? What did the scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses' seat, command? For ALMOST TWO THOUSAND YEARS the truth has been buried under pagan superstition! What is the PLAIN TRUTH about the Passover? When should it be observed? Here is VITAL TRUTH *you need to know!*

The Passover is one of the most important of all God's festivals -- yet surprisingly there is more controversy and confusion over this holy festival of God than any other! Why all the confusion?

Some observe the Passover at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan, some at the end of the 14th of Nisan; some make it into a cold, austere religious Church service, with ministers officiating, and lock the doors to keep out any who are late. To some it is even more solemn an occasion than the Day of Atonement!

Why such confusion and misunderstanding over the Passover? In this chapter, you will learn the truth about the Passover -- truth which has been buried and totally lost for almost 2,000 years, but now revealed during these LAST DAYS for the very first time! Surely God Almighty is beginning to RESTORE His true knowledge during this end time! The true understanding of the Passover is one of the KEY ESSENTIAL TRUTHS which has been lost to the world and to the Church of God for CENTURIES,

since the very time of the apostles themselves!

Consider for a moment! The Word of God says we are to first REPENT of sin (that is, put sin out of our lives), and then “believe on Christ” and be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. Peter was inspired to write, “REPENT, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). He later told thousands, “Repent ye therefore, and BE CONVERTED, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Notice! Repentance comes first! Then comes the blotting out of our sins by the blood of Christ! First we must repent and put away our sins; and then God covers our sins with the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ!

But the Worldwide Church of God and others claim Passover pictures “repentance” and the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures putting “sin” out of our lives. Yet, once they partake of the Passover, the next day they go out and eat leavened products -- doughnuts, toast, pancakes, hamburgers, etc. -- AFTER they have partaken of “Passover” picturing “repentance” of sin! Does this make any sense? This is backwards! God does not really cover our sins with the blood of Christ, our Passover lamb, until AFTER WE REPENT OF SIN, and and put “sin” -- typified by “leaven” -- OUT of our lives, and depart from sin!

What, then, is the truth about the Passover? When should it be observed? Let us study the original instructions concerning the Passover, and see if we can sort out this problem once and for all.

The Old Testament Passover

In the book of Exodus we read, “Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house . . . And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall KILL IT IN THE EVENING” (Exo.12:3-6).

The original Hebrew in this passage is *ben ha arbayim* and means, literally, “between the two evenings.” Gesenius’ *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* tells us about this expression. It relates, “between the two evenings, Ex. 16:12; 30:8; used as MARKING THE SPACE OF TIME DURING WHICH THE PASCHAL LAMB WAS SLAIN, Ex.12:6; Lev.23:5; Num.9:3; and the EVENING SACRIFICE WAS OFFERED, Ex.29:30, 41; Num.28:4.”

The big question is, then, what does this expression really refer to? There has been controversy over this point for thousands of years. According to the opinion of the Karaites and Samaritans, the expression refers to the time between sunset and deep twilight, or dusk. ‘The Pharisees, however, and the Rabbinites considered the TIME WHEN THE SUN BEGAN TO DESCEND to be called the FIRST EVENING (Arabic ‘little evening’; ‘when it begins to draw towards evening’; and the SECOND

EVENING to be the REAL SUNSET” (Gesenius).

The question, then, is -- who is right?

Before going further into this question, I would like to point out two very important facts which we must keep uppermost in mind. First, who were the “Samaritans”? Since they are the foremost ancient "authority" for the "dusk theory" as the interpretation of this Hebrew expression, we ought to know who they were. The Samaritans were a NON-HEBREW, GENTILE people who were transported into the northern portion of Israel after the captivity of the northern Ten Tribes in 718-721 B.C.

They were PAGANS! They built their own temple at Mount Gerazim in Israel, as competition to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. We read, “And the king of Assyria brought men from BABYLON, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them IN THE CITIES OF SAMARIA instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. . . . Howbeit every nation made GODS OF THEIR OWN, and put them in the houses of the high places which the SAMARITANS had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt . . .” (II Kings 17:24-29).

The Jewish Holy Scriptures continues the account: “They worshiped the LORD, but they also appointed from their own ranks priests of the shrines, who officiated for them in the cult places. They worshiped the LORD, WHILE SERVING THEIR OWN GODS according to the practices of the nations from which they had been deported. TO THIS DAY THEY FOLLOW THEIR FORMER PRACTICES. They do not worship the LORD [properly]. They do NOT follow the laws and practices, the Teaching and Instruction that the LORD enjoined upon the descendants of Jacob -- who was given the name Israel But they did NOT obey; they continued their *FORMER* practices. Those nations worshiped the LORD, *but they also served their idols*. TO THIS DAY their children and their children's children do as their ancestors did” (II Kings 17:33-41).

Notice! These Samaritans were *MIXED UP PAGANS!* They perverted, twisted, and distorted the truth of God into error. They tried to mix the worship of God with their ancient PAGAN superstitions and practices. They compromised the truth of God and amalgamated, merged, blended truth with pagan superstition and error!

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ had an encounter with these pagan Samaritans. Jesus said to a woman of Samaria, descended from these pagan people, “*Ye worship ye know not what: we [Jews] know what we worship: FOR SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS*” (John 4:22). Thus the Holy Word of God, clearly shows us we should NOT look to the SAMARITANS for religious teaching, or practice! To do so would be a grave error of the first magnitude!

The Teaching of the Pharisees

Now, point number two: As Gesenius pointed out, the Pharisees and Rabbis of the Jews taught that the phrase “between the two evenings” meant from the time the sun begins to descend till final sunset. Josephus, a leading Pharisee and Jewish general of the first century, and the greatest Jewish historian of ancient times, wrote concerning this subject. In his book *Wars of the Jews*, he declared: “So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the PASSOVER, WHEN THEY SLAY THEIR SACRIFICES FROM THE NINTH HOUR TO THE ELEVENTH . . .” (*Wars*, Bk.VI, ix, 3).

Notice carefully! In terms of Roman time, or today's Roman calendar, this means that the JEWS in ancient times sacrificed the Passover from 3:00 PM in the afternoon until 5:00 PM -- obviously *BEFORE* SUNSET! In the months of March-April, when Passover occurs, sunset is about 6:00 PM or later!

Now consider carefully! Since the Passover was sacrificed between 3-5 PM, BEFORE SUNSET, on Nisan 14, IT HAD TO BE SACRIFICED AT THE END OF NISAN 14, AS THE DAY WAS DRAWING TO A CLOSE! If it had been sacrificed between 3-5 PM just before the BEGINNING of Nisan 14, it would have been sacrificed on NISAN 13! That, of course, is preposterous! God did not command the Passover to be killed on the 13th of Nisan -- He said very plainly, “ye shall KEEP IT UP UNTIL THE FOURTEENTH DAY” -- and then “KILL IT IN THE EVENING” (Exodus 12:6). To kill it before the 14th of Nisan would have been contrary to the LAW!

What could be plainer than that? But some say it was to be killed right after sunset, when the 14th of Nisan began. This interpretation has many problems. Number one is, how do you kill so many lambs within a short space of 45 minutes, between sunset and nightfall? Number two is, how do you roast the lamb, beginning at that time, and sit down to eat it before very, very late, since lambs would require several HOURS to properly roast? If sunset were 6:30 PM, and you roasted the lamb for 3-4 hours, you wouldn't be ready to eat it until 9:30 to 10:30! Is that the time these various churches hold their so-called “Passover” services? Of course not!

The Pharisees were the religious teachers during the time of Christ. They were the ones followed by the whole nation of Judea in terms of religious practice. On this point of the proper time for observing the Passover, there is no argument or disagreement between the Pharisees and high priests. They were in complete unity, so far as history relates.

Should we today follow the example set by the Pharisees, as to the proper time for observing the Passover? That is, the original Passover was slain in the latter part of the 14th, but not eaten until the twilight or darkness of Nisan 15th. What did Jesus Himself say on this issue?

Jesus did not take issue with the teaching of the Pharisees concerning the Torah, or Law, or the proper times for the holy days and festivals of God to be observed.

Rather, He Himself, with all the authority of Heaven, declared: “The scribes and the PHARISEES SIT IN MOSES’ SEAT: ALL THEREFORE WHATSOEVER THEY BID YOU OBSERVE, *THAT OBSERVE AND DO . . .*” (Matt.23:2-3).

How crystal clear -- how plain! Since the Pharisees sat in MOSES’ SEAT, their authority in teaching the laws and statutes and holy days of God was BINDING UPON ALL THE CHURCH! They taught that Passover should be observed at the closing or ending of the 14th of Nisan, not at the beginning of the day! The Passover was killed in the LATE AFTERNOON, AT THE VERY TIME JESUS CHRIST, OUR PASSOVER LAMB, WAS SLAIN AND SHED HIS BLOOD FOR OUR SINS! Therefore, Jesus was a PERFECT ANTI-TYPE of the original Passover lamb!

Imagine the scene, if you can. Just as Jesus Christ was pouring out His holy blood for our sins, hanging on the tree, paying the penalty for our sins, as our Passover Lamb of God, multiple thousands of Jews throughout Judea were also slaying their Passover lambs! What a perfect fulfillment! What a perfect anti-type! What a marvelous picture! Jesus fulfilled the anti-type of the Passover PERFECTLY! Josephus tells us that during that time about 256,000 Passover lambs were being slain, one for every ten people who were undefiled. Thus the population in Judea was about 2,500,000 during the time of Jesus. All those Passover lambs pointed to HIM -- the true Passover Lamb of God!

Unger’s Bible Dictionary points out concerning the Passover, “The daily evening sacrifice (Exod.29:38,39), usually killed at the eighth hour and a half (i.e., 2:30 P.M.), and offered up at the ninth and a half hour (i.e., 3:30 P.M.), was on this day killed at 1:30 and offered at 2:30 P.M., an hour earlier . . .” (article, “Festivals,” p.354).

The *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* declares concerning the Passover, “[Heb.*pesah* from *pasah* (to pass over, in sense of sparing) . . .] The 1st of the 3 annual festivals at which all the men were required to appear at the sanctuary . . . known also as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex.23:15; Deut.16:16). It was instituted in Egypt to commemorate the culminating event in the redemption of the Israelites (Ex.12:1,14,42; 23:15; Deut.16:1,3). THAT NIGHT WAS TO BE MUCH OBSERVED UNTO THE LORD, WHEN HE SMOTE ALL THE FIRSTBORN in the land of Egypt, but passed over the houses of the Israelites where the blood had been sprinkled. . . .The festival began on the 14th of Abib AT EVENING, THAT IS, IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 15TH DAY, with the sacrificial meal (Lev.23:5-6). A lamb or kid was SLAIN BETWEEN THE EVENINGS, THAT IS, TOWARD SUNSET (Ex.12:6; Deut.16:6; cf. between the 9th and 11th hours” (article “Passover,” p.705).

Other Biblical Evidence

After studying into this subject, I must confess I find it incredibly difficult to believe anybody could claim, today, that the Passover was slain and offered AFTER SUNSET, that is, at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan or Abib. Certainly, everyone admits that Jesus Christ, the true Passover Lamb of God, of whom the Passover lamb

was a forerunner or type, was slain at the END of the 14th of Nisan! There is no argument there. Then why do whole Churches believe that the Passover itself was offered at the BEGINNING of the 14th of Nisan? The very idea boggles my mind. However, they have swallowed the teaching of the Samaritans, those pagan idolaters who had their own competing temple at Mount Gerazim in Samaria -- the Samaritans, whose Babylonian roots is clearly revealed in the Bible!

Notice further evidence concerning the proper time for the slaying of the Passover!

God told Moses, "But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the PASSOVER AT EVEN, AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (Deut.16:6). Notice! It was to be slain "at the going down of the sun" -- that is, at the DESCENDING of the sun, or, to put it another way, "as the sun goes down," or "as the sun DESCENDS." This tense is equivalent to the present progressive tense in English! It is not past tense, that is, "after the sun goes down," or "after sunset." It is, rather, AS THE SUN IS GOING DOWN, or descending in the western sky, toward the horizon -- not AFTER it has GONE down!

This same expression is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. "And when the sun was going down . . ." (Gen.15:12). The Hebrew Scriptures state: "AS THE SUN WAS ABOUT TO SET . . ." Clearly, this expression refers to the time *BEFORE* SUNSET, not afterward!

"And afterward Joshua smote them (the Canaanite kings), and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees UNTIL THE EVENING. And it came to pass at the TIME OF THE *GOING DOWN* OF THE SUN, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain unto this very day" (Josh.10:26-27).

This event shows that the expression "going down of the sun" refers to the time right up until sunset or sundown, but not after. The Israelites were commanded, in the law of God, not to allow the dead bodies of criminals to hang on a tree at night. God told Moses, "If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must BURY HIM *THE SAME DAY*" (Deut.21:22-23). Since each day begins and ends at SUNSET, to bury such a criminal "*THE SAME DAY*" means he had to be buried *PRIOR TO SUNSET!* Thus, we read again of Joshua who slew the king of Ai. "And the king of Ai was impaled on a stake UNTIL EVENING. AT SUNSET, Joshua had the corpse taken down from the stake . . ." (Joshua 8:29)

This same expression is used in the Bible of the death of king Ahab. As Ahab was fighting the Syrians, he was struck by an arrow from a bowman and was sorely wounded. "And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot

against the Syrians, and DIED AT EVEN: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. And there went out a proclamation throughout the host ABOUT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country” (I Kings 22:35-36). The Hebrew Tanakh, or Holy Scriptures, has this verse, “AS THE SUN WAS GOING DOWN.” Again, the reference is to the time just prior to sunset or sundown, as the sun’s light begins to fade in the west.

The Evening Sacrifice

In the book of Numbers God gives instructions concerning the daily sacrifices which were to be offered before Him. God commanded, “And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot DAY BY DAY [Heb. ‘IN A DAY’], for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer IN THE MORNING, and the other lamb shalt thou offer AT EVEN [Heb. ‘BETWEEN THE EVENINGS’] . . .” (Num.28:3-4).

Notice carefully! Both these offerings were to be offered DAILY, “day by day,” “IN A DAY” -- that is, WITHIN THE SAME DAY! The first one is the morning sacrifice, and the second one is the EVENING sacrifice. In order for the evening sacrifice to be offered the SAME DAY as the morning sacrifice, it had to be offered BEFORE SUNSET! Otherwise it would have been the NEXT day! What could be clearer? Thus, the daily sacrifices is another additional proof that “evening” or “between the evenings” has to refer to the period of time BEFORE SUNSET, or LATE AFTERNOON BEFORE SUNDOWN!

Now that we have thoroughly proved this vital point, let’s continue the story of the Passover in Egypt, and understand the time sequence of events which occurred during that fateful and awesome night. As we go, the story will become more and more plain, even to those who have been confused in the past.

The Passover Saga

After slaying the Passover lamb, the children of Israel were told to take the blood of the lamb and strike it over the two side posts and on the upper door post of their houses. God said, “And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it . . . And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning . . . And thus shall ye eat it; with your LOINS GIRDED, YOUR SHOES ON YOUR FEET, AND YOUR STAFF IN YOUR HAND; and ye shall eat it in HASTE: it is the Lord’s passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

“And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will PASS OVER YOU, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

“AND THIS DAY SHALL BE UNTO YOU FOR A MEMORIAL; and ye shall KEEP IT A FEAST to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a FEAST by an ordinance FOR EVER” (Exo.12:7-14).

Now notice carefully. This day which is to be kept a Feast to the Lord forever -- what day or event is God talking about in this passage of Scripture? Why, read it again! The context here is very clear; it can be nothing else; God is plainly talking about the PASSOVER! The Passover is a MEMORIAL; it is a FEAST -- ordained FOREVER!

Why, then, do the Worldwide Church of God and others claim the Passover is NOT a “Feast” day of God? How can they say such a thing? Where did they go astray? The Word of God is explicitly clear. All through this passage of Scripture, the context is the Passover celebration, the eating of the lamb, the celebrating of God’s passing over the children of Israel when He smites the Egyptians and their pagan gods! After discussing nothing else but this magnificent “Passover” day, God says, “THIS DAY shall be unto you . . . a FEAST” -- not some other day, or some other celebration (Exo.12:14). The Passover meal is eaten on a literal FEAST day – the first Day of Unleavened Bread! How plain! So it is both a Holy Day and a Feast Day! The slaying of the Passover, on Nisan 14, is merely preparatory to the great FEAST that begins with the Passover meal that very night, as the 15th of Nisan – the first Day of Unleavened Bread – begins!

For years I had trouble with this verse, as I read it, wondering how in the world the Worldwide Church of God could say it does not refer to the PASSOVER! What was their problem? Simple: They put the Passover a night early, and therefore they had to invent another separate feast, which they called “The Night To Be Much Observed,” not realizing that the “night to be much observed” was actually the PASSOVER itself! Of course! It makes perfect sense! It was the Passover – that is *why* it was the night to be much observed! It celebrates their being SET FREE from bondage to the Egyptians!

The Passover was to be slain on the 14th, before sunset. It was then to be eaten on the 15th, during the night (Exo.12:8), “in haste.” It was commanded to be a FEAST -- a memorial forever! Although the 14th of Nisan itself was not a “holy day,” the Passover feast was actually eaten on the “First Day of Unleavened Bread,” at night, which is a HOLYDAY of God!

Notice! God commanded, “And this day [the Passover] shall be unto you . . . a FEAST to the Lord . . . ye shall keep it a FEAST by an ordinance forever. SEVEN DAYS SHALL YE EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD . . . for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you” (Exo.12:14-16). This seven-day observance began with the FEAST of the Passover meal itself!

The Passover itself, then, introduces the seven day festival of the Passover, or unleavened bread. It was actually a *seven-day festival*, not an eight day festival. The first part of the 14th of Nisan, prior to the slaying of the lamb, was actually referred to by the Jews as the “preparation of the Passover.” In Matthew’s gospel we read that Joseph of Arimathaea came and took the body of Jesus, “when the even was come” (Matt.27:57), laid it in his own new tomb, and departed (v.60). This would have had to be the evening of the 14th, beginning of the 15th. The we read, “Now the NEXT DAY [the morning of the 15th], THAT FOLLOWED THE DAY OF THE PREPARATION, the chief priests and Pharisees came . . .” (Matt.27:62). Now since the “next day” had to be the daylight portion of the 15th of Nisan, and since it “followed the day of the preparation,” this proves that the 14th of Nisan was also known as the “day of the preparation,” or “the preparation of the Passover”! The day of the preparation was not the 13th; this verse proves it! Here, then, is further proof that the Passover occurred at the END of the 14th, and not at its beginning!

Mark corroborates this fact. We read in Mark, “And now when the even was come, BECAUSE IT WAS THE PREPARATION, that is, the DAY BEFORE THE SABBATH [the annual Sabbath, or First Day of Unleavened Bread] . . .” (Mark 15:42).

Luke further states, "And THAT DAY [the 14th] was the PREPARATION, and the sabbath drew on" (Luke 23:54). Even more emphatic proof is found in the gospel of John. Here we find in chapter 19 the details of Jesus’ appearance before Pilate on the daylight portion of the 14th, in the morning. Pilate brought Jesus to the place called the Pavement (John 19:13). “And it was THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER . . .” (verse 14)! This day, all admit, was the 14th of Nisan. Yet Scripture itself plainly calls it “THE PREPARATION of the Passover”! Why? Because the Passover was *not yet to be eaten*, until that same evening! And remember – this was some time AFTER Jesus had finished His last meal with the disciples, proving once again that His final meal with them was not the Passover!

What could be plainer?

In this same chapter, after Jesus was crucified, and died, about 3:00 PM in the afternoon, we find, “The Jews therefore, BECAUSE IT WAS THE *PREPARATION*, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (FOR THAT SABBATH WAS AN HIGH DAY,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31). Here again the 14th of Nisan is called the “preparation,” because the following day, beginning at evening, was an ANNUAL HOLY DAY -- an “High Day,” the day the Passover was to be eaten, the First Day of Unleavened Bread!

Mark explains further, “And the first day of unleavened bread, when they KILLED THE PASSOVER, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?” (Mark 14:12). The actual “first day of unleavened bread” is Nisan 15. So what does this verse mean? The Scriptures cannot

be broken (John 10:35). Actually, the term “first day” here is *protos hemera*, and can be translated “beginning time” or “prior period.” It is a reference to the time before the Passover celebration itself – that is, the preparation period! “First” here is number #4413 in Strong’s Concordance and means, “foremost, in time, place, or importance – before, beginning, best, chief, first, former.” The word *hemera* translated “day” can refer to a “period of time,” such as “the day of the Lord,” “the day of vengeance,” etc. Therefore this verse is simply referring to the PERIOD OF TIME PRIOR TO THE PASSOVER, WHEN IT WAS BEING PREPARED FOR – the time period during which it was prepared and finally killed. This entire period was from the 10th of Nisan, when the Passover lambs were selected, until the 14th, when they were killed (Exodus 12:3-6).

Now notice once again God's commandment! In Exodus we read, “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month, at even. SEVEN DAYS shall there be no leaven found in your houses . . .” (Exo.12:18-19).

Here it should be as plain as day. The feast of unleavened bread was to last exactly SEVEN DAYS, not eight days. It was to continue through the evening of the 21st day of Nisan. Therefore, it was to begin the evening of the 14th of Nisan, or beginning of the 15th -- that is, at sunset at the end of the 14th! This verse plainly says unleavened bread was to be eaten beginning the 14th of Nisan at evening till the 21st of Nisan at evening -- and it says this period of time is “seven days.” If the evening of the 14th meant the beginning of the 14th, as some suppose, then the correct number of days would have to have been EIGHT, not seven! So here again is proof the Passover occurred at the END of the 14th, and not its beginning! It is a SEVEN DAY FESTIVAL, not an eight day festival!

This “evening of the 14th” of Nisan in Exodus 12:18 has to be the same “evening” of the 14th of Nisan when the lamb was to be slain (Exo.12:6). Counting from that evening, there were to be SEVEN DAYS of unleavened bread -- not eight!

The Saga Continues

After the Israelites struck the blood of the lamb over their doorposts, they were commanded, “none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning” (Exo.12:22). They obeyed God. Later that night, “And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt . . . And Pharaoh ROSE UP IN THE NIGHT, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a GREAT CRY in Egypt; for there was not an house where there was not one dead.

“And he called for Moses and Aaron BY NIGHT, and said, RISE UP, AND GET YOU FORTH FROM AMONG MY PEOPLE, both ye and the children of Israel; and GO, serve the Lord, as ye have said, and BE GONE [GET OUT!]; and bless me also.

“And the Egyptians were URGENT upon the people, that they might send them

out of the land IN HASTE; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough BEFORE IT WAS LEAVENED, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders” (Exo.12:29-34).

Now notice what happened! That same Passover night the plague struck the Egyptians. At midnight they all arose, and found dead people everywhere! Pharaoh and his councilors were beside themselves with anger, trembling with fear, and they were horror-struck. They immediately sent for Moses and Aaron, and commanded them, begged them, beseeched them, to take the children of Israel and GET OUT -- SCRAM! All the people were urgent upon them, urging them to DEPART immediately! As an enticement for them to leave, they gave them all their jewels and silver and gold, and beautiful things (Exo.12:35-36). Actually, they had begun doing this *before* the final plague (see Exodus 11:2-3). But as an added inducement for the Israelites to be cooperative, and to *get out*, before more calamities occurred, the Egyptians gave them even more jewelry as they were leaving!

Isn't it perfectly clear that all this happened the very night of the Passover, and the very next morning, early? The Egyptians didn't want the Israelites hanging around any longer. They URGED them to be ON THEIR WAY! They virtually kicked them out the door!

The account goes on, “And the children of Israel journeyed from Ramses to Succoth . . . And they baked UNLEAVENED cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were THRUST OUT OF EGYPT, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual” (Exodus 12:37-39).

They were literally THROWN OUT of Egypt! They could not dilly dally, or drag their heels. They were ON THEIR WAY, and marched all the way from Ramses to Succoth that very day!

Two things you should notice here. First, the day they left Egypt was the very next morning, early, after the horrendous PASSOVER NIGHT when the Egyptians were destroyed! They did not spend a whole day wandering around, packing, and getting “ready” to go -- they were *ALREADY READY!* Remember, they ate of the Passover fully clothed, and with their staffs in their hands, ready to depart (Exodus 12:11). The next morning they did not wait around, or tarry; they were on their way out of Egypt!

Now those who observe Passover at the beginning of the 14th have a major problem here, because they have to conclude that the following day was spent by the Israelites just moping around, and gathering jewels, and getting organized and ready to go -- because that day would have been the daylight portion of the 14th of Nisan -- yet Scripture plainly says, “And they departed from Ramses in the first month, on the *FIFTEENTH DAY* of the first month; ON THE MORROW AFTER THE PASSOVER the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians”

(Numbers 33:3).

Notice! They didn't depart on the 14th, but on the 15th! This was called the “morrow” after the Passover night! Remember, the Egyptians were URGENT upon the people to get out, leave, vamoose, scram, high-tail it, to "beat it!" They were afraid they might all get killed (Exo.12:33). Yet, those who observe Passover at the beginning of the 14th would have us believe that the Israelites waited around another WHOLE DAY, just getting organized, and visiting their Egyptian neighbors, saying their good-byes! Does that make any sense to you? Some claim that they spent this time collecting the valuables of their Egyptian neighbors. But they had days and days to do this, as the plagues of God descended! God had told them to do this back before the last plague struck Egypt (Exo.11:2-3), telling them to ask for jewelry from the Egyptians – and they did so, PRIOR to the last plague, the Lord giving them grace and favor in the eyes of the Egyptians (verse 3). So they had NO EXCUSE to just “hang around” a whole day, after they were given their marching orders! Do you see? Besides, they did not want to wait around, in case this unstable Pharaoh once again changed his mind, as he had done so often!

Secondly, notice that when the Israelites left they were in such a hurry that their dough did not even have time enough to become leavened, from sitting out in the air. The yeast did not even have time to work. If they had sat around on their hands and knees for a whole day, there would have been plenty of leaven in their dough by the following evening! As any modern cookbook will show, it only requires bread dough with leaven from one to two hours to rise, and double in bulk! But these two million or more Israelites had NO LEAVEN AT ALL! Imagine the pressure they must have been under to get moving and to get out! They did not have even an hour to spare!

When Did Israel Organize for Departure?

Some, in their haste to make apologies and excuses for their erroneous beliefs, have said that the Israelites could not have begun moving out of Egypt the following morning after the Passover (despite the plain verse in Numbers 33:3 which plainly says they departed “on the MORROW after the Passover”), because it would require all day for them to get ready, to marshal together in one place, and to be put in ranks. One writer said he discussed the logistics problems with a local army official, who said it would of course require much time to organize such a large, unwieldy group. Nonsense! These people simply don't know what they are talking about.

Let's examine the facts! The Israelites had been *planning* this exodus for *many weeks*. This was not a sudden, impromptu departure. God had announced to them at the beginning of Nisan that they were to select their Passover lambs on the tenth day of the month (Exodus 12:1-3). They had weeks to prepare. It is not as if they were a bunch of ill-equipped stumble-bums who didn't know what was going to occur. They were well prepared. Besides, Moses was a great leader.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us much about the intricate and detailed

planning for the journey out of Egypt. He wrote in *Antiquities of the Jews*, “But when God had signified, that with one more plague he would compel the Egyptians to let the Hebrews go, he commanded Moses to tell the people that they should have a sacrifice ready, AND THAT THEY SHOULD *PREPARE THEMSELVES* on the tenth day of the month Xanthicus, against the fourteenth . . . and that he should carry away the Hebrews with all they had. Accordingly, *HE HAVING GOT THE HEBREWS READY FOR THEIR DEPARTURE, AND HAVING SORTED THE PEOPLE INTO TRIBES, HE KEPT THEM TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE* [therefore, no gatherings were required -- the people were already assembled together!]: but when the fourteenth day was come, and ALL WERE READY TO DEPART, they offered the sacrifice . . . as just ready to depart” (*Antiquities*, Bk.II, xiv,6).

Josephus continues, describing the scene: “. . . for the destruction of the firstborn came upon the Egyptians that night, so that many of the Egyptians who lived near the king’s palace persuaded pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. Accordingly he called for Moses, and bid them be gone; as supposing, that if once the Hebrews were gone out of the country, Egypt should be freed from its miseries. They also honored the Hebrews with gifts; some in order to get them to depart quickly, and others on account of their neighborhood, and the friendship they had with them” (*ibid.*).

Josephus also points out that Moses had formerly been a top general of the Pharaoh, a man well acquainted with the problems of logistics and supplies for an entire army in the field. He fought against the Ethiopians who were rampaging throughout Egypt. In dire distress, Pharaoh turned to Moses and appointed him general of the army of Egypt (*Ant.*, II,x, 1). Moses, with sagacity and brilliance, routed the Ethiopians, striking them by surprise, and slaughtering a multitude. Thus, for anyone to think that Moses and the children of Israel were ignorant shepherds, unable to organize themselves in the time they had available, to march out of Egypt in ranks, is foolishness of the highest order. Israel left Egypt “by their armies” (*Exo.12:51*), “troop by troop,” as the Hebrew Scriptures declare.

The New Testament Passover

When did the Jews in the New Testament times observe the Passover? And, more importantly, when did Jesus Himself observe it?

It is very clear that the Jews observed it at the ending of the 14th, when they killed the Passover lamb, and the beginning of the 15th. The time Jesus appeared before Pilate, on the morning of the 14th, was still known as “the preparation of the Passover” (*John 19:14*). Early that same morning the high priests took Jesus from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment, to see Pilate. They themselves, however, would not go into the judgment hall, “lest they should be defiled; but that they might EAT THE PASSOVER” (*John 18:28*).

It is clear that the year of the crucifixion Jesus and His disciples ate a special meal *before* all the Jews, including the high priests and Pharisees, ate the Passover. The

Jews still had not eaten of the Passover after they had apprehended Jesus and brought Him to trial!

Many assume that Jesus referred to the final meal He had with His disciples as the “Passover.” Actually, that is a matter of dispute. How could it have been the “Passover,” since the following day would still be the “preparation” of the Passover? So in what sense was this final meal a “Passover” since the traditional Passover would not be until some days later? He plainly said to the disciples, “With desire I have desired to eat *THIS* PASSOVER with you BEFORE I SUFFER: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16). So, what did He really mean?

Why did Jesus that night, at supper with the disciples, speak of “THIS Passover”? Was He referring to that evening meal? Or was He not referring to the upcoming Passover which He would be *unable* to eat with them since He would be dead at that time? Notice *precisely* what He said! The word translated “desire” in this verse is #1939 in *Strong’s Concordance*, the word *epithumia*, and means “a *longing* (especially for what is forbidden).” How natural! Jesus really wanted to eat the regular Passover with them that year -- but it was “*forbidden*”! He would be *unable* to do so because it was required that He die, and *become* our “Passover” lamb (I Cor.5:7).

Notice, therefore, exactly what Jesus said! This particular “Passover” He could not eat with them, because He would be sacrificed as our “Passover Lamb” at the very same time the Jews would be killing their physical Passover lambs! That year, on Nisan 14, when the Jews would be sacrificing their Passover lambs, He Himself would be sacrificed as our Passover. As Paul wrote, “For even Christ OUR PASSOVER is sacrificed for us” (I Cor.5:7). The following evening, when everybody else would be partaking of the Passover lamb, at the beginning of Nisan 15, Jesus would be in His tomb, dead. Obviously, He would not be able to partake of the normal Passover with His disciples at that time! Therefore, He deliberately arranged to eat this final *meal* with them “before” He suffered -- that is, before the regular Passover!!

This was an arrangement done to give them special parting instructions. It was not the Passover. Since He could not keep the regular Passover with them, as commanded, at the END of the 14th and beginning of the 15th of Nisan, He made special arrangements to have a final, “going-away,” dinner -- a “Passover-like” dinner, in some respects -- with them that final night before His arrest, incarceration, judgment, and His crucifixion! What could be more natural? *It was not “the” Passover, always held on Nisan 15. The date and time for that can never be changed. It is ETERNAL!* Rather, it was a “pre-Passover” *going away meal*, which, because it was linked with His crucifixion, seemed LIKE a Passover in some respects! This final meal itself, however, was NOT “the Passover.” If it had been, then the apostle John would have described it as such, when he spoke of it in John 13. But he did not. Rather, he plainly said it was simply a “supper” or “dinner” (John 13:2, 4). He plainly said this dinner was eaten “*BEFORE* the feast of the Passover” (John 13:1).

Let's understand the timing, here. This final meal occurred on the evening, beginning portion, of Nisan 13. He was arrested that very night and taken into captivity. The next morning, still Nisan 13, he appeared before Pilate, then Herod, and finally again before Pilate, when He was judged and condemned "about the sixth hour" (John 19:14). The "sixth hour" in Jewish terminology meant "twelve o'clock noon." See our article, "Just What Do You Mean, 'The Sixth Hour'?"

After being condemned, Jesus was flogged, scourged, and beaten, and thrown into the dungeon where He was left until the following morning, Nisan 14, bright and early, when He was led up to the spot of the crucifixion, on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple, where the Red Heifer sacrifices were wont to be made. There He was nailed to the stake at "the third hour" of the day -- nine AM in the morning (Mark 15:25). This means the final supper Jesus had with His disciples occurred TWO nights before the regular Passover seder, which would be observed throughout Jerusalem on the night of Nisan 15, after all the lambs had been sacrificed and roasted. What could be clearer?

Therefore, this final meal -- similar to the traditional Passover in certain respects - was a special, unique, final "going away" meal -- which many have referred to as "the Lord's Supper." It was *like* a normal Passover in some respects, but it was different in other respects -- it was actually two nights BEFORE the actual Passover, there was no "lamb" eaten with it, as the Passover lambs would not be killed at the Temple till the afternoon of Nisan 14, as the Law prescribed (Exo.12:6). The bread eaten at it was regular leavened bread -- *artos* in the Greek language, which simply means a "loaf" of bread, or "raised bread." The word used for "unleavened bread" everywhere in the New Testament is *azumos*. But here the word is just the common word for "bread" which has leavening (see Matt.4:4; John 6:48; and esp. Matt.16:6-7, 12)!

However, since Jesus knew He would be dead at the time of the traditional Passover meal, this particular year, He chose to hold a special, unique "going away" dinner with His disciples the last available night He had with them before the regular Passover that year. At this meal, or supper, He introduced the new symbols of bread representing His body and wine representing His blood. What was this all about, and how did it relate to the Passover?

What Is the Real Meaning of the "Bread and Wine" Ceremony?

Jesus used this final meal, held at the beginning of Nisan 14, as an "introduction" to the Passover Feast. The whole Feast was called "the Passover" (Luke 22:1). Therefore, this meal, as being part of the "Passover preparation" this one year, was very special. It was unique. And Jesus used it to impart to His disciples instructions regarding a ceremony which very few have really understood -- the ceremony about the "bread and wine." Let's notice!

The apostle Paul declared to the Corinthian church, "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is NOT to eat the Lord's supper" (I Cor.11:20). The

margin has the original Greek as saying, “Ye cannot eat the Lord’s supper.” In other words, Paul is telling them that when they gather for a special service, IT IS NOT TO CELEBRATE some new ritual called “the Lord’s supper”! That is not the way it is to be done! He admonishes them, “For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another drunken. WHAT? HAVE YE NOT HOUSES TO EAT AND TO DRINK IT? Or despise ye the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you NOT” (I Cor.11:21-22). Clearly, Paul is telling them here that they should be eating their dinners *IN THEIR OWN HOUSES*, and not coming together in a Church service to observe a “Lord’s supper”!

Paul then goes on to explain the basic, overall instructions Jesus gave to His disciples for observing the “bread and wine” ceremony that Jesus revealed to His disciples on the very night He was betrayed. Paul writes, “For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed *took bread*: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which IS broken for you: this do in REMEMBRANCE of me [in the Greek, “for a remembrance”]. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the NEW TESTAMENT in my blood [a testament, remember, is only in effect after the DEATH of the testator -- see Hebrews 9:15-17]: this do ye, *as oft as ye drink it*, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME. For *as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do SHEW THE LORD’S DEATH till he come*” (I Cor.11:23-26).

As we have seen earlier, this “bread” was *artos*, raised or leavened bread, the kind you can dip as a “sop” (John 13:26-27). The Jews of Christ’s time did not begin eating “unleavened bread,” called *azumos* in the Greek language, until the beginning of the Feast, on Nisan 15. To eat unleavened bread *before* the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have *detracted* from the rich meaning and symbolism of the Feast.

This special ceremony of the bread and wine was commonly observed by the Jews. It was a tradition that went back as far as the time of Abraham and Melchisedek (Gen.14:18). They, of course, never connected it with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God! The night before His crucifixion, Jesus *gave NEW MEANING to these familiar items and this customary observance!* It was commonly called the *Kiddush!*

Paul says this ceremony was to be done “as often as” -- in other words, *OFTEN*, throughout the year! This was *not instituted as an ANNUAL observance, which would be added to the Passover, but as a SPECIAL OBSERVANCE to be celebrated OFTEN throughout the year!* The “Kiddush” itself has nothing to do with the Passover -- no direct connection -- it is a ceremony which ought to be performed by God’s people “OFTEN” through the year! Write for our special article, “Are We Neglecting the Sacred Fellowship Meal?” It will explain the truth of this observance thoroughly for you.

A New Look at the Passover

Why, then, do certain churches today claim they celebrate the “Lord’s supper” on the evening of Nisan 14 -- and even admit it is not the Passover? They call it a “memorial” of the death of Christ. But consider this:

Is it fitting each year to hold a “*memorial*” service of an event which is to occur the next day -- the death of Christ -- *21 hours BEFORE* the actual death of the one being remembered? Jesus died at 3 P.M. in the afternoon of Nisan 14 -- not the previous evening! If we are going to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ *as a memorial service*, in memory of Christ’s sacrifice, then we should do it the *NEXT* night -- after He has “died” on the stake! It is only logical that such a “memorial” should be done *AT THE REGULAR PASSOVER DINNER* on the night of Nisan 15 -- at the very time the roasted Passover lambs were eaten! Doesn't that make sense? Why, then, try to keep such a “memorial” the night *BEFORE* the event takes place, on the yearly calendar? Why keep it *21 hours before* the event being commemorated took place?

Even so, it would be ludicrous to observe the Passover at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan, *24 hours before the actual events of the original Passover*, and *twenty one hours before* the actual crucifixion of our own true Passover, Jesus Christ! During the evening of the 14th of Nisan, Jesus was not even having a meal with His disciples -- He was in the dungeon, after having been beaten and scourged, awaiting His crucifixion the next day!

Paul pointed out, the cup of wine is “the *NEW TESTAMENT*” in Jesus’ blood. Paul wrote in Hebrews, “For where a testament is, there must also *OF NECESSITY BE THE DEATH* of *THE TESTATOR*” (Heb.9:16). He went on, “For a testament is of force *AFTER* men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth” (verse 17).

All these Scriptures show us, then, that the Passover should be celebrated at its proper time, *AFTER THE DEATH* of Christ -- not a day early in anticipation of the death of Christ -- but right after it occurred on the annual calendar, as a true *MEMORIAL* and *REMEMBRANCE* of our deliverance from sin through the shed blood of Christ!. The cup of wine should be taken each year, “after the death of the testator,” “otherwise it is of no strength at all.”

The Old Testament Passover was a *perfect type of the death of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ!* Therefore, the true New Testament Passover is *IDENTICAL WITH* the Old Testament Passover -- they are both the *SAME EVENT!* Therefore both should be observed at the precise same time! There are not two different “Passovers”! There is only *ONE* Passover -- and it was ordained a Feast “for ever”!

In observing the original, true Passover, as believers in the Messiah, therefore, we merely *add* the new elements and new understanding given to us by Christ. Some of

the instructions He gave the final night before His crucifixion give us insight not only into the meaning of the “Kiddush,” celebrated often throughout the year, but also give us insight into the meaning of the “unleavened bread” and “wine” which we partake of at the Passover itself, on the night of Nisan 15.

But, at the regular Passover, we go much more into depth, reviewing the whole story of Passover -- the coming out of Egypt, the plagues upon Egypt, God’s supernatural deliverance of the Israelites -- and then bring in the wonderful way in which Christ Jesus BECAME the “antitype” of the original Passover lambs slain in Egypt -- and we partake of the matzos, the unleavened bread, symbolizing His broken body, and we drink of the wine, symbolizing His shed blood.

Oh what a joyous night! It is a “family” affair, which we do with friends and relatives, around the dinner table, according to the customs preserved for us by the Jewish people! It is called a “seder” -- which means a “setting forth.” We follow a “Haggadah” -- “a telling of the story.” As Christians, we at Triumph Prophetic Ministries have published our own “Christian –Messianic Passover Hagaddah,” to help people to observe this Biblical holy feast of the Passover with fullness of joy, completeness of meaning, and true understanding. If you have never done it, you simply don't know what you have missed! How sorry I feel for those poor souls who have been blinded to this awesome truth, and have neglected the true Passover, as well as the celebration of the “Kiddush” throughout the year! How sad.

Partaking “Worthily”

Paul continues, in I Corinthians, “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man EXAMINE HIMSELF, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [judgment] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [are dead]” (I Cor.11:27-30). Paul is talking directly about the *kiddush* or wine and bread ceremony which we are to partake of “often” throughout the year (I Cor.11:26). However, his words certainly also apply to the symbols we partake of during the Passover itself.

When we partake of the wine and unleavened bread, symbolizing Christ's shed blood, and the beatings and bruises and sacrifice of His body for us, we should do so *at the correct time*, or else we would be partaking of the Passover without proper understanding, and therefore “unworthily.” Consider! Think about this: If we partake of the wine and bread ceremony connected with the Passover *ahead of time*, every year, 21 hours *before* Christ suffered and died for our sins (during the afternoon of Nisan 14), then are we not out of sync with the truth and the Word of God? Would such a practice not be actually doing it *wrongly, erroneously*, in error, and therefore “*unworthily*”? To do something "in memory of" means to do it *after* the event took place, not the evening *before!*

Why, then, do some want to observe the night *before* the Passover? It is almost as if there is a “lust” to do this -- and yet Jesus never once commanded it, or recommended it, or “approved” it! But, as Solomon wrote: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the *ways of death*” (Prov.14:12). Even though entire churches do this, they do so out of sheer ignorance of the truth!

To sin in ignorance is one thing; but to continue in error and sin, transgressing the law of God, knowingly, after the truth has been pointed out, is another matter altogether! In God's sight, sins of ignorance can be forgiven, when repented of; but sins of presumptuousness, deliberate sins, are another matter, and God will punish them very severely .

God declares, “But the person, be he citizen or stranger, who acts DEFIANTLY reviles the LORD; that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has SPURNED THE WORD OF THE LORD and VIOLATED HIS COMMANDMENT, that person shall be cut off -- he bears his guilt” (Numbers 15:30-31).

Because of observing the wine and bread ceremony wrongly, Paul says, many in the Church of God are “weak and sickly among you,” and many have died. ***They have no spiritual POWER with God because they have been disobeying Him, even though it may have been in ignorance, due to wrong teaching.*** This fact is certainly also true of the observance of the annual PASSOVER! *If we participate in a pagan “mass” type of Passover, and observe it 24 hours BEFORE God’s commanded observance, then we do it UNWORTHILY! Or if we observe some ADDED ceremony on that evening as an annual memorial, then we are “ADDING TO” the word of God and doing this God condemns vehemently – doing this brings one under divine condemnation (Deut.4:4)!*

MAKE NO MISTAKE! *This is serious business with God!*

Did Jesus CHANGE the Passover?

The meal Jesus and His disciples ate that final night could be called a Passover-type meal, even though it was an evening early (Matt.26:17, 19), since it was part of the Passover preparations. However, let’s be plain about it: ***Jesus was not instituting some NEW observance to be celebrated annually on that evening, forever! He was not instituting a new “holy day” to replace the annual PASSOVER celebration! That would be ridiculous!*** If Jesus intended to institute a new ANNUAL observance, don’t you think He would have plainly said so? ***But there is no commandment anywhere that we should observe THAT NIGHT as a perpetual memorial or “Lord's Suppe” or hold a celebration of any kind on it!***

Nor was Jesus *changing* the Passover from its normal time to a new time, a night before. This was a one-time special event, forced by very unusual circumstances. It was not a new policy to be perpetuated by the Church of God. *Jesus nowhere said any such thing.* It was simply a special, unique, auxiliary meal, similar to the “Passover” meal in some respects, and different in other respects, held in lieu of the regular

Passover, that year only, giving Jesus a final formal opportunity to impart some needed final teachings to His disciples, since Jesus would be dead and in the grave at the customary time of the eating of the Passover at the beginning of Nisan 15!

Let's really get this right!

Jesus Christ, as the Word of God, the Logos (John 1:1-3), was the One who ordained the Passover in the first place (1 Cor.10:4). He was the Yahveh, the YHVH, the member of the Godhead who revealed Himself to Israel (compare John 1:18; Exo.24:10-11; Acts 7:30, 35). He ordained that Passover should be celebrated FOREVER *at the appointed time, and not some other time!* (Exo.12:14-24; Lev.23:1-5). Being the One who ordained the Passover in the first place, He certainly would not CHANGE IT and violate His own commandment! He says, "I change NOT" (Mal.3:6). Jesus Christ is "the SAME, yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb.13:8). His word endures FOREVER (I Pet.1:23), and never changes. It is unchangeable and unbreakable (John 10:35; John 17:17). Jesus would never break His own word, that was ordained FOREVER, and then CHANGE it, when He Himself said He did not come to change *even one iota of God's Law!* (Matt.5:17-19).

Throughout His life on earth, from the time He was a child, Jesus always observed the Passover at the same time as all the Jews. We read in Luke's gospel, "Now his parents went to Jerusalem EVERY YEAR at the FEAST OF THE PASSOVER. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem AFTER THE CUSTOM OF THE FEAST. And when they had FULFILLED THE DAYS, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem . . ." (Luke 2:41-43).

Notice! They observed the Passover festival EVERY YEAR, and they did it "after the CUSTOM of the feast." This means they observed it just like every body else! They did not observe it a day early, but according to the custom; and Jesus observed it with them! Every year, then, as Jesus grew to manhood, He observed the Passover with all the other Jews in Judea. In so doing, He set us an example (I Pet.2:21; I John 2:6).

After Jesus began His ministry, He still did as He had always done, with His earthly parents. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 2:13). On this occasion He threw the money-changers out of the Temple (verses 14-16). At this Passover He foretold the Passover when He would be slain and be raised up in three days (John 2:18-21).

The gospel of John continues, "Now when he was in Jerusalem AT THE PASSOVER, IN THE FEAST DAY, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did" (verse 23).

No Controversy Over the Passover Celebration

Now, *think!* If the Jews had been celebrating the WRONG DAY, Jesus would

certainly have taken issue with them on such a major error. But He did not. He rebuked them for such relatively “minor” things as their preoccupation with pots and pans, and outward cleanliness as opposed to inward purity (Mark 7:1-13; Matt.15:1-20). If they had gone so far astray as to change the day of an annual holy day of God, do you think Jesus would have ignored such an abomination?

On the other hand, if Jesus Himself had been observing Passover a day earlier than all the Jews, the scribes and Pharisees, don't you think that would have been one of the issues they would have confronted Him with? Don't you think they would have accused Him of violating the Passover commandment? But they didn't! Why not? *Because He observed Passover on the same day as all the Jews did!*

There simply was no conflict or controversy over this point -- that is, not until modern times, and the 20th century, when various Christian-professing Churches, in their attempt to get back to the faith once delivered, repudiated the teachings and traditions of the Jews, and tried to figure out for themselves when Passover should be observed! And in so doing, they noted that Jesus, the year of His crucifixion, mentioned the “Passover” at the beginning of Nisan 14, so they ASSUMED that the beginning of Nisan 14 was the right day and time for the annual Passover. Since this was different from the Jewish date, they were forced to conclude that the Jews had *lost the true date somewhere in their history -- even though there is NO EVIDENCE IN HISTORY THAT THEY EVER CHANGED THE PASSOVER!* But, since the Jews' date was a day later, they *assumed* that the Jews *must* have changed it! Furthermore, they claimed that the Old Testament Passover *had to be* at the beginning of Nisan 14, since they had already assumed Jesus observed the regular Passover the night before His death! One assumption led to another; one error led to another! Error compounded and multiplied, and they dug their hole deeper and deeper, till there was no way out!

This mistake -- this error -- caused great confusion and distortion of the Old Testament Passover record and has caused multiple thousands of God's people to observe Passover at the wrong time and in the wrong manner for the *past sixty years!*

But now, as the end of this age approaches, God has revealed the PLAIN TRUTH about the Passover, and its correct time and sequence of events!

The following year, as Christ continued His ministry, John records, “And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh” (John 6:4). Sometimes in his gospel John calls the Passover a feast of the “Jews,” as he does here. That does not mean he is saying it was not God's Passover. He calls it the feast of the Jews, on occasion, because the Jews were the only ones in all the earth still celebrating it! On other occasions, however, he simply refers to this same feast as “the Passover” (John 12:1; 18:28; 19:14). This particular Passover season, Jesus fed the multitude miraculously, and then taught them about the true bread which comes down from heaven (John 6:5-58).

All these Passovers, Jesus celebrated according to the usual custom, at the same time as all the Jews, scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses' seat. He did not rail or

debate or argue with them over any discrepancy in time or date of observance. He did not point out any alleged error in their calculations. Therefore, by His quiet acceptance of their teaching on this point, He personally endorsed the day of Passover which they were observing! Also, by doing this, Jesus set us an example that we also should follow the traditional custom of the Jews in observing Passover at the ending of Nisan 14, and during the early evening of Nisan 15, and not a day earlier as some Churches do!

Passover -- a Memorial

Stop and think a moment. Passover typified the slain Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. He was slain -- no argument from anybody -- at the end of the 14th of Nisan, about 3:00 PM in the afternoon (Luke 23:44; Mark 15:33). Thus He was slain at the precise time the Jews throughout Jerusalem were slaying their sacrificial lambs, which unknown to them pointed to the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself.

As we, today, observe the Passover, at the close of the 14th, and beginning of the 15th of Nisan, just as the Jews have always done, we are observing it *at the very time Jesus always observed it throughout His life*. We keep it as a memorial, observed after the death of the Lamb of God, after He was killed, and buried, and entombed. We observe it the night of the Feast, at the beginning of Nisan 15. We observe it at the very time the Jews observe it, celebrating the night of deliverance from Egyptian slavery. We celebrate it the night God “passed over” Israel’s firstborn, when He slew the Egyptian firstborn.

As we observe it, going through the story of the Haggadah, and telling the story, connecting it with Messiah Yeshua, Jesus Christ the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29), it is as if we re-live these events of yesteryear. At the very time these awesome things were happening, it is as if *WE ARE THERE IN PERSON, re-living the experience of our forefathers!* As we go through the story, it is as if each one of us were actually there, participating in these historic events.

But if we do like some do, and observe the Passover a day or evening early, we miss the point of actually sharing in the experience with Christ and the disciples and the children of Israel. Rather than Christ having just been sacrificed for our sins, time-wise, we would be celebrating 24 hours in advance of His actual crucifixion, death and burial. The observance would be out of sync -- out of phase. It would be like being in a “time warp.” It would not truly be a “MEMORIAL,” but rather a like a “fore-shadow” of something to come. Yet God Almighty, the One who became Christ, specifically said, “And this day shall be unto you FOR A MEMORIAL,” a remembrance of a past event -- not a shadow of future events. It was ordained as a MEMORIAL DAY, not a foretaste day.

Jesus Himself, when He added the symbols of bread and wine, as types of His shed blood and broken body, said, “this do in REMEMBRANCE OF ME” (Luke 22:19). Again, it was to be a MEMORIAL of His sacrifice for our sins, something we

look back on, not something we look forward to in future anticipation! Those who observe Passover at the beginning of Nisan 14 actually miss out on this vital point. By observing it ahead of time, they are anticipating the sacrifice of Christ, instead of memorializing it.

Passover -- the Festival of Freedom and Joy

How should we observe the Passover, today? Should it be observed in our homes, in a family setting, with the leading family member taking charge and guiding the observance, as is done in Jewish families around the world? Or should we all go to Church, and there partake of the symbols of unleavened bread and wine, under the direction of Church ministers, in a rather formal, solemn, quiet ceremony?

Remember, first of all, that from time immemorial the Jews have celebrated the Passover as a distinctly FAMILY affair! In fact, they were COMMANDED to partake of it in their own homes (Exodus 12:3-11). Children were to be present, and were to be taught the history and reasons for celebrating this Holy Festival (Exo.13:8-10). The Passover was never intended to be an awesome, austere, solemn Church service resembling a Catholic mass!

But what do many churches do? They focus on observing a ritual that is much like a Catholic mass, with a tiny wafer (unleavened) and a thimble sized vial of wine! They turn a happy, festive, family occasion into a comatose, moribund, funereal dirge with overwhelming silence, austerity, solemnity, and sorrow, as they meditate on their sins and death!

Passover was *never* intended to be a solemn, austere “church service” as it is practiced in the Worldwide Church of God and most all of its off-shoots! Not at all. It was intended to be a joyous, happy, celebration of deliverance, an intimate family type celebration, with a few families and close friends gathered together, led by the elder member or patriarch, even as the Jews still celebrate it today!

Jesus Christ set us an example of how to celebrate the Passover. He observed it all His life with His family -- and after He began His ministry, with His disciples. We are commanded to “FOLLOW HIS STEPS” (I Pet.2:21) -- that is, celebrate it THE SAME WAY HE DID, SETTING US AN *EXAMPLE!* He never observed the Passover as a funereal dirge or evening of sorrow, like a Roman Catholic mass!

Are you willing to follow JESUS? Or are you going to follow men, in their own practices which deviate from the pattern and truth set down in the Word of God?

The true Passover is meant by God to be a time of great rejoicing and joy. It symbolizes our deliverance from sin and evil, the clutches of spiritual slavery. It is to be a time of great rejoicing and gladness, not mourning and sorrow. In ancient Israel Passover was a time of JOY AND REJOICING! (II Kings 23:22; II Chron.35:18; Ezra 6:19-22). Even so, our Passover today ought to be a time of tremendous rejoicing and

overwhelming JOY!

All of God's annual Holy Days have tremendous meaning and awesome significance. Unfortunately, millions are missing out on the real spiritual treasures that these days afford -- because they don't observe them at all, or they observe them on the wrong day, in the wrong manner, and without proper knowledge or instruction. God thunders, "My people are DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also REJECT THEE, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast FORGOTTEN THE LAW of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos.4:6).

Isn't it about time we get back to the faith once delivered to the saints? (Jude 3). May God help you to understand -- and take action!

Chapter 5

A New Look at the New Testament PASSOVER

Did Jesus Christ change the time and manner in which the Passover should be observed? The Jews have always kept Passover on Nisan 15. Jesus gave new Passover symbols to His disciples at His "Last Supper," on Nisan 14. He was crucified and died at 3:00 PM during the afternoon of Nisan 14, when the Jews were slaying thousands of Passover lambs. What does all this have to do with the Christian PASSOVER? When should the Passover be observed by God's people today? When the "Lord's Supper" occurred? At 3:00 PM? Or on the traditional day of Nisan 15?

In Proverbs 18:13 we read, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." And in Revelation 12:9 we read that ". . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan . . . deceiveth the WHOLE WORLD."

Truer words were never spoken -- and they apply to the Passover ceremony and celebration itself, believe it or not!

When should the Passover be kept today? When should Christians observe the Passover? Is the "New Testament Passover" any different or at a different time than the Old Testament Passover? Did Jesus change the date, time, and manner of observance?

Jesus Himself said we are to live by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4). What does the WORD OF GOD say about the Passover?

A person wrote to me saying that he doesn't know of any Church that observes

Passover at the time the Bible quotes (Matt.27:46, Mark 13:34, Luke 23:44) -- that is, 3:00 PM in the afternoon of Nisan 14, when Jesus actually died on the stake or tree. He also mentioned there are four distinct events at Passover time -- the Last Supper, crucifixion, night to be

remembered, and resurrection. He then quoted Luke 22:15 as implying that Jesus kept the Passover a night early so that He could change it from physical to spiritual. He also quoted Deuteronomy 16:6 as showing the Passover was to be kept at the going down of the sun, before even or sunset. He then referred to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and I Cor.11:24-25, saying Jesus told us to take the bread and wine -- symbols of His body and blood -- in remembrance of Him, not of the Last Supper, or the resurrection. This person concluded that the time to "remember Him" is 3:00 PM when He died on the stake, not some other time.

Is this true? Should the Passover therefore be observed at 3:00 PM in the afternoon?

This same individual then pointed out that "we," meaning I suppose the Worldwide Church of God, Church of God International, and other offshoots, take the Passover the evening before the time Jesus was killed, then go home, eat leavened bread or products, and the following day -- the daylight portion of the 14th -- continue eating hotcakes, biscuits, toast, hamburgers, hotdogs, etc., all day up until sunset, when all leavening is finally put out, prior to Nisan 15. This, he pointed out, makes no sense.

In conclusion, he said, his question is this: "Where in God's Scriptures does it tell us to observe the Passover at any time other than the 9th hour (3:00 PM) on the 14th day of the first month of God's calendar?"

That's a good question! As the Bible is our sole authority on this subject, and all Scripture is given by inspiration of God -- is "God-breathed" (II Tim.3:16) -- what does Scripture say about this question?

Illogical Passover Nonsense

My correspondent was right that the present day observance of Passover by those who attempt to keep it during the "Lord's Supper," prior to the actual Passover, at the beginning of Nisan 14, is in error and makes no sense. It is ludicrous that some eat the unleavened Passover bread at what they call the "Passover," then go right back into eating leavened bread -- a type of SIN -- the following hours, and don't put it out of their homes until prior to sunset the following day, almost 24 hours later! Such a symbolism is screwy and foolish. Do we partake of Christ, then go back into SIN and "live it up" for 24 hours, and only then finally "repent" and put the leaven -- SIN -- out of our lives? Nonsense!

The Lord's Supper, as it has been called, which many believe occurred at night shortly after the beginning of Nisan 14, was NOT the Passover. The Jews did not celebrate the Passover until after the lambs were slain, generally from 3-5 o'clock

during the afternoon of Nisan 14, according to the Jewish historian Josephus of the first century. They slew the lambs on the 14th, as God commanded, and then ate the Passover on the 15th of Nisan. This was the "night to be observed unto the LORD" (Exodus 12:42).

When, then, should we observe Passover? God's commandment is plain. God commanded Moses and all Israel, "And ye shall keep it [the lamb] until the 14th day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall KILL it in the evening" (Exo.12:6). The expression "in the evening" in Hebrew means "between the two evenings." This is a general period of time which means between high noon when the sun begins to go "down," until actual sunset when the sun has disappeared beneath the horizon -- a time span of about six hours. Thus the Israelites were permitted to begin slaying the Passover lambs after noon and up until sunset. This was important, because all the lambs had to be slain at the Temple or place where God put His name. The Passover had to be sacrificed "in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there" (Deut.16:2).

This slaying of the lambs perfectly represented the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb, who was slain for our sins (I Cor.5:7; II Cor.5:20), and who expired on the stake about 3:00 PM in the afternoon of Nisan 14 (Matt.27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:44).

Passover Night

But when was the Passover actually to be eaten, and partaken of, as a meal? Notice the very Word of God on this question! "And they shall eat the flesh IN THAT NIGHT, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. . . And ye shall let nothing of it remain UNTIL THE MORNING . . . It is the LORD'S PASSOVER. For I will pass through the land of Egypt THIS NIGHT, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD . . . and when I see the blood, I WILL PASS OVER you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And THIS DAY [NISAN 15] shall be unto you for a MEMORIAL; and ye shall keep it a FEAST to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a FEAST by an ordinance forever" (Exodus 12:7-14).

Notice carefully. The LAMB was to be slain during the afternoon of the 14th, at the very time Jesus Christ died on the stake for our sins. But the PASSOVER itself was not to be celebrated, and EATEN, as a meal of rejoicing and deliverance, until NIGHT (Exo.12:8-10), and nothing of it was to remain until the next MORNING. Since Nisan 15 began at sunset, this proves conclusively that the Passover celebration of eating the Passover meal, with the lamb and unleavened bread and bitter herbs, was not to occur until SUNSET -- AT NIGHT -- ON NISAN15!

This is the very time God Almighty COMMANDS us to observe the Passover -- and it is the TIME when the Jews have kept it from time immemorial, throughout their

history! They never forgot the right day to observe this chief of all their holy days! This is the very time we should observe it TODAY -- A FEAST BY AN ORDINANCE FOREVER" (Exo.12:14). To observe it on any other day or time, such as 24 hours earlier, at the beginning portion of Nisan 14 -- is an act of sacrilege, disobedience, rebellion, wilful pride, and arrogance -- an act of callous REBELLION against this plain and simple LAW of Almighty GOD! He is the One who sets the date, time and manner we should observe His festivals -- not some church leader, sect, cult, or modern day church group!

God's Word says plainly, "These are the FEASTS of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim IN THEIR SEASONS. In the fourteenth day of the first month AT EVEN [at the end of the day] is the LORD's passover" (Lev.23:4-5). The Passover was actually to be slain or sacrificed "AT EVEN, at the going down of the sun" (Deut.16:6). The sun goes down from noon till about six o'clock, when it sets; after the sun "sets," it is no longer "going down," but has "gone down." Therefore, the Passover lambs were to be sacrificed during the AFTERNOON of Nisan 14 -- not on Nisan 13 or any other day! Nor were they to be slain after sunset of Nisan 13, at the beginning of Nisan 14, when it was dark, after the sun had already "gone down."

The Scriptures are PLAIN. The Passover was killed in the afternoon of Nisan 14, and then eaten on the NIGHT portion of Nisan 15. Nothing else makes any sense whatsoever. The Jews, knowing this fact, have properly observed the Passover on Nisan 15 for thousands of years, and never lost this precious knowledge. No wonder God said He gave His holy oracles to them to preserve, and not to others (Rom.3:1-3). No wonder Jesus said that the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, and had authority to interpret the commandments and holy days of God (Matt.23:1-2).

However, God never commanded us to partake of the Passover meal, with its rich symbolism, at the beginning of Nisan 14, or even at 3:00 PM during the afternoon of Nisan 14. The fact is, Nisan 14 was simply regarded as the "PREPARATION of the Passover," which involved the killing and dressing of the lambs, and putting leaven out of their homes.

"The Evening of the 14th"

Some have claimed that the "evening" of Nisan 14 means the beginning of that day. They teach that the Israelites were to keep the Passover lambs up until sunset when Nisan 14 began, then sacrifice them before dark, and eat them that same night.

Is this true? Is it even possible? During the time of Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, he tells us that the Jews sacrificed some 256,500 lambs in Jerusalem, at the Temple, for the Passover, at a typical Passover celebration. Josephus wrote:

"So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour to the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong

to every sacrifice, (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves,) and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was two hundred and fifty six thousand five hundred; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons that were pure and holy" (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, ix, 3).

Josephus plainly states these lambs were slain between the ninth and eleventh hour, generally -- or from 3:00 PM in the afternoon until 5:00 PM -- obviously *BEFORE sunset!* Can you imagine the disarray and consternation the priests would have been under if they had to sacrifice all these lambs in the brief "twilight" period of time between sunset and dark -- maybe thirty minutes or so? Sheer chaos and pandemonium would have reigned! But God is NOT the author of CONFUSION (I Cor.14:33) and commands that all things be done decently and in order (v.40).

In Exodus 12:6 God commands the Passover be killed "between the two evenings." This is the period of time between high noon, when the sun begins to go down, and actual sunset, when the sun has gone down. It is the time of the "going down of the sun" (Deut.16:6) -- not the time AFTER the sun has already gone down!

Some claim, however, that "evening" must refer to the beginning of the 14th of Nisan. One man said, in effect, "Show me one place where the Bible says a holy day begins the EVENING of the previous day!" Is this expression used anywhere else in the Bible?

You bet it is! In fact, in this very same chapter, God tells His people, "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month AT EVEN. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses . . ." (Exodus 12:18-19).

Notice! What were the beginning and ending days of this Feast? From the 14th at even till the 21st at even was SEVEN days, this verse tells us. If the 14th "at even" meant the beginning of Nisan 14, then the 21st day "at even" would have to mean the beginning of the 21st -- this would mean we would have to keep the Feast from Nisan 14 through the 20th, and exclude the 21st! Is this what God intended? Not at all!

Leviticus 23 answers plainly: "In the fourteenth day of the first month AT EVEN is the LORD's passover. And on the FIFTEENTH DAY of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the *first day* [the 15th] ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein . . . in the *seventh day* [the 21st -- add it up yourself!] ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev.23:5-8).

Now notice. The Passover occurred at the end of the 14th, beginning with the sacrificing of the lambs. The FEAST began after sunset, on Nisan 15, with the

Passover meal itself. This feast continued for seven days, during which no leaven was to be found in their dwellings. Thus the feast concluded on Nisan 21. Now God had commanded them to eat "unleavened bread" on the 14th day of the month "at even" UNTIL -- THAT IS INCLUDING -- the 21st day of the month -- SEVEN DAYS! Count it up. From the evening (end) of the 14th of Nisan till the evening (end) of Nisan 21 is exactly SEVEN DAYS! Here is clear proof that "evening" means the END of a day -- not its beginning!

But there is even more proof. In Leviticus 23 God commands us to celebrate the Day of Atonement "on the tenth day of the seventh month" (Lev.23:27). That is very plain. God then says, "It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the NINTH DAY of the month AT EVEN, *from even unto even*, shall ye celebrate your sabbath" (verse 32).

Thus the ninth day "at even" means the END of the ninth day -- even as the fourteenth day of the first month "at even" means the END of the fourteenth day -- not its beginning!

"The Preparation of the Passover"

Notice! The day after the "Lord's Supper" (John 13), Jesus had been arrested by the Jews, and brought before Pontius Pilate, who ordered Him to be whipped and scourged (John 19:1). On the morning of the 14th of Nisan, Pilate had Jesus brought to the place of judgment called "the Pavement" (John 19:13).

John records: "And it was THE PREPARATION OF THE PASSOVER, and about the sixth hour [high noon – see our article, "What Do You Mean, 'The Sixth Hour'?"]: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" (John 19:14). The Passover itself would not be partaken of until that evening, after sunset. Nisan 14 was "the preparation," and the body of Jesus had to be laid in the tomb before sunset (John 19:31), when the High Holy Sabbath -- the first day of Unleavened Bread, would begin.

Jesus' "Last Supper"

But now let's go backward in time. Let's go back to the evening when Jesus sat down with His disciples for a final dinner before He was apprehended by the Jewish authorities. Notice the facts about that final dinner, as revealed in the Scriptures.

Some people believe that the last meal Jesus ate with His disciples was a Passover. However, this was not the case. It could not have been, as we have just seen. The Passover would not be held until the night following the execution of Christ, who was our "Passover Lamb" (I Cor.5:7).

The last meal Jesus had with His disciples was definitely not the "Passover." It was rather a "last supper," often called "The Lord's Supper." As we have just seen, the following morning of Nisan 14 was still called "the PREPARATION of the Passover"

(John 19:14, 31). This shows the Passover had not yet come.

Nowhere in Scripture does God command us or tell us to commemorate or observe this "last supper" as such which Jesus had at a time significantly BEFORE the Passover. Although He did give us three elements we are to observe – the symbols of the bread, wine, and the footwashing – He did not tell us to observe that evening as such! When we are to observe those important symbols, we will discuss later in this article. Suffice it to say for the present, Jesus never commanded us to observe that supper that night as a distinct event or observance. It is not a holy day or feast or festival of God. The fact that it was not the Passover itself is clear from the apostle John's record. Notice carefully!

John explicitly wrote, "Now *BEFORE the feast of the PASSOVER*, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. *AND SUPPER BEING ENDED . . . HE RISETH FROM SUPPER*" (John 13:1-4) -- and He began to wash the disciples' feet. Notice! This supper was clearly stated to have been "BEFORE the feast of the Passover" (verse 1). *Therefore it could NOT have been the Passover!*

Matthew, Mark and Luke actually corroborate this account in John's gospel. There is no contradiction in the so-called synoptic gospels. We find that Jesus taught on the Mount of Olives, on Nisan 11, teaching His disciples about His second coming (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13, Luke 21), probably teaching into late afternoon.

Now we come to Monday night, the beginning of Nisan 12. Let's pick up the story:

Nisan 12 -- Monday Night

"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that AFTER TWO DAYS is *the feast of* THE PASSOVER, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified" (Matt.26:1-2).

"AFTER TWO DAYS was *the feast of* THE PASSOVER, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, not on a feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people" (Mark 14:1-2).

"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew night, which is called the passover" (Luke 22:1).

Notice that I highlighted the expression "the feast of" as it is found in Matthew and Mark. This expression, in italics in the King James Version, is supplied by the translators and *does not appear in the Greek originals at all!* This was an incorrect assumption by the translators. It was not the "Feast" that was two days hence, but rather "the Passover" -- that is, the day of Nisan 14, when the Passover was KILLED! This was the very day that Jesus Christ would be crucified, as our Passover (I Cor.5:7). Thus the

time sequence here shows that we have come to the evening of Monday, and the beginning of Nisan 12 -- Monday night. What occurred at this time?

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat [dinner]. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt.26:6-13; see also Mark 14:3-9).

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him" (Matt.26:14-16).

It was now Monday evening. Judas went out after the supper in the home of Simon the leper, and met with the chief priests, who were Sadducees, and made an agreement to betray Jesus to them for the equivalent of \$150 dollars today -- the price of a slave in those days. And so was fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah:

"And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver" (Zech.11:12).

Nisan 12 -- Tuesday

What was the next event to occur in the life of the Messiah, the Lamb of God?

Here is where scholars, Bible translators, and theologians, all become the most confused, befuddled, and frustrated. Here is where grievous misunderstanding of the text and of the sequence of events has led to massive error and doctrinal confusion on the part of churches, Christians, and students of the Scriptures. Scholars assume that the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke -- called the "synoptic gospels" -- differ from the gospel of John. Most theologians also ASSUME there is a problem in reconciling the first three gospel accounts with John's account. This has led to many strange and puzzling theories and even wild speculations, concerning the last days of Jesus, and the 'Lord's supper.' Why all the confusion?

Let us proceed carefully, step-by-step, and see if we can solve the problems that suddenly begin to appear in the various accounts. Is the problem in the *texts*? Or is the problem in the *minds of the men who study and interpret the texts*?

Some scholars *assume* the contradictions are real, and therefore prove the gospel accounts contradict and therefore *could not be divinely inspired*. Some theologians are *hard pressed to find a "reasonable" explanation* for the assumed "contradictions."

What IS the problem? Some believe the "last supper" Jesus held with His disciples was the Biblical "Passover" and was held at the beginning of Nisan 14, even though the Jews would not be sacrificing the passover lambs until the following afternoon. The churches who teach this believe that the Jews *over the centuries* somehow *changed the passover* from the beginning to the end of Nisan 14. Other churches admit that the Jews never changed the passover -- it was always held at the end of Nisan 14. But they believe that the "last supper" Jesus held with His disciples was at the beginning of Nisan 14 and was "the New Testament passover." That is, they conclude that even though Jesus NEVER SAID He was changing the date and time of the observance of the passover seder or dinner, *He did it anyway by instituting the bread and wine ceremony at the "last supper"!* Therefore, they call this the "New Testament Passover," in distinction from the "Old Testament Passover."

Nowhere in the entire New Testament, however, do we ever find the expression "New Testament Passover"! This teaching assumes and claims that *Christ CHANGED a holy day observance, and replaced the "Old Testament Passover" with a "New Testament Passover" -- yet Jesus Christ said He did not come to abolish or destroy even a "jot" or a "tittle" of the Law of God (Matt.5:17-19).*

The apostle Paul tells us that Christ is "the SAME, yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb.13:8).

Why all this confusion? What is the TRUTH? Let us notice very carefully and examine minutely the next events to occur in the final week of Christ on this earth -- His "last few days" leading up to the crucifixion!

A Crucial Mistranslation

Matthew's account:

"Now the **FIRST *day*** of the ***feast of UNLEAVENED BREAD*** the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we **PREPARE** for thee to eat the passover?

"And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they **MADE READY THE PASSOVER**" (Matt.26:17-19).

Mark's account:

"And the **FIRST DAY** of unleavened bread, *when they killed the passover*, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we *go and PREPARE* that thou mayest eat the passover? . . . And his disciples went forth, and came into the city,

and found as he had said unto them: and they *made ready the passover*" (Mark 14:12-16).

Luke's account:

"Then came the **DAY** of unleavened bread, when the passover must be **killed**. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and PREPARE us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we PREPARE? . . . And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they MADE READY the passover" (Luke 22:7-13).

Notice! The King James Version has inserted the words "day" and "feast of" in Matthew's account. These words do not belong! In the original Greek, as the *Englishman's Greek-English Interlinear* shows, the correct rendering is as follows:

"Now on the first [day] of unleavened bread."

Thus the real Greek reads, "Now on the first of unleavened bread." However, the first *day* of unleavened bread would not come till Nisan 15th arrived! What does the expression "the first of unleavened bread" really mean? The Greek word for "FIRST" here is #4418 in Strong's Concordance -- *PROTOS* -- and means,

"FOREMOST (IN TIME, PLACE, ORDER OF IMPORTANCE): -- *BEFORE, BEGINNING, BEST, CHIEF . . .*"

Therefore, this verse in Matthew merely states, "Now in the *beginning of* unleavened bread," or "Now *before* unleavened bread! This refers to a period of TIME at the beginning of or preceding the Feast of Unleavened Bread -- *an indefinite period which is not specified but which is related to the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread!*

The Word "DAY"

But what about the word "day" as found in the accounts of Mark and Luke? Mark says it was the "first day" of unleavened bread "when they killed the passover." Luke says it was "the day" of unleavened bread when the passover "must be killed." Many ASSUME that this MUST mean Nisan 14, because that is the literal 24-hour day the passover was commanded to be killed (Exo.12:6). However, the truth of the matter is that the Greek word "DAY" has *many different meanings!*

Notice! The Greek word translated "day" in these verses is *HEMERA*. It is #2250 in Strong's Concordance and means --

"DAY, i.e. (lit.) *the time space between dawn and dark, or the whole 24 hours . . .* fig. A PERIOD (ALWAYS DEFINED MORE OR LESS CLEARLY IN THE CONTEXT): -- AGE . . . DAY . . . TIME, WHILE, YEARS."

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words defines *hemera* as follows:

"(a) the period of natural light . . . (b) the same, but figuratively for a period of opportunity for service . . . (c) one period of alternate light and darkness . . . (d) *A PERIOD OF UNDEFINED LENGTH MARKED BY CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS, such as 'the day of small things,' Zech.4:10, of perplexity and distress, Isa.17:11; Obad.12-14; of prosperity and of adversity, Ecc.7:14; of trial and testing, Ps.95:8; of salvation, Isa.49:8; 2 Cor.6:2; cf. Luke 19:42; of evil, Eph.6:13, of wrath and revelation of the judgments of God, Rom.2:5; (e) an APPOINTED TIME, Eccl.8:6; Eph.4:30 . . . (f) a notable defeat in battle, etc., Isa.9:4 . . . (g) by metonymy – 'when,' 'at the time when' . . ."*

Clearly, this word has many different uses in the Greek language and most certainly does NOT always refer to a particular 24-hour "day"!

Notice how it is used in various Scriptures in the New Testament!

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see *my day* [*the period of Christ's coming*]: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).

"At that TIME [*HEMERA*] there was a great persecution against the church" (Acts 8:1).

"But to Israel he saith, All DAY long [i.e., for a very long time] I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom.10:21).

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that ONE DAY is with the Lord AS A THOUSAND YEARS, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet.3:8).

"But the DAY OF THE LORD [period of Christ's intervention] will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet.3:10).

With this understanding then, we see that the verses in Mark and Luke can be translated, and understood, as follows:

"And the *beginning period of unleavened bread*, when they killed the passover" (Mark 14:12).

"Then came the *TIME of unleavened bread*, when the passover must be killed" (Luke 22:7).

The Word "KILLED" Examined

Now let's take a closer look at these two verses, and the word "KILLED," as used in them. The word for "killed" in both Mark's and Luke's accounts is *THUO* in Greek (Strong's' Concordance, #2380), and literally means, "to sacrifice." It is not the normal word used for "kill" as in killing a man, but rather a word which means "to immolate, slaughter for any purpose." To sacrifice the Passover lamb was not just taking a lamb and "killing" it. This was a very careful, regulated procedure which required proper preparation and TIME.

As we have already seen, the Israelites were commanded to select their Passover lambs on Nisan 10, and then to keep them apart for five days, until the ending of Nisan 14. During this time, they were to inspect the lamb, and be sure it had NO BLEMISH of any kind. They were to *maintain it* in perfect condition, without injury or flaw. *All of this PREPARATORY WORK was part of the ritual of slaying the Passover lamb.* Since the word *thuo* specifically refers to a *sacrifice*, it must of necessity *include the required elements of preparation!*

In other words, these verses are discussing the TIME OF PREPARATION -- the beginning period of PREPARATION -- for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread!

Tuesday, Nisan 12, would certainly qualify in every way to be part of this PREPARATION PERIOD OF TIME, getting ready for the Passover which was coming up very soon -- just two days later!

There is absolutely no grounds for assuming or believing that these verses must refer to the day of NISAN 14 itself! To the contrary, it would seem LUDICROUS to BEGIN preparation for the Passover as LATE as Nisan 14, the very day all leaven had to be out of the homes, and the Passover lambs were killed! It would have seemed to be a complete dereliction of duty on Christ's part to WAIT UNTIL NISAN 14 BEFORE TELLING HIS DISCIPLES TO "GO AND PREPARE THE PASSOVER"! This would be DOUBLY TRUE if the "Passover" was going to be observed THAT VERY NIGHT!!!

Think about it!

What Do You Mean, "PREPARE the Passover"?

Our day-by-day chronology of events in Jesus' last week has brought us to Tuesday morning, Nisan 12. The Passover celebration itself would begin with the sacrificing of the lambs on the afternoon of Nisan 14. Prior to that time, all leaven had to be burned or disposed of hours before the end of Nisan 14. Then, the families would eat the Passover after roasting the lambs for hours until they were well cooked, at some time after the beginning of Nisan 15, on the first annual High Holy Day of Unleavened Bread.

Jesus tells His disciples to "go and prepare us the passover" (Luke 22:8). This means the time had come to BEGIN PREPARATIONS for the Passover! Our time-flow shows us that this was TUESDAY MORNING, Nisan 12th -- two days before the killing

of the lambs, and two and one half days before the Passover seder would be eaten! Chronologically, this makes perfect sense. Then, Monday morning, the disciples went into the city, a journey which may have taken an hour or so, found the man they were to follow, made the inquiries they were instructed to do, found the appointed room, and *then they made the Passover preparations.*

Anyone who has kept Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread would know that much work would be involved in making all the proper "preparations." They would need to clean the room, be sure it was free of all leaven, and remove any leaven from the premises. They would need to go to the market, purchase supplies and stock up on food and unleavened bread to use during the seven-day Passover Festival (see Luke 22:1; Ezek.45:21). This "preparation" probably took at least four or five hours, to get everything ready in advance for the upcoming Passover celebration! These preparations occupied the daylight portion of Nisan 12, that Monday.

The common belief that it was *already Nisan 14, when Jesus sent the disciples into the city to "prepare for the Passover," is flawed on several counts.* First, it doesn't make any sense that the Messiah, Saviour of Israel, would wait until the last minute to instruct His disciples to make such important preparation! If Passover was that very night, as some insist, then they would have pulled their hair out, wracked with worry and anxiety, knowing that there was simply not enough time!

Second, since they would have started into the city on Nisan 14, after the sun had set ending Nisan 13, it would have been dark by the time they reached the city. How would they follow a man in the dark? But even if they did, it would have taken them hours to clean the room, and remove the leaven, to be ready for "Passover."

And third, if they had gotten such a late start, *where would they have gotten the time to go to market, and purchase all the things needed for the Passover?* By nightfall, all the markets would have been closed. The disciples would have thought that Jesus was "out of his mind" for waiting so long to tell them to "prepare the passover" if they were to celebrate it that very evening, and the sun had already set!

But when we realize it was only Tuesday morning, Nisan 12, when He told them to "go and prepare," the whole scenario makes much more logical and reasonable sense!

What happened next?

Nisan 13 -- Tuesday Night

"Now when the EVEN WAS COME [that very night, which would be the beginning of Nisan 13 -- Tuesday night!], he sat down with the twelve. And AS THEY DID EAT [they were eating dinner!], he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?" (Matt.26:20-22).

"And *IN THE EVENING* he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and DID EAT [DINNER!], Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you that eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? An he answered and said unto them, it is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:17-21).

"And when the hour was come [the hour for dinner -- the supper hour!], he sat down and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover* with you before I suffer: [I will explain this comment later. Jesus was not referring to that meal, but to the upcoming Passover Feast.] For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22:14-18).

Notice that up to this point, Matthew and Mark are treating this final meal as just that -- a dinner or supper held among friends. There is no mention of this night being the "Passover" at all!

Notice also -- we have taken this chronology of Christ's last week on a careful day-by-day introspection. We have carefully pointed out what occurred in the morning of each day, and the evening. We have gone through the ending of Friday, Nisan 8, Sabbath, Nisan 9, Sunday, Nisan 10, Monday, Nisan 11, and logically we must now come to Tuesday, Nisan 12, and Tuesday evening, the beginning of Nisan 13!

What occurred on this *Tuesday*? Simple: Jesus sent His disciples into the city, to "prepare for Passover" which was coming up soon, and much preparation work was needed. Then, "when evening was come," *it logically must have been that very evening - - Tuesday evening, Nisan 13, which would have begun at sunset! This "last supper" therefore -- contrary to common assumptions -- occurred TUESDAY NIGHT!*

So, with this amazing fact in mind, let's continue the story-flow.

At this "last supper," the gospel writer Luke quotes Jesus as making a remarkable statement. Luke mentions Jesus made the astonishing statement, "With *desire* have I *desired* to eat this passover with you before I suffer . . ." (Luke 22:15). Does this one simple statement "prove" that this dinner was the "Passover"? Not at all! Jesus could just as easily have been harking back to the Passover which they had been preparing for, which was due to arrive a few days later. They understood what He was talking about. They knew He meant the upcoming Passover Festival, with the Seder on the night of Nisan 15 (Ezekioe 45:21).

What Jesus really meant by this expression is revealed when we look into the original Greek language. The Greek word for "desire" here in this verse is not the normal

word used for "desire" in the New Testament. That word would be *eudokia*, meaning literally "good pleasure." But the word Jesus used is #1939 in Strong's Concordance, the word *EPITHUMIA*, which means "A LONGING (ESPECIALLY FOR WHAT IS FORBIDDEN)."

Jesus longed to be able to partake of the upcoming Passover celebration -- *but He knew He could not, because He knew He would be DEAD AND BURIED at the time the Passover was being celebrated in Israel!* He is merely expressing to the disciples His keen yearning to be able to keep the Passover with them -- but He knew it would not be possible. Why? Because He knew He was going to *BE our Passover Lamb that very Passover!*

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary says of this word *EPITHUMIA*:

"A DESIRE, CRAVING, LONGING, MOSTLY OF EVIL DESIRES,' FREQUENTLY TRANSLATED 'LUST' . . .

*"With regard to evil 'desires,' in Col.3:5 the RV has 'desire' for the KJV, 'concupiscence'; there the preceding word *pathos* is translated 'passion,' RV, for KJV, 'lust' . . . *Epithumia* is the more comprehensive term, including all manner of 'lusts and desires' . . ."*

Why did Jesus use this word at His final supper with His disciples, before the Passover, which was only two nights away? The answer is simply that *humanly speaking He longed, even craved, to keep that Passover with them -- but He knew that He couldn't, and still fulfill the plan of God, and BECOME our Passover sacrifice!*

This word comes from the word *epithumeo* which means, "set the heart upon," "long for (rightly or otherwise)," "covet, desire, lust after." In other words, Jesus is simply telling His disciples how much He LONGED to be able to eat this upcoming Passover on the night of Nisan 15 with them -- *but He knew it would be impossible!* It simply was not to be; it was not possible according to the plan of God. Rather than eat the Passover with them, He would BE our "Passover lamb," sacrificed for us (I Cor.5:7)! What He was longing for, in this particular instance, was indeed "forbidden" -- for He could not possibly do BOTH, partake of the Passover and BE our Passover!

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon points out that this word literally means, "desire, craving, longing," specifically, "desire for what is forbidden, lust." The plain truth is, humanly speaking, Jesus did not want to have to go through with the crucifixion, being beaten, scourged, nailed to the stake, and KILLED! He sweated great drops of blood, praying to the Father later that same night, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Luke records, "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (verse 44). Even for Jesus, our Saviour, this trial of the crucifixion was a great ordeal, one He did not look forward to.

This fact adds meaning and depth to our perception of His remarkable words to His disciples that he literally "CRAVED" to eat this upcoming Passover with them, on Nisan 15, and not have to go through with the ordeal that lay ahead of Him that would prevent Him from doing so! He most certainly would NOT have used such a word merely to describe having the "last supper" with them at the beginning of the 13th of Nisan. That meal itself has no particular significance other than being their last meal together.

The truth is so beautiful, when we understand it! Jesus was not referring to that dinner that very night at all! Notice! The apostle John makes this point abundantly clear.

A Quick Review

Matthew tells us, "When evening came, Jesus was RECLINING AT THE TABLE with the Twelve." John tells us: "It was JUST BEFORE the Passover Feast. . . . The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from THE MEAL" (John 13:1-4). This was a regular MEAL, not the Passover feast! Luke adds, "When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table" (Luke 22:14).

How clear! This was not the Passover -- it was about 48 hours BEFORE the Passover! But a unique thing happened at this special meal -- this final meal Jesus would have with His disciples, since He would BE our Passover lamb slain for us the afternoon of Nisan 14, about one and one half days later. Therefore, at this final meal, Jesus gave His disciples instructions for the future.

This was not the actual Passover, which would not be eaten for another 48 hours, but it was the last chance Jesus had to have a fellowship meal with His disciples, before His arrest, trial, and death. It was His last real meal since Jesus would be imprisoned later that very night, and then crucified, dead and in His tomb during the actual Passover. Therefore, He told His disciples, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16)

All the gospel writers, other than Luke, plainly state that the true Passover was not to occur until another two DAYS passed. John plainly says this evening meal was "BEFORE" the Passover. Yet some think Jesus seems to be calling this final meal "this Passover." Why, then, does this ambiguity occur? Why does Jesus refer to "this Passover"?

As we have already seen, He was merely referring to the UPCOMING Passover, not to that meal that very night. In fact, He DID eat that meal with them! And He ate it AFTER He said the words that He would not eat the 'Passover' again until the Kingdom of God comes! Therefore, that is one more proof that that meal was not the Passover, and could not have been. Would He say He would not again eat the Passover, and then go

right ahead and EAT it immediately after He said those words? Such a belief makes Him out to have been a “liar.” He did not “lie,” for that meal simply was not the Passover!

The New Bread and Wine Symbols

What about the special ordinance, then, that Jesus gave to His disciples that evening – the partaking of bread and wine, symbolizing His body and blood? Just what were these symbols?

Notice! We read:

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat: this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom'" (Matt.26:26-29). Mark corroborates this account exactly (Mark 14:22-25).

Luke, however, adds a distinction. Very plainly, in Luke, there are TWO CUPS of wine Notice! "After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' IN THE SAME WAY, AFTER THE SUPPER HE TOOK THE CUP, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you' (Luke 22:17-20).

Why does Luke mention two cups? Was he all mixed up? Of course not! The Scripture cannot be broken, Jesus told us (John 10:35). "Thy Word is TRUTH" (John 17:17).

Luke did not make a mistake. His gospel account is also inspired Scripture (II Tim.3:16). Luke was a very careful and elegant writer, the most learned of the gospel writers. He did not become confused and repeat himself. Rather, he really meant to say that there were TWO distinct cups of wine during that supper that Jesus called special attention to. Luke's gospel account is simply more complete than that of the other apostles on this point. John doesn't mention the bread and wine symbolism at all, whereas Matthew and Mark give very similar accounts. But Luke adds this extraordinary observation that TWO CUPS were actually involved, one simply divided among the Twelve after giving thanks, and the SECOND or LAST cup symbolizing the blood of the covenant!

In this regard, it is interesting to observe that the Jewish Passover seder or meal, which is held on Nisan 15 and lasts for several hours, in remembrance of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt and freedom from bondage, involves the taking of FOUR CUPS

of wine diluted with water during the evening, each cup having special meaning and significance. The first cup is the "cup of sanctification," taken at the beginning of the Passover. At the end of the first part of the meal the "cup of plagues" is taken -- symbolizing the wrath of God upon His enemies, and the plagues poured out on ancient Egypt. The third cup begins the main portion of the Passover, and is the cup of redemption. The final cup, taken toward or at the end of the meal, is the cup of praise. Obviously, the first cup Jesus offered His disciples recorded in Luke at the beginning of the final supper He had with His disciples corresponded to the first cup of wine which was taken at the beginning of a meal. The second cup of wine Luke mentions was the cup symbolizing the blood of the new covenant in His shed blood -- it was the same as the cup of redemption!

However, Jesus never intended to TRANSFER the Passover ceremony and dinner to a different night before the Passover. Rather, He just introduced these new symbolical meanings to the cup of wine and the unleavened bread which had always been observed by the people of God as the "KIDDUSH" ceremony -- that is, the blessing of the bread and wine ceremony! This ceremony goes back to Abraham and Melchizedek, when the high priest brought forth "bread and wine" after Abraham rescued his nephew Lot from captivity (Genesis 14:18).

In essence, Jesus gave NEW MEANINGS to this ancient ceremony, explaining just what the bread wine always truly represented and symbolized -- His body and blood! In no way was He attempting to change God's eternal LAW, or move the Passover celebration to a different night than the Law prescribed! Remember, God's law is ETERNAL, and God CHANGES NOT (Psalms 110:7-8; Mal.3:6).

There is NO HISTORICAL CHURCH DOCUMENT OR RECORD THAT STATES JESUS CHANGED THE PASSOVER FROM NISAN 15 TO NISAN 14! He could not do that, because the Passover was ordained as a festival of God on Nisan 15 for all time!

God Almighty commanded: "THROUGHOUT YOUR GENERATIONS; ye shall keep it a feast BY AN ORDINANCE FOR EVER" (Exo.12:14). The Hebrew word for "forever" is *olam* and means "concealed, the vanishing point, time out of mind" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). It means "eternity, always, forever, eternal, continuous, perpetual, without end."

The Passover was always to be observed along with the other festivals of God only "AT THEIR APPOINTED TIMES," and at *no other time* (Lev.23:4, NIV).

Jesus did not change the time or manner of observing the Passover. He merely changed the MEANING of two elements of the traditional "Kiddush" or "bread and wine ceremony" which the Jews had done, customarily, whenever they held a fellowship banquet or supper. This ceremony was done with regular bread -- *artos* in the Greek language -- the kind of bread Jesus used at the last supper. This was not *azumos* -- that is, unleavened bread. All the gospel accounts use the word ARTOS for this bread,

signifying regular leavened bread! This, once again, PROVES this last supper was NOT the “Passover,” at which leavened bread was forbidden!

This fact puts the final “nail” in the coffin of the so-called “New Testament” Passover being at a different time or celebrated differently than the original Passover!

Paul's Instructions

Paul wrote in I Corinthians, about Jesus’ last supper with His disciples. Paul said that meal was “NOT THE LORD’S SUPPER” (I Cor.11:20). Rather, it was simply the “bread and wine” ceremony, which Jesus instituted as a MEMORIAL of His death and sacrifice!

How do we know this was not the Passover Paul was talking about? First of all, as we have seen, this he said occurred “the night Jesus was BETRAYED” – *NOT ON THE PASSOVER, which was two nights later!* Jesus could not very well have given these new emblems to His disciples at the REAL time of the Passover celebration, on the night of Nisan 15, because Jesus was DEAD AND BURIED at that time.

Therefore, what was this SPECIAL observance He introduced? Let’s let Paul explain it. Notice carefully! Paul explained it thus: "The Lord Jesus, on the NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, AFTER SUPPER he took the cup, saying, 'This cup [not the previous cups] is the new covenant in my blood; do this, *whenever you drink it*], in remembrance of me'" (I Cor.11:23--25).

Notice! Paul said, “WHENEVER YOU DRINK IT”! This ceremony can be held at any time, throughout the year! It is part of a festival or fellowship meal! It can be done at any special celebration. It is often performed at the New Moons, or on Festival feast banquets. It does not necessarily have anything to do with the Passover, except that, like the Passover, it symbolizes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Remember, however, it is done with ARTOS – LEAVENED BREAD! Remember, also, Jesus said that He is the “bread [*artos*] of life” that came down from heaven (John 6:48). Therefore, this ceremony symbolizes Him in a very special way, throughout the year. The expression, “as oft as you drink it,” or “whenever you drink it,” is the very same expression found in Revelation, where we read that the two witnesses of God, during the Great Tribulation, will strike the earth with plagues “as often as they will” (Rev.11:6).

Therefore, in I Corinthians 11, Paul is not even speaking of the “Passover,” and nowhere does he use that word to identify the ceremony he proceeds to describe!

Let’s understand this, and get it straight!

Paul did not say here that Jesus changed the Passover from the night of the 15th of Nisan to the 14th. That would be absurd! God's laws are eternal, and the date of the Passover has NEVER been changed from Nisan 15! Rather, Paul simply pointed out the

obvious fact that it was the night Jesus was actually BETRAYED that He gave these new symbols of the bread and wine ceremony which we are to use THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, whenever we celebrate fellowship meals, *REMEMBERING HIM as we do so!* This was in essence a new interpretation and meaning placed on an ancient custom dating back to at least Abraham's time

Paul went on, "For *whenever* you eat this bread and drink this cup, you PROCLAIM the Lord's death until he comes" (verse 26). In other words, at each observance of the "Kiddush," when we participate in the wine and bread ceremony, we remember and proclaim that we accept and honor and cherish the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins, and accept and worship Him as our Saviour, Redeemer, Messiah and coming King!

Let's Celebrate the TRUE Passover!!

Let's understand thiis! The true Passover celebration is NOT a celebration of the DEATH of the Son of God -- not at all! We are saddened that our Saviour had to DIE to pay the penalty of our sins. But we REJOICE in His gift of salvation and deliverance from the power of sin, which this annual occasion represents for us! Even as ancient Israel rejoiced at Passover for their delivberancce from the clutches of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, so we rejoice in our deliverance from the grasp of Satan and this evil world and its power!

The night many say they observe as a "New Testament Passover" is not only nothing of the kind, what they think they are observing is really the "night of betrayal" of the Son of God! Now who would really want to celebrate that? The one who would celerate that grisly, horrible event is none other than Satan the devil, the prince of darkness. That was his supreme hour, his greatest conquest, his most notable victory in the history of the world! Only SATAN would proclaim a "holy celebration" on the night of the BETRAYAL of the Son of GOD!

Yes, only SATAN would celebrate the terrible "Night of Betrayal," the supposed evening when Satan entered into Judas Iscariot and led him to treacherously betray and turn traitor to the Son of God! That evening was "Satan's night" -- certainly NOT a night that true Christians and believers in the Messiah would want to celebrate or honor!

The true Passover was never changed. It has always been observed on Nisan 15, the evening after the Passover lambs were slain in ancient Israel. It was never intended to be a commemoration of the DEATH of the sacrificial lambs in Old Testament times. Rather, it was a celebration of LIBERTY AND DELIVERANCE from Egypt, which symbolizes the power of sin and Satan's world (Exo.12:12-14). The ancient "Passover" was celebrated the night God actually "PASSED OVER" the Israelites and did them no harm, but destroyed their enemies, the gods of Egypt, and the firstborn of all the Egyptians.

Likewise, the true New Testament Passover is celebrated at the VERY SAME

TIME as the original Old Testament Passover. It celebrates our VICTORY OVER SIN through the shed blood of Christ! We do not celebrate the DEATH of God's Passover Lamb as such, but realize that it took the DEATH of His Son for our sins to be forgiven! WE thank God in awe that He was willing to pay such a price for redeeming us, and we thank Christ that He was willing to give up His life for us. But we do not celebrate the death of the lamb itself, any more than the Israelites celebrated at the killing of poor innocent lambs.

It is the DELIVERANCE WROUGHT, the TRIUMPH over our enemies, including our own flesh, Satan and his demons, and the world around us, that we celebrate, through the shed blood of Christ, and His indwelling Spirit power that He gives to us for accepting His shed blood and broken body in our behalf! Through Jesus Christ we can be OVERCOMERS -- we can TRIUMPH over all our enemies, and inherit the Kingdom of God!

Strangely, in a bizarre and mysterious fashion, those who observe what they call the "Passover" in the beginning of Nisan 14, BEFORE the actual slaying of the lamb occurred the following afternoon, are actually celebrating a Roman Catholic, Babylonish type of mystery-religion. The little tiny piece of "unleavened bread" they partake of is reminiscent of the Roman Catholic MASS, which stems directly from Babylonian Paganism!

This strange ritual, when hundreds and thousands of people gather together somberly, without laughter or rejoicing, and partake only of a piece of unleavened bread and a tiny thimble of wine, has NOTHING WHATEVER REMOTELY to do with the true PASSOVER, which was a FULL COURSE DINNER CELEBRATION OF GREAT JOY for the entire family, or several families together! (Exo.12:3-4). It was a time for careful rehearing of the History of Israel and God's redemption and providence for the benefit of the children (Exo.13:14-15; 12:26-27). It was intended to be a joyous FAMILY AFFAIR!

WHY then do modern churches, such as Worldwide Church of God, Church of God International, and others, PROHIBIT CHILDREN from the "Passover"? Thus they drive one more wedge between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. Instead of reconciling families, they drive them apart (see Malachi 4:5-6).

The true Passover of God is not a solemn, mysterious "mass," but a JOYOUS FAMILY CELEBRATION OF LIFE, FREEDOM, JOY AND LIBERTY THROUGH CHRIST!

The Death of Christ

Do you see the difference? That is why we do NOT celebrate the Passover at the 3:00 PM time when Jesus actually expired on the stake or tree. That horrible death needs no celebration or commemoration. We do not rejoice that God had to die. That Christ had to die was a horrible reality, necessitated by our sins. He was nailed to that stake for

us. He do not rejoice in that horrifying event.

We do rejoice, however, in the wonderful deliverance wrought through the death of the Son of God in payment for our sins. As Paul wrote, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor.5:21).

Paul expressed it this way: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be SAVED BY HIS LIFE" (Rom.5:6-10).

The truth is, God never commanded the Passover to be observed on Nisan 14, whether in the beginning portion as night fell, or whether in the afternoon, around 3:00 PM, when the Messiah died. Those events were simply preparatory for the true Passover celebration, which has always been celebrated and is to be celebrated during the NIGHT of Nisan 15! The Passover is, therefore, "*a night to be much observed* unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is THAT NIGHT OF THE LORD TO BE OBSERVED of all the children of Israel in their generations" (Exodus 12:42).

God commands us: "And this day" -- PASSOVER -- "shall be unto you for a memorial: and ye shall keep it a FEAST TO THE LORD throughout your generations; ye shall KEEP IT A FEAST BY AN ORDINANCE FOR EVER" (Exodus 12:14).

May God bless you as you observe His one and only *true* Passover!

Chapter 6

Do You Observe a *PAGAN* PASSOVER?

Was the Passover ever meant to be a "memorial" of the DEATH of Christ, as many churches claim which observe it on the evening beginning Nisan 14? Or is observing the DEATH of a Saviour hanging on a cross a PAGAN custom dating back to time immemorial -- to the pagan customs introduced by Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz?

Here is new truth with a cutting edge that will cut through the "smoke and mirrors" of modern religious confusion! Here is powerful new truth that will explode like dynamite the false, neo-pagan customs observed by many who are deceived and never understood the profound significance of their practices!

A Pagan Counterfeit

On Thursday, Nisan 14, in 30 A.D., Jesus Christ of Nazareth was nailed to an upright stake or tree outside the bounds of ancient Jerusalem on an outcropping of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the eastern Temple entrance. As He was affixed to this "accursed tree" with its wooden cross-beam, Jesus endured the agony, pain, and suffering that the human mind can imagine -- searing pain, numbing achiness, dizziness, cramps, traumatic fever, shame and obloquy, throbbing wounds and lacerated veins. Every movement was sheer agony. His arteries and veins became swollen with surcharged blood. From nine in the morning until three in the afternoon, He suffered, bled and finally died the most horrible form of death known to man -- crucifixion. He died, giving His life for your sins and mine and for the sins of every man, woman and child who has lived or ever will live.

Think about it. Re-enact this most heinous of all murders in the mental imagery of your mind. This was no doubt the moment, ironically, of Satan's greatest triumph -- he had succeeded in getting the "Son of God" killed, murdered, in a frenzy of hatred and loathing. The Saviour of the world was nailed to the cross. The Redeemer of mankind hung there, dead, having suffered the utmost agony and indescribable pain, shame, and ignominy.

And many confused people believe we are to celebrate this event by participating in a special "mass" type ceremony! What is the truth?

The Lamb of God

The "Lamb of God" had been slain for the sins of the world! The apostle Paul wrote as a consequence of this event, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. . ." (I Cor.5:7). Just as the Jews sacrificed their Passover lambs every year on the afternoon of Nisan 14, so Jesus Christ died for our sins at that very same time. Paul went on, "Therefore let us KEEP THE FESTIVAL, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor.5:7-8).

What is Paul saying here?

In ancient Israel, the "feast of the Passover" began with the slaying of the Passover lamb, which then was bled, skinned, and roasted whole. God told Israel to take care of the lambs until the 14th day of Nisan, "when all the people of the community must slaughter them at twilight [the ending of the 14th, before sunset]" (Ex.12:6). The original Hebrew for "twilight" was literally "between the two evenings," and meant generally the period of time between noon and sunset, or the time during which the sun was "going down" in the sky. Sunset marked the beginning of a new day, Nisan 15.

God went on, "That same night" -- or what would have been Nisan 15, therefore - - "they are to EAT the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. . . . Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover" (v.8-11). "On that SAME NIGHT" -- Nisan 15 -- "I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn -- both men and animals -- and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a SIGN for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will PASS OVER you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (Ex.12:12-13).

God goes on, "This is a day you are to COMMEMORATE [the day of Nisan 15, when the Passover was eaten, and the children of Israel were "passed over" and spared the destruction that came upon the Egyptians!]; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it AS A FESTIVAL to the LORD -- a lasting [or everlasting] ordinance" (Ex.12:14). "For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast" (v.15).

This awesome day of celebration was Nisan 15, the first Holy Day of the Feast called Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread. It celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the sparing of Israel and the slaughter God wreaked upon their enemies, the paganized Egyptians. It was a celebration of immense joy and incredible, miraculous Triumph. It proclaimed freedom, liberty, rescue from slavery and bondage, and deliverance!

Later, God told the Israelites, "On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' This observance will be for you like a SIGN on your hand and a REMINDER on your forehead that the LAW of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year" (Ex.13:8-10).

The Passover -- a Joyous Celebration!

This great festival of the Passover, eaten on Nisan 15, with great joy and anticipation, was to be "a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand"(Ex.13:16). Notice that this actual celebration occurred on Nisan 15, and symbolized the DELIVERANCE which God wrought! It was a positive, uplifting, emotional celebration of tremendous excitement and joy. There was nothing negative about it. The children of Israel did NOT celebrate the slaughtering of the lambs, or their being killed, in Nisan 14, in any manner, shape or form. But they DID celebrate their own being SPARED and "passed over" at midnight from the slaying hand of the LORD who struck down all those houses where there was no "blood" of the lamb on their doorposts or lintels.

"At midnight the LORD" -- notice, this was God Himself who executed this judgment, not, as many believe, merely a "death angel" or "angel of the Lord" at all -- "At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead" (Ex.12:29-30).

The whole celebration and memorial of the Passover revolved around the EATING of the lamb, and being Passed Over and delivered from Egypt, a type of SIN. The Jews were never commanded, and never observed, any "memorial" of the DEATH or slaughtering of the lamb itself. They never celebrated the "death" of the lamb -- which was a type of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Rather, they celebrated the VICTORY God gave them over their enemies, the Egyptians, a type of SIN, from whom they were SET FREE by the blood of the Lamb, and the EATING of the Lamb!

The shed blood of the Passover lambs actually symbolized the shed blood of Jesus the Messiah who gave His life for our sins; the eating of the lambs symbolized the EATING of the Messiah, or His body given for our sins, and accepting of His sacrifice -- as well as the "eating" of His "flesh," which meant the devouring of His Words and acceptance of His message! As Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. I This bread is MY FLESH, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:35, 51). Jesus said, "So the one who feeds on me will live because of me (v.57). He did not mean His literal flesh of course; He was speaking spiritually. He explained,

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The WORDS I have spoken to you are SPIRIT and they are LIFE" (v.63).

In other words, the PASSOVER CELEBRATION, which is to be observed and always has been observed, on Nisan 15, the very NIGHT God freed His people from Egyptian bondage and slavery, and DELIVERED them from the power of Egypt ("sin"), is the very same celebration CHRISTIANS are to observe, in the very same manner, in celebration of CHRIST delivering US from bondage to SIN, and bringing us SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE! It is a time of reviewing the whole plan of God, from start to finish, and ends up with our LOOKING FORWARD to the return of Christ our Deliverer to bring the Kingdom of God, and to finish His task of complete DELIVERANCE from this evil world of Satan's dominion (Rev.12:9; II Cor.4:4; Eph.2:2).

The True Passover

The true Passover -- celebrated always on Nisan 15 -- points directly and completely to JESUS CHRIST, coming as our Saviour and Redeemer and KING of kings and LORD of lords, bringing us COMPLETE DELIVERANCE and ETERNAL SALVATION! It is a time of awesome joy and fulfillment. It points NOT to just a "dead Christ," hanging on a cross, suffering obloquy and shame -- it points to the LIVING CHRIST, WHO SAVES US from sin and the power and clutches of sin and the corruption of the flesh! The entire focus of this Holy Day of God is POSITIVE -- *not negative!*

However, Satan the devil is the great perverter of all truth. And Satan has also perverted and polluted this awesome truth of the Passover, and turned it into a time of negativism, somberness, sorrow, grief, shame, reproach, self-loathing, contempt, and mourning.

Notice how subtly he has done this. The whole emphasis of the Passover is, according to the Scriptures, the EATING of a Feast, especially the lamb, and the commemoration of DELIVERANCE and FREEDOM. Nowhere in the Scriptures will you ever find any commemoration or memorializing of DEAD people, things or artifacts. This is a PAGAN custom! Pagans memorialize birthdays (ie, "Christmas" which is the "mass of Christ," and dates back to the PAGAN custom of observing the winter solstice and the "birth" of the new "sun god" -- observed by the Romans as the "Saturnalia"), death days (ie., "Good Friday," the day the Catholics claim Jesus died -- why they would call that "good" is a subtle indication of the devil's trickery, confusing people into celebrating a day God NEVER commanded to be celebrated!).

The Passover celebration was not and was never intended to be a "memorial" of the DEATH of Christ (any more than the Israelites ever "memorialized" the death of the Passover lambs slaughtered on Nisan 14!). Notice! The apostle Paul explained: "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he

was betrayed [the evening PRIOR to the Passover!], took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he too, the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you EAT this bread and drink this cup, YOU PROCLAIM the Lord's death UNTIL HE COMES" (I Cor.11:23-26).

The Meaning of the Kiddush

Notice! This event, called a *Kiddush* or "Blessing" in Hebrew, refers to the bread and wine Jesus told His disciples to take "in remembrance" of His broken body and shed blood. This final ceremony Jesus held with His disciples before He died on the stake as our Passover Lamb the very next day was not itself the *Passover*. It was a special "bread and wine" ceremony to be partaken of throughout the year, when brethren get together.

However, this ceremony should not be confused with the Passover itself!

Of course, as we eat the Passover bread, during the Passover meal on Nisan 15, the broken bread REMINDS us of the body of Christ, our Passover Lamb, beaten, pierced and slain for us; and the wine REMINDS us of his shed blood, given for our sins. This should be literally true, every Passover, every year -- for the EATING of the bread and DRINKING of the wine occurs on Nisan 15, just AFTER the afternoon of Nisan 14, when the Passover was actually SLAIN! The time sequence is perfect; just as we should expect.

We do not celebrate, however, the DEATH of Christ -- that was indeed the most horrible thing that ever had to happen, an appalling and totally unjust thing. He literally became SIN FOR US -- a SIN OFFERING. And as such, God the Father actually had to turn His back on His beloved Son, and let Him die an agonizing death on the stake or tree. We don't rejoice in the DEATH of Christ, but rather in what that death ACCOMPLISHES FOR US -- the DELIVERANCE FROM SIN that He made possible, and makes possible since He now sits at God's right hand, to evermore intercede for us (Heb.7:24-27).

The Passover therefore is a MEMORIAL OF DELIVERANCE from sin -- not of the horrible death that Christ suffered. We celebrate DELIVERANCE, just as the ancient Israelites did, and every Jew does today, when they partake of the Passover.

However, the Passover, like the *Kiddush*, also is an occasion where we "PROCLAIM the Lord's death TILL HE COMES" (I Cor.11:26). This is the part of the Passover that those who attempt to observe it on Nisan 14, prior to the true Passover, fail to perceive and observe at all. The word "proclaim" in the Greek is *kataggello* and means, literally, "declare, promulgate, preach, speak of, teach." This is not a word that connotes "memorialize" at all, but rather "PROCLAIM, PREACH, TEACH" the truth about the significance of Christ's death and how it delivers us from SIN and the power

of Satan -- which is the **WHOLE SPIRITUAL MEANING** of the Passover celebration on Nisan 15!

That very evening we are to **TEACH** our family, and children the real meaning of our **DELIVERANCE** from Satan's control, and sin, through Christ, as we rehearse and teach the whole lesson of the Passover in ancient Egypt, at its foundation, and the plagues upon Egypt, following up with the lesson of Christ our Passover, and continuing the saga through the **SECOND COMING** of Christ, when He will complete the **DELIVERANCE** He has made possible and brought to mankind!

Therefore, Paul said, we "proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (II Cor.11:26) -- that is, the story of Christ's death, resurrection, what it means to us, His ascension into heaven, and the final judgment He will bring on the world in the Great Tribulation, the "Day of the Lord," and the prophecies leading up to **HIS SECOND COMING!**

Christ died for us in the afternoon of Nisan 14, in 30 A.D. And that very evening, Nisan 15, is the annual celebration of the **PASSOVER SEDER**, or dinner and story-telling, explaining how just as God passed over the firstborn of Israel in ancient Egypt, protecting them from death, so God "passes over" our sins when He sees the "blood of Christ" covering them, and forgives us, and blots out our transgressions of His Law -- enabling us to receive **FINAL SALVATION** when Christ returns to execute judgment on the wicked, to deliver the righteous, and to usher in everlasting righteousness and the Kingdom of God!

Daniel's Amazing Prophecy

As Daniel wrote, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy" (Dan.9:24). This prophecy of the Messiah or Saviour deals with **TWO ADVENTS** -- the time He came to pay the penalty for our sins and the time He comes again to usher in the Kingdom of God and everlasting righteousness!

Daniel was told that from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem -- issued later by Persian king Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. -- till the coming of Messiah would be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens" -- or 69 "sevens" or "weeks." A day being a year in fulfillment (Num.14:34; Ezek.4:4-6), 69 weeks of 7 days each was 483 days or *years* in actual fulfillment. From 457 B.C. till the coming of the Messiah would be 483 years. Thus Christ actually began His ministry in 27 A.D. -- exactly 483 years after the decree!

The "final week" or "seven" years of this prophecy **REMAIN TO BE FULFILLED!** They will involve the final suffering on this world, its judgments, the abomination of desolation, the destruction of Jerusalem, the Great Tribulation, and the punishments of God during the "Day of the Lord" (Dan.9:26-27). This final "week" will usher in the **SECOND COMING** of Messiah, when "The kingdom of this world

has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. . . . The nation were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great -- and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev.11:15-18).

True Christians, who partake of the Passover, have their eyes on the future -- the future when this present world under the cloud of illusion and deceptive sway of Satan the devil (Rev.12:9) will be abolished and replaced by the joyous, exuberant, scintillating, dazzling Kingdom of God! We look forward, in the Passover, to the time when Christ will replace all the pagan traditions, customs, and ideas of this world, with its false Christmas, fraudulent "Easter," phony "Good Friday," and fake "Nisan 14 Passover" which God never commanded and Christ never sanctioned -- all which have their roots buried in PAGANISM -- with the TRUTH of God, and the true Holy Days of GOD!

Beware of Pagan Traditions

The eyes of true Christians, when they celebrate Passover, are not on a dead "Saviour" hanging on a cross, which is a carry-over of the PAGAN tradition of a dead "Tammuz" who was crucified, or a dead Nimrod, or a dead "Saturn," the pagan "saviour" of the world -- the apostate saviour of the Babylonian Mystery religion. God says He will not even listen to the prayers of people -- even "Christians" -- who insist on learning, believing and practicing HEATHEN, pagan concepts and ways.

"Thus saith the LORD, 'Learn not the way of the heathen . . . For the customs of the people are VAIN" (Jer.10:2-3). The Jewish Tanakh has, "Do not learn to go the way of the nations . . . For the laws of the nations are DELUSIONS." The Moffat translation has, "Never learn to live like PAGANS . . . but their rites are inane." The Amplified Bible says: "Learn not the way of the heathen (nations) . . . For the customs and ordinances of the peoples are FALSE, EMPTY and FUTILE."

The particular custom of the pagans, in the spring of every year, was to weep and lament the slaying and death of Tammuz, the pagan false saviour. In Ezekiel 8:14, the prophet says, "Then he brought me to the entrance to the north gate of the house of the LORD, and I saw women sitting there, MOURNING FOR TAMMUZ." The KJV says they were "weeping for Tammuz." God called this custom "greater abominations," or "things that are even more detestable" (verse 13).

In the Tanakh we read, "And He said to me, 'You shall see even more terrible abominations which they practice.' Next He brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the House of the LORD; and there sat the women BEWAILING TAMMUZ."

Tammuz-Osiris-Adonis-Saturn-NIMROD!

Who was this Tammuz? *The New Bible Dictionary* says, "This mourning for the god Tammuz took place on the second day of the fourth month (June-July), which was named after this event. It commemorated the legendary DEATH of the Sumerian deity Dumu-zi ('true son'), the prediluvian shepherd and husband of Ishtar [Easter]. On his death, Ishtar mourned and called on all to do so . . . [The cult] seems to have become popular, however, in Syria and Phoenicia, where a similar legend is told of Adonis and Aphrodite. A reference to the planting of gardens to these deities is possibly given in Isaiah 17:10. The temple of Aphrodite in Gebal, Syria, was a principal centre of this cult, also known in Egypt, where Adonis was identified with Osiris" ("Tammuz," p.1238).

Tammuz was "originally the sun-god, primarily a god of Babylonia, slain by a wild boar while hunting, and mourned long and vainly by the goddess Ishtar. He is generally identified with Adonis, of Greek mythology, whose story is practically the same. According to Sayce, the Canaanites called him 'Adonai' lord, from which when the myth reached Greece came the name Adonis" (*Pelubet's Bible Dictionary*, p.667).

"Tammuz was an ancient Akkadian deity whose worship spread throughout the Semitic world. He was the husband and brother of Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of procreation. . . . The Greek counterpart of Tammuz was Adonis and the Egyptian, Osiris. Tammuz cults are thought to be referred to in Jer.22:19; Amos 8:10; Zech.12:10 . . .

"Tammuz worship was connected with licentious festivals. In Babylon the cult included the annual marriage of the king to the fertility goddess in the form of a priestess. This symbolized the regeneration of nature. The Tammuz-Ishtar cult was degrading and thoroughly inconsonant with the chaste worship of Yahweh" (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p.1070).

"Tammuz was worshiped throughout Babylonia, and in Assyria, Phoenicia, and Palestine . . . He was the husband of the goddess Inanna, queen of heaven, goddess of love and war, known by the Semites as Ishtar. He was god of the pasture, the patron of flocks and their keepers, and hence was himself entitled shepherd. HE WAS REPRESENTED AS DYING ANNUALLY, BUT RETURNING TO LIFE. . . . Jerome says that the Syrians celebrated an annual solemnity to Adonis in June, when he was LAMENTED by the women as dead, and afterward his coming to life again was celebrated with songs" (*New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, p.925).

According to this authority, the annual feast of Tammuz was held in the temple of Aphrodite (Ishtar, Easter or Semiramis). It lasted seven days, beginning with a commemoration of the disappearance of the god. There followed a search for the missing god by the women. When his image was found in one of the gardens, a celebration followed with lewdness and songs. The image was then confined, the wound made by the boar which legend says slew him was shown on his body. "The people sat on the ground around the bier with their clothes rent, and the women raised loud lamentation" (*ibid.*).

Tammuz, known as Adonis, was the paramour of Venus. At Byblos, the Syrian

women wept for him, and in wild grief tore their hair, "and yielded their persons to prostitution, consecrating the hire of their infamy to Venus; next followed days of rejoicing for his return to the earth . . ." (*Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary*, vol.II, p.227).

Says the *Adam Clarke Commentary*,

"He is fabled to have been a beautiful youth beloved by Venus, and killed by a wild boar in Lebanon. . . The women of Phoenicia, Assyria, and Judea worshipped him as dead, with deep lamentation, wearing priapi [images of male sex organs] and other obscene images all the while, and they prostituted themselves in honor of this idol. Having for some time mourned him as dead, they then supposed him revived, and broke out into the most extravagant rejoicings" (vol.I, p.444).

Nimrod -- the Mighty Rebel

This slain pagan sun-god was none other than Nimrod, who steered the world into rebellion against the laws of God after the Flood, and established the first world "kingdom," over which he ruled as the first tyrant (Gen.10:8-12). He was a "mighty hunter," and promised the people protection by herding them into cities, which he then formed into a "kingdom," which he ruled with despotic authority. He was eventually slain, at the behest of Shem, the son of Noah, and his body carved up into pieces to show the people the fate of those who plunged into idolatry. But the people, at the behest of his wife Semiramis, bewailed his death each year in the "Babylonian mysteries," and worshiped him as the "sun-god," or Baal (the Phoenician or Hebrew word means "Lord"). The mourning for Tammuz, then, was the annual wailing for this wicked priest-king of Babylon who led the world into rebellion!

Tammuz, or Nimrod, was also known as Bacchus, that is, "The Lamented One" (see Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p.21). He was the "husband" of Semiramis, but is also represented as her son. After the death of Nimrod, Semiramis had an illegitimate son (she was "Venus," remember, a paragon of unbridled lust and licentiousness!), whom she also foisted upon the world as the "son of God," or the reincarnation of her husband come back to life!

The Lamented Death of Nimrod

Since Tammuz or Nimrod was also known as the Egyptian god Osiris, Egyptian legends tell us Osiris met with a violent death, around which the whole idolatry of Egypt turned. Hislop writes:

"The death of the great ringleader of the apostasy was not the death of a warrior slain in battle, but an act of judicial rigour, solemnly inflicted. This is well established by the accounts of the deaths of both Tammuz and Osiris. The following is the account of Tammuz, given by the celebrated Maimoides, deeply read in all the learning of the Chaldeans: 'When the false prophet Thammuz preached to a certain king that he should worship the seven stars and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, that king ordered him to be put

to a terrible death. On the night of his death all the images assembled from the ends of the earth into the temple of Babylon, to the great golden image of the Sun, which was suspended between heaven and earth. That image prostrated itself in the midst of the temple, and so did all the images around it, while it related to them all that had happened to Thammuz. The images wept and lamented all the night long, and then in the morning they flew away, each to his own temple again, to the ends of the earth. And hence arose the custom every year, on the first day of the month Thammuz, to mourn and to weep for Thammuz" (*The Two Babylons*, p.62).

Egyptian mythology shows that their god Osiris, or Nimrod, was slain not by open violence or in battle, but through a "conspiracy" by one whom they called "Sem" - - most likely the patriarch Shem, the son of Noah, who undoubtedly was still alive at that time -- who entered into an agreement with 72 of the leaders of Egypt to capture him, put him to death, and then cut his dead body into pieces which were sent throughout the country (p.63). Seventy two was the number of judges, both sacred and civil, in Egypt required to determine the punishment of one guilty of so high a crime as that charged to Osiris. Naturally, among the apostates this act of summary vengeance and execution was abhorrent and grossly evil. They mourned the death of their "god," and referred to the chief architect of his demise as "Typho," or "The Evil One."

Legends have Tammuz slain by the tusk of a wild boar. The tusk, a "horn in the mouth," symbolized the power of the mouth, or the power of persuasion, the very power with which "Sem," the primitive Hercules was endowed. Wilkinson notes that Typo was also called "Seth." Both "Seth" and "Shem" are synonymous and mean "the appointed one." The name "Shem" also means "to desolate, or lay waste," which is exactly what this son of Noah did to Nimrod!

Shem was the son of Noah whom God blessed (Gen.10:26). He was adamantly opposed to the worship of the starry host of the heavens and idolatry. As the son of Noah, he was a great patriarch and leader. He was the ancient Egyptian Hercules who fought against the Giants (Nimrod and his fellow tyrants) "by the power of the gods" (ie. by the Spirit of God). Shem and the Egyptian Sem were one and the same. The Celtic Hercules, called Hercules Ogmius, in Chaldee is "Hercules the Lamentor." The appellation fits Shem perfectly, for he it was who saw the vast apostasy that occurred after the Flood during his day, and having personally experienced the catastrophe of the Flood, this apostasy no doubt grieved him to his very soul. He lived 502 years after the Flood, with no less than seven generations of his lineal descendants dying before him (Gen.11:10-32).

The apostasy spread like wildfire, with a fury that must have grieved and devastated Shem.

The Paganization of Christianity

Says Hislop, "It was an essential principle of the Babylonian system, that the Sun or Baal was the one only God. When, therefore, Tammuz was worshipped as God incarnate, that implied that he was an incarnation of the Sun" (p.96). Connected with

his worship was a pagan "Lent" of forty days. Hislop adds,

"Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz, which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing . . . being observed in Palestine and Assyria in June, therefore called the 'month of Tammuz;' in Egypt, about the middle of May, and in Britain, some time in April. *To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated*, and, by a complicated but skilful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity -- now *far sunk in idolatry* -- in this as in so many other things, to *shake hands*" (*ibid.*, p.105).

The "sign" of the pagan Tammuz was the sign of the "cross." Says Hislop, "That which is now called the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and Egyptians -- the true original form of the letter T -- the initial of the name of Tammuz . . ." (p.197).

The name Tammuz was equivalent to "god of fire," and was derived from *tam*, "to make perfect," and *muz*, "fire," signifying "fire the perfecter" or "the perfecting fire." As Nimrod was the first "king" or tyrant ("melek" or "molech") after the Flood, it was in honor to him, also known as Tammuz, that the "children were made to pass through the fire to Molech" (II Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35). Those who performed this cruel and horrendous child sacrifice no doubt believed that the "fire" purified their children even as it consumed their flesh. Similarly, Hindu women would burn or immolate themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands in a rite known as *Suttee* -- that is, "pure by burning."

Considering how enormously pagan the custom is of memorializing the DEATH of the pagan saviour Tammuz, by weeping for Tammuz or Nimrod, every spring, when the pagans mentally re-lived the execution of their saviour, and considered it the most horrendous murder of all history, should we even begin to consider that God wants us to WEEP, and follow a similar custom in connection with the death of Christ on the stake or tree?

Nowhere is such a custom sanctioned in the Bible. Nowhere does God command us or encourage us to observe a custom memorializing or commemorating the DEATH of Christ on the tree. Some claim this is precisely what they do when they observe what they ignorantly call the "Passover" at the beginning of Nisan 14, the night Jesus held His "last supper" with His disciples. That "last supper," however, had NO LAMB served. It was NOT the "Passover." The apostle John very plainly declares, "Now *BEFORE the feast of the passover*, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And SUPPER BEING ENDED . . . he riseth from supper . . ." (John 13:1-4). Notice! The supper itself -- a regular meal -- was OVER. Yet, John says, Passover HAD NOT YET ARRIVED! In fact, it would not arrive UNTIL THE FOLLOWING NIGHT (see John 18:28; 19:14).

Rather, we are commanded to observe the PASSOVER on the 15th of Nisan which celebrates our DELIVERANCE FROM SIN! Although the emblems of the Passover are to remind us of the suffering and the death of our Saviour, and the price He paid for us, Passover is a VICTORY CELEBRATION of the "deliverance" and "salvation" we receive through Christ -- not a celebration of His death itself! There is a distinct and clear difference between the two concepts. The godly approach emphasizes LIFE; the negative, sorrowful, pagan approach emphasizes DEATH! It celebrates the death of the pagan god Tammuz, Gilgamesh, or also known as Nimrod, the arch-rebel against the true God!

Neo-Pagan "Christian" Customs

However, every spring Roman Catholics, as part of their celebration of Lent, Good Friday and Easter, vividly attempt to virtually re-live the sufferings of Christ. In the Philippines, men even nail themselves to crosses, in imitation, they think, of the sufferings of Christ. Every Sunday, or even on any day of the week, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates its "mass" -- when Catholics commemorate the death of Christ by participating in the "mass." The priests claim that the wafer and wine literally are transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ.

In the Catholic Church, just above the communion rail hanging over the altar is a large crucifix with a dead figure attached. Catholics all assume that the dead figure is or represents the true Christ. However, this is not so. Usually, on every crucifix there is a name-plate. On this name-plate are the large Roman letters I H S. The "I" stands for Isis, the Egyptian goddess, or "Ishtar" ("Astarte" or "Easter"), the pagan harlot-queen Semiramis, wife and mother of Nimrod. The "H" stands for "Horus," another name for the Egyptian "Tammuz" or "son of god," the resurrected or revived "Nimrod," made "pure." And the "S" stands for "Saturn" -- the Roman name for "The Hidden One," Saturn, who was Nimrod, and who fled to Saturnia, the ancient name of Rome, trying to escape from the avenging wrath of Shem.

Thus the Catholic Church, the Mother of Harlots, "Babylon the Great" (Rev.17:3-4), memorializes the death of the PAGAN savior, Nimrod or Saturn, in every mass, every day, every week, and every year! The weekly and daily custom refers to the mass. The yearly custom involves the "weeping for Tammuz," or Nimrod, the false saviour, every spring, bewailing and lamenting his "death."

For true Christians to observe a solemn, sober, austere night in which they think only on the DEATH of Christ, and partake of a tiny piece of unleavened wafer, and a thimble-sized portion of wine, letting their minds DWELL upon the suffering and misery and horrendous death of Christ, seems awful close to the "weeping for Tammuz" which ALMIGHTY GOD CONDEMNS as a *detestable abomination* in Ezekiel!

Therefore, I must ask, in all sincerity -- is there any place in the Bible, from

Genesis to Revelation, where God asks us to COMMEMORATE or MEMORIALIZE the *death* of Jesus Christ on the stake or tree?

The answer must be a thunderous *NO!* RATHER, we are to observe the Passover, on Nisan 15, as it has ALWAYS been observed, which proclaims (preaches and promulgates) the LIBERTY and SALVATION we receive through the death of Christ in our stead, as our Ransom, He who gave His life that we might LIVE!

The Passover -- Past, Present and Future

Salvation was NOT "completed" long ago, on the cross of Calvary. Not at all! It was merely BEGUN there! The Feast of the Passover makes this plain. It was not ever held on Nisan 14, the day the lambs were slain. It was celebrated the NIGHT of Nisan 15 -- the following Hebrew day -- commemorating deliverance and salvation from Egypt, and from SIN and the power of Satan!

God does not want us to commemorate, therefore, the death of His Son. The Scriptures state: "Cursed is everyone that is hung on a tree" (Gal.3:13). When Christ was hanging on that tree, He had become a "curse." He became SIN for us -- our SIN offering. Therefore, God the Father turned His back on His own Son, to allow Him to DIE for our terrible and many SINS. Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to be SIN FOR US, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor.5:21). Nevertheless, His death is not the end of the matter. Rather, "Much more then, being justified by his blood, we SHALL be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the DEATH of his Son, much more, being reconciled, *we shall be SAVED BY HIS LIFE*" (Rom.5:9-10).

Therefore, what we are to commemorate is our VICTORY and TRIUMPH over sin, which was made possible only through the DEATH of Christ! We must never forget that fact. We "remember" His death every time we partake of the *Kiddush*, and every night of Nisan 15, when we celebrate the Passover, just as God commanded, over three thousand years ago!

Those who celebrate a day they "call" Passover, at the beginning of Nisan 14, have *no Scriptural authority for doing so*. They may call it "Passover," and mourn and lament, similar to the pagans mourning for Tammuz. But that observance is NOT "the Passover." It is a wholly NEW invention of MEN who are trying to circumvent the plain and Scriptural commandment to observe the PASSOVER, FOR EVER, in every generation!

Let's face facts. Those who observe a Nisan 14 ritual similar to a Catholic "mass" *are not really observing the Passover of God's Word!* They don't do it! They celebrate a ritual "added to" God's commands, on a different day, and in a different manner, which God never commanded -- and they do it in a manner similar to and reminiscent of that ancient PAGAN practice which Almighty God specifically prohibits and condemns as an ABOMINATION in His eyes -- the practice and annual

observance of "weeping for Tammuz" or Nimrod!

Can we scarcely comprehend how diabolical and Satanic such a custom is? Can we not FEAR to do anything even remotely similar to PAGANISM? Can we not see clearly that the somber, sad, melancholy and mournful celebration of the "death" of Christ is a PAGAN PRACTICE BORROWED FROM PAGANISM! Such a practice has no place whatsoever in the Church of the Living God!

Let's not compromise one iota or even one hair-s breadth with paganism!

God's Severest Warning

Does Almighty God say it is all right for us to worship Him like the pagans do their idols and false gods? Is it all right to partake of the "Passover" in a wrong, unScriptural manner, and to top that off, on the WRONG DAY, and for the WRONG REASONS?

The apostle Paul warned, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER will be GUILTY of SINNING against the body and blood of the Lord" (I Cor.11:27).

The practice of assembling together, as a group, to partake of a tiny wafer or piece of unleavened bread, and a tiny thimble-sized vial of wine, smacks completely of the Roman Catholic MASS and is a Protestant variation thereof! Just because the Worldwide Church of God and Church of God, International, do this once a year instead of every Sunday, it is still PAGAN IN ORIGIN and is most definitely NOT the true Passover celebration, a festival of JOY, including the eating of a joyous and abundant MEAL, and celebrating deliverance and freedom from SIN!

How did Churches get so mixed up?

God does not want His people to compromise with even the tiniest bit of PAGANISM! God called His people OUT of Egypt! He doesn't want His people to go back into Egyptian customs, such as a modern version of "weeping for Tammuz" or "Osiris"! God Almighty thunders,

"Do not defile yourselves in any of these [pagan] ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land VOMITED OUT its inhabitants. But you must keep MY decrees and MY laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do ANY of these DETESTABLE things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you [pagan worship practices], and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does ANY of these detestable things -- such persons must be CUT OFF from their people. KEEP MY CUSTOMS that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God" (Lev.18:24-30).

God says further,

"Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. **YOU MUST NOT WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD IN THEIR WAY**" (Deut.12:3-4).

God adds, ". . . be careful not to be **ENSNARED** by inquiring about their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.' **YOU MUST NOT WORSHIP THE LORD your God IN THEIR WAY**, because in worshipping their gods they do all kinds of **DETESTABLE THINGS** the LORD hates [such as mourning or weeping for a "dead saviour"!]" (Deut.12:30-31).

"For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [Satan]? . . . Therefore **COME OUT** from them and **BE SEPARATE**, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (II Cor.6:14-17). This is *very important* in God's sight. How important is it to you?

BY WHOSE AUTHORITY?

Let us recapitulate briefly the facts, as they are revealed in the Bible -- the Word of God. Originally, God gave the Passover to His people when they came out of Egypt, the "house of bondage." He told them they were to sacrifice the Passover lambs "between the two evenings" on Nisan 14 -- or between noon and sunset of the 14th, and then **EAT** the Passover that night -- which would have been Nisan 15, since sunset begins a new day according to God's calendar (Ex.12:6-8). This day of the Passover celebration -- the 15th of Nisan, when God slew the firstborn in all Egypt and delivered His people Israel -- was to be celebrated **FOR EVER**, throughout their generations (Ex.12:14). It was sacrificed in the evening, "when the sun goes down" (Deut.16:5). The sun goes down in the sky between noon and sunset. After the sun has set, it has already gone down.

Joshua and all Israel observed the Passover when they entered Canaan (Josh.5:10-11) at that same time, slaying the lamb as the "sun went down" and eating the Passover on the night of Nisan 15. All Israel kept the Passover at this very same time, as God commanded, during the days of king Hezekiah of Judah (II Chron.30:1-18). In the day of king Manasseh, the king apostasized from the truth of God and led Israel into rebellion. But later, king Josiah of Judah also led all Israel to celebrate the Passover as God commanded (II Kings 23:21-22; II Chron.35:1-19).

Jesus and His parents, Joseph and Mary, observed the Passover, according to the custom of the Jews (Luke 2:41-42). All His life, Jesus observed the Passover and kept all the commandments of God (Mat.5:17-19). During His ministry, He and the disciples kept faithfully the Passover at the very same time. The last year of Jesus' ministry, however, He did not observe the Passover with the disciples -- because that

year He BECAME our Passover lamb, dying for our sins on the stake (I Cor.5:7). The "final supper" or meal He eat with His disciples in the "upper room" was not the Passover, but just a final meal about 24 hours before the celebration of the Passover would occur.

Of that final meal, the apostle John says, "It was just BEFORE the Passover Feast" (John 13:1). The next morning, when Jesus was brought before Pilate, after He had been scourged and whipped, it was still "the day of Preparation of Passover" (John 19:14). When Jesus was crucified, and died on the stake (John 19:28-30), the afternoon of Nisan 14, the Jews were slaying the Passover lambs at the Temple of God. Thus Jesus' death fulfilled perfectly -- right on time -- the Passover sacrifice! At that time it was still "the day of Preparation, and the next day [Nisan 15] was to be a special Sabbath [the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover was to be EATEN and celebrated by the people!]" (John 19:31).

Thus the Passover has always been observed on Nisan 15. Jesus kept it at that very time. The Jews have always observed the Passover on that special high holy day. The apostles observed it at the very same time. They never changed or deviated from God's commandment.

The question must be asked, therefore: BY WHOSE AUTHORITY WAS THE PASSOVER CHANGED BY SOME TO 24 HOURS EARLIER, AT THE BEGINNING OF NISAN 14? This change is completely contrary to Holy Scripture. It has no foundation in the Bible. It is an institution of MEN. It is not the Passover!

Now at one time Herbert W. Armstrong thought that the original Jewish Passover was held at the beginning of Nisan 14. He thought that the time the lambs were slain was at "twilight," which he thought was between sunset and dark, when the stars come out. Therefore, he assumed and believed that the Passover lambs were slain after sunset of Nisan 13, and then eaten that same evening. That is the reason he led the Worldwide Church of God to celebrate the Passover on the beginning of Nisan 14.

However, research has proven that Herbert Armstrong's assumption of when the Passover lambs were slain was wrong. Some 200,000 lambs were slain at Passover by the Jews in Jerusalem during the days of the Jewish historian Josephus of the first century. He points out in his history that they were slain in the afternoon, largely between 3 and 5 o'clock. No way could so many lambs be slain after sunset and before the first stars came out, about 20-30 minutes later!

If Herbert Armstrong had understood that the true Passover was slain in the afternoon of Nisan 14, and celebrated and eaten on Nisan 15, then he would have observed the Passover at the same time the Jews do -- and have always done it -- on Nisan 15!

BY WHAT AUTHORITY, THEN, DOES THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD, THE CHURCH OF GOD INTERNATIONAL, AND OTHER CHURCHES,

CONTINUE TO OBSERVE A WRONG KIND OF PASSOVER CEREMONY AT THE WRONG TIME AND ON THE WRONG DAY?

They have no authority whatsoever from God or Christ for doing so. They have no authority from the apostles for doing so. The truth is, they have NO SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY AT ALL -- they have only their own "human" authority, which is tantamount to saying they have USURPED GOD'S AUTHORITY and arrogantly taken it upon themselves to do as they see fit -- that which seems "right unto a man," but ends in DEATH (Prov.14:12).

By doing this, they have "changed times and laws" of God (Dan.7:25). In doing this they have usurped the prerogatives of God and rebelled against His laws (I Sam.15:22-23), a sin comparable to WITCHCRAFT and DEMONISM!

In Leviticus 23, God says plainly, "These are the LORD's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim AT THEIR APPOINTED TIMES" (Lev.23:4). To try to observe them at a DIFFERENT TIME and in a different manner is nothing short of REBELLION AGAINST GOD! To do so knowingly and willingly is an act of willful defiance and stubborn presumption which can only lead to the unpardonable sin and the lake of Gehenna Fire!

This is no small matter in God's sight. God commands us to observe HIS FEASTS at their "appointed times" -- not some time else! Not at a different hour on a different day and in a different manner! Woe unto those who trample on the Word of God, and do despite to the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by rebelling against the Word of God and stubbornly following their own customs rather than the PLAIN and straightforward Word of GOD!

Now you know the truth. When will YOU observe the Passover this year? Will you observe some kind of PAGANIZED Passover? Or will you keep and proclaim the TRUE PASSOVER, which has been observed on the same day and at the same time by all the people of God from Moses to Christ, and the apostles? What is *your* decision?

Chapter 6

The Mystery of the Omer Counting *Revealed!*

The lessons taught by the "Counting of the Omer" have been glossed over by the end-time Churches of God. No wonder they possess no spiritual POWER at all! What is the secret way to spiritual power revealed in the counting of the Omer? How can you grow stronger spiritually, so that you will NEVER be deceived?

"You shall then COUNT seven complete weeks after the day following the Passover holiday when you brought the Omer as a wave offering" (Lev.23:15).

"Sefirat Ha'Omer" -- counting the Omer -- refers to the forty-nine days from the second day of the Passover festival, and recounts the journey of the Israelites from Egypt, through the desert wastes, to the revelation of God at Mount Sinai, when the Commandments of God were set forth from heaven, and God made a Covenant with His people Israel, and "married" His bride.

This step-by-step journey through the wilderness was a time of trial and testing. God revealed to His people the Sabbath day (Exo.16), and satisfied their hunger with manna from heaven. When they complained of thirst, He caused water to spring forth. When the Amalekites attacked, He intervened for them and helped them fight off the vicious hordes (known as the Hyksos in Egyptian history).

Each day the Israelites are commanded to count the Omer, as they experienced their journey from captivity (Egypt) to freedom (Sinai). This daily count is associated with the experience of a toddler (the newly born Israelites, as it were) exploring and gaining understanding of his life's new environment (the wilderness) and the protective nature of his parent (God) who nurtures him, and provides structures and rules to safeguard him from evil.

This journey through the wilderness is a TYPE of the Christian life of overcoming -- from baptism and leaving sin behind (Egypt), marching and struggling through the spiritual wilderness (this evil world, and our human nature), until we reach the Kingdom of God -- Mount Zion.

Jewish psychologist Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, writes:

"The initial joy of liberation is fragile and impermanent, like the infatuation that marks the beginning of a romantic relationship. An infatuation become strained as differences and conflicts emerge. Pleasure that is complete and trustworthy comes only after a working through of those differences. . . ." (p.90-91).

Joel Ziff continues:

"This theme is also reflected in the other archetypal symbols associated with this time of year: the fetus must emerge through the constriction of the birth canal, the seed is covered by the dirt and the shell must rot before it can sprout, and the metal is melted in the fire of the furnace before it can be purified.

"Liberation [spiritual growth in Christ] for each of us is a complex, lengthy process. We might initially feel exhilarated, as our ancestors did when they left Egypt; however, at this stage, life can be an emotional roller coaster. The liberation is not complete. New challenges and new difficulties are encountered. We must work through these problems. We need to identify and change old habits of coping that no longer serve us before we can stabilize ourselves in the new environment. *This is a painful process.* We are forced to give up what seems to be our very Essence [our human nature, and old habits]. Only later do we discover that we have surrendered the outer shell" (*ibid.*, p.91).

As we go through our Christian lives, we meet obstacles, encounter problems, face trials and difficulties. All these are reflected in the "counting of the Omer," a task which identifies with our progress in "overcoming" our sins, faults, and human nature, from the moment of conversion and baptism, until that final time when we are changed into spirit beings, the sons of the Father, and inherit the promises of the New Covenant, at the coming of the Messiah!

We encounter problems we need to "work through." We come upon "old habits" which must be rooted out and changed. We find out that life has its ups and downs, like a roller coaster. As we fight and struggle against our human nature, and the downward pulls of the flesh, we find it is a "painful process." Nevertheless, we endure to the end, we keep on keeping on, till that final day when victory shall be ours, and our triumph shall be complete -- when the "Omer" of our life's experiences has been "fully counted" and we reach that final day of "Pentecost," at the end of a "jubilee" period of overcoming -- the day when Revelation is complete, and the Plan of God is finished, and there is "time no more" -- and the Messiah appears from heaven to inaugurate the Messianic Age, taking us to Himself as His spiritual Bride (Rev.19:7).

Among the Jewish people, today, the standard formula for "counting the Omer" goes like this: For example, on the eighth day, the people would pray to God and say, "Today is the eighth day of the Omer, making one week and one day of the Omer." Or, "Today is the twenty-fifth day of the Omer, that is, making three weeks and four days of the Omer." In my own counting of the Omer, I add the following: "This means, there are forty-two more days till Shavuot (Pentecost)," or "There are twenty five more days till Shavuot" -- showing me, and reminding myself, how many days are left to count, till Pentecost, and the countdown ends! Thus we think back both where we have come from,

and how much is left till we reach our destination! This gives us a sense of stability, and being, a sense of solidarity, knowing where we are -- where we fit, as it were -- in God's plan, as He is dealing with us.

It is a remarkable fact that there are "seven weeks" that we count the Omer. The word for "weeks" is *shavua* (see Deut.16:9). But in Leviticus 23:15, God inspired Moses to use the word for "sabbaths" which is *shabbatot*. Why the change -- the difference in wording? Evidently, God intends us to LEARN a LESSON from this! The word *shabbat* in Hebrew literally means "a cessation from labor," "a rest." It is also the name for the seventh day of the week, and the name of each of the annual holy days -- all of which are "days of REST," and therefore qualify as *shabbatot*. But as we are to "count the Omer," then, seven times we come to a *shabbat*, that is, a "cessation from labor," meaning we have FULFILLED THAT "WEEK" of counting -- that week of "overcoming."

Why "seven" such periods in the Omer count-down (or, count-up)? What does the number "seven" refer to in this relationship? "Seven," of course, is the number of COMPLETION, of PERFECTION! It is God's number -- the number of complete perfection and fulfillment. How do these "seven" then, relate to the process of "counting the Omer"? We count each week, and then the number of days, remember. This is significant! Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time*, points out that there is tremendous meaning behind this observance. He declares:

"According to Shneur Zalman [early 19th-century rabbi and leader of Chabad hasidism], each day of the barley offering has a *unique spiritual quality paralleling the learning* of the Israelites day-by-day on their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. Although God's Essence is unified, one can differentiate various types of SPIRITUAL ENERGY, each with unique and separate qualities. In the kabbalistic system, God's Presence is experienced through archetypal energies known as the *Sefirot*. There are ten *Sefirot*: Wisdom (*Chochma*), Understanding (*Binah*), Knowledge (*Da'at*), Loving-kindness (*Chesed*), Containing Strength (*Gevurah*), Mercifulness/Beauty (*Tiferet*), Power/Victory (*Netzach*), Presence/Glory (*Hod*), Energy/Foundation (*Yesod*), and Manifestation/Kingdom (*Malchut*). . . The first three *Sefirot* cannot be experienced" (p.94).

The last seven of these *Sefirot*, or Aspects of God's Presence, or God's Essence -- that is, the Seven aspects of God's Holy Spirit, are action-oriented manifestations of the Divine Nature of God. We will discuss these later. The first three, however, are internal aspects of the Divine Nature -- qualities God has and we ought to seek, with all our being -- that is, "Wisdom," "Understanding," and "Knowledge."

Notice how Solomon put this vital key in the book of Proverbs. He wrote, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *knowledge*; but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov.1:7). He added, "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding . . . Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov.2:3-6).

Again, Solomon exhorted us, "Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve

thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding*" (Prov.4:5-7).

Knowledge represents the acquisition of factual data, amassing facts and statistics and making observations. Understanding builds upon knowledge, for it is the grasping of the facts, the essential understanding of the data and its meaning and relevance, awareness of the interrelationships between the data, or the bits of knowledge, seeing how they all fit together in the BIG PICTURE. But wisdom is the crown of all three of these attributes: Wisdom is the process and ability of taking this knowledge and understanding, and PUTTING IT TO USE -- the practical *application* of knowledge and understanding -- putting it to WORK in our lives!

With these three attributes as a basis, therefore, we now examine the *SEVEN SEFIROT* of God -- also called in Scripture "those seven: they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech.4:10). These are the attributes of the Messiah -- the Lamb of God. We read in the book of Revelation: "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having SEVEN HORNS [complete power and authority] and SEVEN EYES, *which are the SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD* sent forth into all the earth" (Rev.4:6). These seven "spirits" can refer to seven mighty angels, under the authority of the Lamb of God, who serve Him throughout the earth. These could also be the same as the "seven angels" responsible for the seven churches of God (the seven branches of His true Church). As we read: "The seven stars are the ANGELS of the seven churches" (Rev.1:20).

However, since the "seven eyes" are the "seven Spirits" of God, this phrase can also be a reference to SEVEN (COMPLETE) FACETS *of the Holy Spirit -- that is, SEVEN ATTRIBUTES OF DIVINE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER -- the character of God Himself*. These attributes identify Him as God; they identify His Holy Spirit. These "seven" or complete aspects of God, facets of His character, are like the seven facets of an incredible spiritual Diamond, shining, sparkling, dazzling in beauty. They comprise the totality of God's Character -- the very character we as His children are to be STRIVING to develop, and inculcate, into our very beings!

The SEVEN SEFIROT of God

Joel Ziff writes in his book *Mirrors in Time*:

"Shneur Zalman connects the barley offering to the *Sefirot* by referring to Ezekiel's vision, which is included in the reading from the Prophets on Shavuot. In this vision, the prophet experiences God's Presence with the appearance of a human figure riding on a chariot. On the sides of the chariot are four faces: a lion, an ox, an eagle, and a human

Since barley is the grain eaten traditionally by animals, the offering symbolizes nourishment of the 'animals' of the chariot, the 'animal soul' that is the material part of the self. Each of the figures symbolize one of the *Sefirot*. The face of the lion symbolizes *Chesed*; the face of the ox represents *Gevurah*; the eagle symbolizes

Tiferet.

"During the forty-nine days of counting, we focus *each week* on one of the seven lower *Sefirot*. Each day, we focus on a particular aspect of that *Sefira*. Each of the seven *Sefirot* incorporates within itself an aspect of all the others. We can therefore meditate on the quality of *Chesed* in *Chesed*, *Tiferet* in *Chesed*, and so forth. . . .

"In the same way as a child comes to understand the abstract concept of number only through repeated counting of actual objects, we make sense of the abstract, archetypal spiritual energies in terms of our daily experience. Theoretical concepts can be understood only when they are grounded in real life. Step-by-step, we build understanding. *Spirit that is, by definition, incomprehensible and infinite becomes understandable by clarifying the various different parts. Each day, by counting, we consider ONE QUALITY OF SPIRIT, separating and differentiating into comprehensible pieces. Each day, we focus on a different ASPECT OF GOD'S ESSENCE and clarify how to make a personal connection to that quality"* (p.95).

You should carefully study and re-read the previous paragraphs. They contain a mountain of vital information on how we, as human beings, can develop step-by-step the very qualities of the Spirit Essence of Almighty GOD!

Each day, as we count the Omer, we should strive to integrate and internalize the qualities of God Himself in our own nature and character. In this way we become more and more like our Father and Jesus Christ in character. We become more and more "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet.1:4). The apostle Paul wrote, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be FORMED in you" (Gal.4:19). Paul also writes, "That ye put off concerning the former conduct the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be RENEWED in the *SPIRIT of your MIND*; and that ye put on the NEW MAN, which *after God [in God's likeness of character] is created in righteousness and true holiness"* (Eph.4:22-24).

This is a process which takes time. It requires change, suffering, pain, and endurance. It is not easy, like falling off a log into a stream. It requires strenuous, rugged effort -- like climbing a mountain, hiking up steep switch-backs, to the crest of a rugged peak. It requires sheer exertion and constant expenditure of energy to make forward progress.

Joel Ziff writes of this experience of change and growth to true maturity, in comparison with the Israelites' journey through the wilderness. He asserts:

"The Israelites did not go directly from Egypt to the revelation of God's Presence on Mount Sinai. They journey for forty-nine days. They wonder how they will sustain themselves. They need to understand and make sense of the new realities of life in different circumstances. They require time to interact with the world to achieve this understanding.

"The process of cognitive development occurs not only in childhood. As we struggle with new situations, we recapitulate the developmental process. Encountering a changed environment, we find ourselves disoriented and confused, lost in the desert. We do not know how to nourish ourselves. We do not quite know where we are going or how to get there. We may long to return to our old environment, to a world that is familiar.

We find mentors and guides for ourselves. We learn through a process of TRIAL AND ERROR, STEP-BY-STEP. In time, we may experience moments of revelation, intuitive leaps in which our goals and methods for achieving those goals become clear" (p.98).

This process of spiritual growth and development is not one of steady regular progress, like a car operating under "cruise control." Not at all. It is more like a jerky, stop-and-go, rough ride, with fits and starts, progress for a while, then a rough patch is hit, or a wash-out on the road, and a "detour" must be navigated past the obstacle. Nevertheless, we continue onward, in faith, believing God's promises and His Word. Says Joel Ziff:

"The breath of life that emerges from the mouth of God differentiates into the various spiritual energies, the *Sefirot* that are associated with the seven weeks of counting. Breath cannot be seen or heard; however, differentiated into vowels, it can be perceived. God's Essence is beyond our perception, but the spiritual energies can be manifest and revealed. In the same way, we begin to differentiate the confusing, chaotic world around us into separate categories and objects" (p.99).

Differentiating the Spirit of God

There is much wisdom in the words we have read, and not a little understanding. Nevertheless, to really grasp the essential *Sefirot* (Aspects) of the Spirit of God, I have found it most helpful to allow the Word of God to delineate and differentiate these qualities for us. The seven (or nine) aspects of the Spirit of God are referred to as the "FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT," in the words of the apostle Paul. What are these qualities or characteristics?

Paul wrote to the brethren in Galatia, these plain and instructive words:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections [or, "passions," marginal reading] and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also WALK in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:22-26).

There are actually *nine* fruits of the Spirit listed here. But if we combine gentleness and meekness, which go together, and faith and self-control (temperance), then we have *seven* combinations of Divine Attributes -- the *Seven Sefirot* (Manifestations) of God!

Applying the Principles to Our Lives

Now let us apply these lessons to our own lives, in striving to build the character of God by working on building into our character the very attributes ("fruits") of God's Holy Spirit! This is something we can DO -- and FOCUS upon! It will not happen "automatically." You cannot set your life on "AUTO-PILOT" and expect to arrive at your spiritual destination. It behooves us to take control of our lives, and the throttle, and

fly as if we were at any moment going to be ambushed by agents of Satan the devil. We must avoid storms as best we can, avoid the lightning, tornadoes which may come up in our flight path, avoid anti-aircraft fire, and enemy rockets, missiles, and aircraft. Coasting on "auto-pilot" would be a sure-fire short-cut to disaster and a crash-landing.

Joel Ziff writes again about the Passover to Shavuot, Counting-the-Omer principle:

"The days from Pesach to Shavuot, Sefirat Ha'Omer, serve as a bridge from the experience of redemption to the experience of revelation. We are pulled from slavery by miracles, by powers outside of ourselves. Changes in our lives -- both positive and negative -- pull us out of our habits, out of our constrictions. It may be a change in work life, relationships, health, a new stage in the life cycle. Then we begin to make sense, to try to understand what this means and how to deal with it."

We may face changes in our church relationships, as well. For many, perhaps their old church affiliation which they had much confidence in, began to erode, and change, and to embrace teachings and doctrines contrary to Scripture. These changes can become very upsetting, and detrimental -- depressing and discouraging. Some become angry, and throw the "book" away, and vow never to have anything to do with "religion" ever again! Others gravitate to this group or that one, depending on where they feel most "comfortable." Many slip back into a state of somnolent lethargy and spiritual ennui -- boredom and listlessness. The "desert, wilderness wandering" experience for such people becomes lethal. They get off track, lose sight of the goal, and plunge over a cliff or become separated from those who are continuing on toward their destination across the desert!

What happens to such people? For many, maybe they never learned to "count the Omer." Therefore, they became "easy pickings" for Satan and his flock of vultures and scavengers, waiting with eyes peeled to prey on the members of the flock that stray into danger, and wander off, who become disoriented and confused. If they had learned the TRUTH about "overcoming," and mastering the flesh, and developing the attributes of God -- the lesson taught by "counting the Omer" -- then they might have avoided the dangers, the pitfalls, and desert illusions and perils.

How, then, can we truly develop our spiritual senses and the seven facets of God's perfect, righteous, character? Joel Ziff goes on to explain:

"During the days of counting, we use the archetypal images of the *Sefirot* as guides. Our job is *Tikkun* -- repair -- of the attributes. One of the qualities of an archetype is that it is ambiguous, can be defined in many different ways. Through *meditation, contemplation, and analysis*, we clarify the ways in which we might interpret each of the *Sefirot* negatively in ways which are not helpful and positively in ways that help us with our struggles.

"Each week is devoted to one of the seven *Sefirot*. For example, during the first week, the *Sefira* of *Chesed* [*loving-kindness*] is the focus. One might meditate on a variety of topics: What are my experiences of unconditional love? What are my definitions and beliefs about love? How have my life experiences affected my understanding and beliefs? What can I learn from the experiences of others about love?

"Not only does each week have a unique focus; each day within the week also has a particular significance. Each of the *Sefirot* contain aspects of the others. For example, the first week is associated with the *Sefira* of *Chesed*. The days of the week are linked to the various *Sefirot* subsumed in *Chesed*: *Chesed* in *Chesed*, *Gevurah* in *Chesed*, *Tiferet* in *Chesed*, *Netzach* in *Chesed*, *Hod* in *Chesed*, *Yesod* in *Chesed*, and *Malchut* in *Chesed*" (p.103-104).

In the next section of this article, I am combining the Seven *Sefirot* of God, from the Old Testament studies of the kabbalists, with the New Testament revealed qualities of the Spirit of God. Notice how they work together in a spiritually synergistically powerful manner.

The Seven Sefirot and Fruits of the Spirit

Chesed -- loving-kindness. This is also known as *Ahavah* (love). This quality is associated with Abraham, the father of the faithful, who loved God so much he was willing to sacrifice Isaac, his true son, if God so required it. Abraham was also noted for his hospitality. This quality refers to unconditional acceptance and love of others -- outgoing concern and care.

Love is also the first of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit! Love is the bedrock of the Law of God -- the first great commandment is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbor. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3). "Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom.13:10).

Gevurah -- Strength. This quality is also known as *Yirah* -- awe or fear. This quality is connected with Isaac. It refers to strength that comes from containment, the power to contain and hold the energy of love. It is the power of inhibition, the power of discrimination and judgment that allows one to make wise, right choices. Isaac's name means "laughter."

Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit of God -- unbounded laughter and happiness. God's Word says, "The joy of the LORD is your *strength*" (Neh.8:10). Thus true joy is a source of strength -- *gevurah*. "Rejoice in the Lord always," Paul wrote; "and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men" (Phil.4:4-5).

Tiferet -- Beauty. This quality is also known as *Rachamim* -- mercifulness. "It is also a symbol of PEACE because it represents the perfect BALANCING of the left and right sides, integrating love and containment . . . *Tiferet* is associated with Jacob" (Ziff, p.105).

Peace is the third attribute of God's Spirit! Jesus Christ said, "In me ye shall have peace" (John 16:33). "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not at the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Christ is not an "Indian-giver." That is, He doesn't give, and then take away again. Paul also wrote: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall

keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil.4:7). Jacob was a man of peace. He was noted as a peace-maker. Peace involves and includes the quality of "mercifulness," and it is "beautiful" in God's sight.

Netzach -- Victory, Triumph. This begins the second triad (or division of three qualities) of the *Sefirot*. This quality is associated with Moses, who triumphantly led Israel out of Egypt "with a high hand." This quality translates *chesed*, *gevurah*, and *tefirat* into bold action and accomplishment with power, energy, planning, and activity.

Gentleness and *meekness* are two of the fruits of the Spirit of God which seem to fit together. These also are defining characteristics of Moses. Why did Moses achieve such *netzach* -- such victory and success? Because he was a man God could use and work with, a man to whom "success" would not "go to his head" and cause him to swell up like a puffed balloon. We read of Moses: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num.12:3). And David writes of the quality of gentleness, speaking of God Himself, "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psalm 18:35). He wrote, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect" (Psa.18:32).

The apostle James tells us: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality [favoritism], and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17-18).

Hod -- Glory. This is the quality that lights up a person's face, the inner strength that causes the face to "GLOW" with confidence, peacefulness, serenity, dignity, honor, and majesty. It is associated with Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron was noted as a "peace" maker, and a man of honor. He was also noted for "unity." Sometimes he went too far in seeking to be a "peace-maker," as when he molded the golden calf for the rebellious Israelites. He sought to preserve the people in unity, so he fell into a spiritual trap. Nevertheless, he was a noteworthy man of God, and a man of wisdom and inner strength. God's word says of such a man, "Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh *his face to shine*, and the *BOLDNESS [strength] of his face shall be changed*" (Eccl.8:1). God also says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in UNITY! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psa.133:1-2).

Goodness is the sixth fruit of the Spirit of God. This also was a strong quality in Aaron, and a quality we must strive to inculcate into our innermost character. David writes, "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" (Psa.25:8). Jesus Christ declared, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt.12:35). Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, *created unto GOOD WORKS*, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph.3:10). The apostle Peter adds, "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew

evil, and DO GOOD; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Pet.3:10-12).

Yesod -- Foundation. This quality is the integration of both *netzach* and *hod*, and is the balance between power and presence. Joseph, the son of Jacob, became the prime minister of Egypt, and virtual ruler of the world, after suffering slavery as a teenager, and imprisonment for a crime he never committed. Yet after these harrowing trials he rose by God's miraculous deliverance to an exalted governmental position. He is the embodiment and epitome of this characteristic. Joseph by his suffering and continual growth and strength through contact with God, and His Spirit, became the foundation of the world, delivering the whole earth from the ravages of the most terrible famine mankind had seen up to that time. His wisdom and planning and spiritual strength provided a way to save his own family, and millions of others.

Longsuffering is the fourth fruit of the Spirit of God. Certainly, this characteristic was well-illustrated in the life of Joseph. Despite his trials and tests, tribulations and suffering, Joseph remained faithful to God and worshipped Him through it all. His long-suffering and patience and endurance in well-doing finally led to his exaltation to high office where he could serve in a much greater capacity. The apostle Paul wrote: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye *have need of PATIENCE*, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb.10:35-37). James added, "My brethren, count it all *joy* when ye fall into divers temptations [trials, sufferings]; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh *patience*. But let *patience* have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4).

Connected with this trait is the quality of "self control" -- self mastery -- which is also one of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. Self-control and long-suffering go together like grits and eggs. They are two aspects of the same quality -- *endurance* -- and constitute a "foundation" for true achievement!

Malchut -- Kingdom. This quality represents manifestation, the translation of energy into action and activity -- and means literally "KINGDOM." *Malchut* is associated with the *Shekinah* -- the "Presence" -- of God. King David is connected to this *Sefira* as he is the one whom God used to bring the Kingdom of God to fruition and accomplishment *as a type*, in his day. He was himself a *type* of the Messianic King, Yeshua -- and the promised Messiah was to be born of his descendants, of his royal lineage.

Faith is the remaining fruit of God's Spirit, as explained in Galatians 5:22-23. David was a man of faith -- and faithfulness. He learned to control himself, his emotions and desires, and to trust God and depend on Him, rather than do the "expedient" thing, and take action himself to bring about the Kingdom of God. He waited patiently, until God's anointed king, Saul, was killed in battle. David would not attack or slay Saul

himself, but rather allowed him to live on several occasions when he could have killed him. But David was loyal to the office of the king; and he would not take matters into his own hands, but trusted God and waited for Him to act. And his faith was rewarded greatly!

Faith is a key characteristic of the character of God -- the *Sefirot* energy of the Spirit of the Most High. How important is faith in our lives? Paul wrote, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb.11:6). Paul also wrote, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb.10:38-39). The apostle Peter wrote, "Who are kept by the power of God *through faith unto salvation* ready to be revealed in *the last time [our day TODAY!]*: Wherein ye *greatly rejoice*, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations [trials]: That the *trial of your faith*, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet *believing*, ye rejoice with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*: Receiving the *end [purpose, goal] of your faith*, even the salvation of your souls" (I Pet.1:5-9).

These powerful Seven *Sefirot* of God -- these SEVEN manifestations of the Holy Spirit -- are mighty vehicles to spiritual growth and becoming Godlike. If we will meditate on these attributes of God, and ponder them, and reflect upon them, and study them in the Scriptures, and spend time thinking about them, and considering HOW we might express them more fully and completely in our own daily lives -- these divine spiritual energies will provide us a powerful tool to use to become the true SONS OF GOD in actual spiritual image and character likeness.

7 X 7 -- The 49 Steps to Salvation

The "counting of the Omer" from Pesach (Passover) to Shavuot (Pentecost) is a process -- a daily task -- that reflects like a mirror our spiritual lives. If we are not counting the Omer as God tells us to do, it is reflective of the fact that we are not overcoming sin and temptations and distractions in our lives. If we fail to count one day, but repent, and begin counting from that time, then God forgives us, and we go onward and forward. But it is better if we are faithful from beginning to end.

The Omer count is a reflection of our spirituality. Are we developing the attributes of God and His Spirit in our lives? Are we growing daily, constantly, in love -- joy -- peace -- longsuffering (patience) -- gentleness -- goodness -- faith -- meekness -- moderation (self control)?

Each day of the forty-nine day Omer count is like a building block to salvation. It is a tool to develop and grow in spiritual maturity, so that we are ready when Christ comes, so that we will be a pure and perfect "Bride" for the KING of the Universe!

Think about such a high calling! Are you faithfully "counting the Omer"?

Even more, the Omer count is a pattern -- a template -- to TEACH us what we should be doing *EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES -- "COUNTING THE OMER" AND DEVELOPING THE TRAITS OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES -- EVERY DAY - DAY-BY-DAY -- TILL THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, RETURNS FOR HIS BRIDE!*

Each and every day should be an "Omer count" day in our journey to spiritual perfection. Each day we should "number the days," and "count the days," as we journey onward and upward to that thrilling time when Jesus Christ will come again, bringing the Kingdom of God with Him!

The "Omer count" then is a physical "type" or typology of a spiritual reality -- the Christian life process. It represents the spiritual journey -- the Odyssey -- of our lives, as we go through the wilderness, overcome obstacles, and root out the negative attributes of the flesh, and develop and strengthen the positive manifestations of God's Spirit in our lives. We are on a great spiritual Quest. Each day counts. Each week is significant. Every month is a palpable unit of time which ought to be devoted to overcoming, growing, and strengthening the Spirit of God within us. Every year brings us that much closer to MESSIAH!

Are you busy "counting the Omer" in your own life -- till Christ returns?

Chapter 7

What Do You Mean, “Counting the Omer”?

“Count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days” (Lev.23:15, NIV).
 “Count off seven weeks . . . Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks”
 (Deut.16:9-10). What is the significance of this commandment of
 God? Does it have real meaning for us today? How should true
 Christians view this command? How is it relevant to our lives?
 Here is new understanding which will help you to become a true
 OVERCOMER and to qualify to enter God’s Kingdom as one of
 His “first-fruits” at the coming of the Messiah!

*“You shall then COUNT seven complete weeks after the day following the
 Passover holiday when you brought the Omer as a wave offering” (Lev.23:15).*

Notice that there are actually TWO commands in counting the Omer! First, we
 are commanded to “count off” the weeks, week by week. Then we are commanded to
 count off the DAYS, till we come to fifty – the fiftieth day being Pentecost!

“Sefirat Ha’Omer” – counting the Omer – refers to the forty-nine days from the
 second day of the Passover festival, and recounts the journey of the Israelites from Egypt,
 through the desert wastes, to the revelation of God at Mount Sinai, when the
 Commandments of God were set forth from heaven, and God made a Covenant with His
 people Israel, and “married” His bride – a “marriage covenant” (Jer.3:14).

This step-by-step journey through the wilderness was a time of trial and testing.
 God revealed to His people the Sabbath day (Exo.16), and satisfied their hunger with
 manna from heaven. When they complained of thirst, He caused water to spring forth.
 When the Amalekites attacked, He intervened for them and helped them fight off the
 vicious hordes (known as the Hyksos in Egyptian history).

Each day the Israelites – the people of God – were commanded to count the
 Omer, as they experienced their journey from captivity (Egypt) to freedom (Sinai).

Leaving Egypt

When Israel left Egypt, they left behind hundreds of years during which they had become contaminated by Egyptian influence, idolatry, and had developed the mentality of slaves, as they were oppressed and driven by harsh taskmasters. They had sunk to new spiritual lows. But at their extremity of suffering, God sent Moses to bring them out of their bondage and suffering, and to lead them to freedom and sovereignty.

They left Egypt on the day of Passover, Nisan 15, after the night when the first born of Egypt were all put to death supernaturally (Exodus 12:29).

Says Avraham Yaakov Finkel in *The Essence of the Holy Days*,

“When the Israelites were in Egypt, they sank to the depth of the forty-ninth Gate of Impurity. God wanted to extract Israel from the forty-nine gates in stages, by illuminating on each day between Passover and Shavuot the Gate of Holiness that is the counterpart of its opposite Gate of Impurity. This *tikkum*, correction or restoration, comes to life each year in the counting of the *Omer*, on the forty-nine days between Passover – the day of the Exodus – and Shavuot – the day of the Giving of the Torah” (p.165, quoting Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto).

Another Jewish rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, offers another profound insight into the counting of the Omer. Writes Avraham Finkel:

“He notes the seven-day periods in the laws of uncleanness and purity as periods during which the individual strives to bring uncleanness to a close in order to enter a state of purity on the eighth day.

“Thus, a *sevenfold counting of seven-day periods, that is, a counting of forty-nine days, would symbolize the complete elimination of uncleanness, namely, of bondage, to our senses*. The fiftieth day [Pentecost or Shavuot] would mark our final entry into purity, that is, into the realm of moral freedom. The *Omer* count thus symbolizes the idea that we can acquire moral freedom only through sevenfold intensive work on ourselves” (p.166).

How does this apply to God’s people, today?

A Life of Overcoming and Growing to Spiritual Maturity

Today, this daily count is associated with the experience of a toddler (the newly born “child of God”, as it were) exploring and gaining understanding of his life’s new environment (the wilderness) and the protective nature of his parent (God) who nurtures him, and provides structures and rules to safeguard him from evil.

This journey through the wilderness is a TYPE of the Christian life of overcoming

– from baptism and leaving sin behind (Egypt), marching and struggling through the spiritual wilderness (this evil world, and our human nature), until we reach the Kingdom of God – typified by Mount Zion.

As we go through our Christian lives, we meet obstacles, encounter problems, face trials and difficulties. All these are reflected in the “counting of the Omer,” a task which identifies with our progress in “overcoming” our sins, faults, and human nature, putting sin out of our lives, and developing the holy attributes of God, from the moment of conversion and baptism, until that final time when we are changed into spirit beings, the sons of the Father, and inherit the promises of the New Covenant, at the coming of the Messiah!

Putting on the New Self

As we go through life, we encounter problems, bad habits, and trials which we need to overcome and “work through.” We come upon “old habits” which must be rooted out and changed. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ!” (Eph.4:17-20, NRSV).

Paul goes on, explaining, “You were taught to *put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be RENEWED in the spirit of your MINDS, and to clothe yourself with the NEW SELF, CREATED ACCORDING TO THE LIKENESS OF GOD in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph.4:22-24).

Paul wrote to the Colossians in like manner, saying, “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. *Set your mind on things that are above*, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. . . Put to death, therefore, whatever in you that is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must *get rid of all such things* – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have *stripped off the old self* with its practices and have *clothed yourselves with the NEW SELF*, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (Col.3:1-10).

Paul sums up this process of overcoming the sinful pulls of the flesh, and inculcating the very righteous character of God, saying, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. *Above all, clothe yourselves with love*, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the *peace of*

Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col.3:12-17).

We find out that life has its ups and downs, like a roller coaster. As we fight and struggle against our human nature, and the downward pulls of the flesh, we find it is a painful process. Nevertheless, we endure to the end, we keep on keeping on, till that final day when victory shall be ours, and our triumph shall be complete. Counting the Omer pictures our life’s experiences and the process of overcoming and purifying ourselves from the contamination and sins of the flesh, until we reach that final day of Pentecost, which pictures the great day of the coming of the Messiah – the day when Revelation is complete, and the Plan of God is finished, and there is “time no more” and the Messiah Himself appears from heaven to inaugurate the Messianic Age, taking us to Himself as His spiritual Bride (Rev.19:7).

The Spiritual Struggle

The Christian life is a life of spiritual struggle. We must learn to keep our eyes on the goal. The apostle Paul knew this.

Paul understood that we must endure to the end – that we must be FAITHFUL till our dying day, or till Christ returns (whichever comes first!). Paul wrote, of his own spiritual battle: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? *RUN in such a way that you may WIN it.* Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. *So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (I Cor.9:24-27, NRSV).*

Notice this in the Amplified Parallel Bible: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but [only] one receives the prize? So RUN [your race] so that you may lay hold [of the prize] and make it yours. . .

“Therefore I do not run uncertainly (without definite aim). I do not box like one beating the air and striking without an adversary. But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, *for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I MYSELF SHOULD BECOME UNFIT [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].”*

Seven Weeks of Concentrated “Overcoming”

It is a remarkable fact that there are “seven weeks” that we count the Omer. These provide us seven optimal weeks to work on ourselves – seven weeks of concentrated, distilled “overcoming.”

Paul also wrote about this battle in the second letter to the Corinthians. He declared, “For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our WARFARE are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the OBEDIENCE of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), being in readiness to punish every [insubordinate for his] disobedience, when your own submission and *OBEDIENCE* [as a church] are fully secure and complete” (II Cor.10:3-6).

Reaching Toward the GOAL

Notice! We are *not yet* “fully secure and complete.”

Rather, as Paul himself wrote to the Philippians, again quoting the Amplified Parallel Bible, “[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and clearly], and that I may in that same say come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually TRANSFORMED [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope] that *IF POSSIBLE I may attain to the* [personal and moral] *RESURRECTION . . . Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I PRESS ON TO LAY HOLD OF (GRASP) and make my own*, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own.” (Phil.3:10-12).

Notice Paul’s attitude! He did not believe or claim to already have salvation, but sought to progressively GROW up into the likeness of Christ, so that “IF POSSIBLE” he may attain to the resurrection of the righteous dead, or salvation!

Paul goes on, saying, “I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and *straining forward* to what lies ahead, I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL TO WIN the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.” So, Paul declares, “So let those [of us] who are spiritually mature and full-grown have this mind and these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also” (verses 13-15).

Once we begin the Christian life, there is a lot of overcoming to do – straining forward to make sure that we will enter the Kingdom of God and attain to salvation!

We must “PRESS ON,” we must “STRAIN FORWARD,” and make sure that we win the ultimate prize!

A Deliberate Spiritual Process

The apostle Peter also declared that we must escape the moral decay and rottenness of human nature and become partakers of “the divine nature” (II Pet.1:4). He wrote, “For this very reason, adding your diligence [to the divine promises], *employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue* (excellence, resolution, Christian energy), and in [exercising] virtue [develop] knowledge (intelligence), and in [exercising] knowledge [develop] self-control, and in [exercising] self-control [develop] steadfastness (patience, endurance), and in [exercising] steadfastness [develop] godliness (piety), and in [exercising] piety [develop] brotherly affection, and in [exercising] brotherly affection [develop] Christian love. For as these qualities are yours and increasingly abound in you, they will keep [you] from being idle or unfruitful unto the [full personal] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One)” (verses 5-8).

“Overcoming” human nature, the pulls of the flesh, the temptations of the world, and the seduction of Satan, involves a “whole lifetime” of work, diligent effort, growth, and steadfast endurance, to the very end – till either death comes, or the Messiah Himself returns!

Peter summarizes the situation, saying, “For whoever lacks these qualities is blind, [spiritually] short-sighted, seeing only what is near to him, and has become oblivious [to the fact] that he was cleansed from his old sins. Because of this, brethren, be all the more solicitous and eager to MAKE SURE (to ratify, to strengthen, to make steadfast) YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION, for *IF YOU DO THIS, you will never stumble or fall*. Thus there will be richly and abundantly provided for you entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (verses 9-11).

Therefore, as the apostle Paul also reminds us, we must constantly, diligently “work out” our own salvation. He declared to the church in Philippi, “Therefore, my dear ones, as you have always obeyed [my suggestions], so now, not only [with enthusiasm you would show] in my presence but much more because I am absent, WORK OUT (cultivate, carry out to the goal, and fully complete) YOUR OWN SALVATION with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ)” (Phil.2:12).

This is clearly a life-long process of overcoming, fighting the pulls of the flesh, and striving to become like Christ in every way!

“Seven Weeks”

Our “counting the omer” is like a microcosm of the life of God’s people. It is like a spiritual “template” or “pattern” which shows us the WAY of OVERCOMING! What we do and how we do during the counting of the omer will very likely be reflected in how we live our lives and overcome during the rest of the year! If we don’t take it seriously, then very likely we won’t take the spiritual struggle we have against the flesh very

seriously the rest of the year, either!

We are commanded to “count the weeks.” The Hebrew word for “weeks” is *shavua* (see Deut.16:9). But in Leviticus 23:15, God inspired Moses to write, “you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete” (NRSV). Here, for “weeks,” God inspired Moses to use the word *shabbatot* which is usually translated as “Sabbaths.” Why the change – the difference in wording? Evidently, God intends us to LEARN a LESSON from this! The word *shabbat* in Hebrew literally means “rest, interruption, cessation” – “intermission” (see Strong’s Concordance, #7673 and 7676). Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon defines the word further: “1) to rest, to keep as a day of rest . . . The primary idea appears to be that of *to sit down, to sit still*. . . 2) *to cease, to desist, to leave off*. . . 3) *to celebrate the Sabbath* . . .” It also sometimes means “week,” as the word does in the Syriac and Greek (compare Matthew 28:1 and Deut.16:9).

Therefore, the basic meaning of this word is a cessation from labor, a rest, an intermission, an interruption, a ceasing from something.

It is also the name for the seventh day of the week, and the name of each of the annual holy days -- all of which are “days of REST,” and therefore qualify as *shabbatot*. But as we are to “count the Omer,” then, when we come to seven days of counting, we come to a *shabbat*, that is, a “cessation from labor,” an “intermission.” This tells us that after each seven-day period we have completed that “week” of counting – that week of “overcoming.” In essence, at the end of each seven days, we have a special day of “rest,” of “integration,” “an intermission,” when we “leave off” that week’s counting and begin the next week’s counting. When we “fulfill” each week, we then go on to the next week.

Why are there “seven” such periods in the Omer count – seven “weeks”? What does the number “seven” refer to in this relationship? “Seven,” of course, is the number of COMPLETION, of PERFECTION! It is God’s number -- the number of complete perfection and fulfillment. The Omer count is a period of 7 7s – seven weeks of seven days each – or a total of 49 days (7 x 7) – which essentially refers to ultimate *completion or ultimate perfection! La crème de la crème!*

Seven is also the number of divine attributes which summarize the holy, righteous character of God – attributes we should be working on to integrate into our own character! The seven weeks of counting the Omer, therefore, can be viewed as “seven stages” of developing the seven characteristics of God into our lives and minds, hearts, and beings – working on one particular characteristic or attribute *each week!*

The Word “Safar”

In Leviticus 23:13, the Hebrew word for “count” is “safar.” There are several different meanings for “safar.” Although *safar* can mean to count up the total in order to arrive at a sum, it can also just as easily and accurately mean to inscribe by making a mark, to enumerate, or to celebrate. Says Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, “*to score with a mark as a tally or record.*”

How should we do this “counting”?

The intended meaning of *safar* in Leviticus 23:15 is “to ritually inscribe by celebrating, i.e., to inscribe to ritual celebration.” Jewish author and historian Chaim Raphael, in *Festival Days: A History of Jewish Celebrations* (c.1990, Grove Weidenfeld: New York), informs us that:

“In the Jewish practice, an Omer (sheaf) of the new barley was offered to the Temple every day after Passover to be ‘waved’ ceremonially by the priest. The Omer began to be counted daily from the second day of Passover for seven weeks, at which point the festival of Shavuot (‘weeks’) was celebrated. ‘Counting the Omer’ until the seven weeks were concluded became a recognizable stretch of Jewish life with its own traditions . . .” (p.69).

This same author adds:

“The seven-week period from Passover to Shavuot had a ritual in which a sheaf of grain from the new harvest was offered to the priest every day. Every offering was COUNTED OFF DAILY until the forty-ninth day, after which Shavuot was celebrated” (p.71).

It should be clear that “counting the omer” was performed EVERY YEAR, as a special aspect of the Passover celebration, beginning the day after Passover. This was the very day that the spring harvest of barley BEGAN, and continued for forty nine days, until Pentecost, when the spring harvest was completed!

The “omer offering” every day for 49 days during the spring harvest is a TYPE of the “firstfruits” of God’s creation – true converted people of God, from the time of the patriarchs down to true Christians of our day, today. The “omer” was the FIRST FRUITS! Likewise, “we ourselves [are those] who have the first fruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23). James calls Christians “a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (James 1:18). John in Revelation speaks of those who “have been redeemed from humankind as FIRST FRUITS for God and the Lamb” (Rev.14:4).

The Messiah Himself was the original “first fruit”, by resurrection from the dead (I Cor.15:20). True saints of God during this age will join Him as the rest of the “first fruits” when He returns.

At Christ’s coming, He will MARRY the Church, the “firstfruits” (Rev.19:6-9), just as He married Israel when He came down to Mount Sinai on that first Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks (Exodus 19-20; 24:9-11). Thus the daily “counting of the omer” is a ritual which REFLECTS THE SPRING HARVEST OF TRUE CHRISTIANS and all the holy men and women of old who will be in the FIRST RESURRECTION, and who will MARRY Christ at His coming!

The vast, overwhelming majority of Christians do not even begin to realize or

recognize this amazing, wonderful TRUTH!

How To “Count the Omer”

Every day, then, from Passover to Pentecost, we should “count the omer.”

How should we do this? The blessing in Hebrew goes like this:

“Barukh Attah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melek Ha Olam,
Asher Kidshanu b’Mitzvotav, Vitzivanu al Sefirat
Ha Omer.

“Ha Yom Echad L’Omer.”

In English:

“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who has separated us by Your commandments, and Who
has commanded us to count the Omer.

“Today is the first day of the Omer.”

When each day begins, after sunset, we should set aside a time in prayer when when WE COUNT THE OMER, as we pray to God, during the period between Passover and Pentecost. After reciting the customary blessing, we should continue, reciting each week and day of the Omer count as it comes. We should recite something like the following:

“Today is the ____ week of the Omer count, and the ____
day of the week, making ____ days in all. Therefore, there
are ____ days till the Feast of Pentecost [Shavuot].”

We give the number of the week first, as in “first,” “second,” “third,” “fourth,” “fifth,” “sixth,” and finally “seventh.” We then enumerate the day of the week, as in “first,” “second,” and so forth. Then we give the total number of days in the count to the day we utter the prayer.

Some follow the count by reciting or reviewing Psalm 67, since it contains 7 verses and a total of 49 words (in Hebrew). Many also pray a prayer for the final Redemption of God’s people at this time, praying for the Messiah to come quickly, to restore the Temple speedily, to make it possible to reinstate the true Biblical observance of the Omer offering and counting at the Temple.

Since counting the Omer pictures overcoming sin and developing the righteousness and character of God in our lives, and becoming more and more Christ-like (see Gal.4:19), we should use these days to pray about overcoming and growing in God’s holiness and righteous character.

Each day it is helpful to pray that day especially about the characteristic of God

which we are working on developing in our lives, pertinent to that day. For example, the Jews derive seven major characteristics of God which are mentioned in the Old Testament, which can be applied to the Omer count. These seven attributes are also characteristic of the “seven patriarchs” mentioned in the Scriptures – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David. The characteristics are:

Chesed	Loving-kindness	Abraham
Gevurah	Strength, Power	Isaac
Tiferet	Harmony, Peace	Jacob
Netzach	Victory, Triumph	Moses
Hod	Glory, Majesty	Aaron
Yesod	Foundation	Joseph
Malkut	Sovereignty	David

We can also use each day to work on one of the attributes of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul wrote to the brethren in Galatia, these plain and instructive words:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections [or, “passions,” marginal reading] and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:22-26).

There are actually *nine* fruits of the Spirit listed here. But if we combine gentleness and meekness, which go together, and faith and self-control (temperance), then we have *seven* combinations of Divine Attributes. The apostle Paul lists them in Galatians 5:19-20.

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Patience (Long-suffering)
5. Gentleness, Goodness
6. Faith (Faithfulness)
7. Meekness, Self Control

Counting the Omer, for forty-nine days, till Pentecost, helps us to concentrate during this period and focus our minds on overcoming our sins and weaknesses and developing the attributes of God in our lives. This helps us to have a PLAN of overcoming! It is Biblically-based! And it will help you to be a true overcomer in your life!

To make the most of the Omer season, and the days of counting the Omer, it is vital to spend extra time in earnest, heartfelt prayer every day, to put your heart into your prayers for spiritual growth and overcoming. As Jeremiah wrote, “Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches, *pour out your heart like water* before the presence

of the LORD!” (Lamentations 2:19). Become the embodiment of prayer like David who wrote, “I am all prayer” (Psalm 109:4, Tanakh, marginal reading). The apostle James wrote, “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NRSV).

The Seven Characteristics of God

Hebrew	Quality	Strong's Number	Character
CHESED	Loving Kindness	2617	Abraham
GEVURAH	Strength Of Character, Fortitude	1369	Isaac
TIFERET	Beauty, Harmony	8597	Jacob
NETZACH	Victory, Eternity	5331	Moses
HOD (HADAR)	Splendour, Majesty Glory	1926	Aaron
YESOD (YASAD)	Foundation, Beginning	3246	Joseph
MALCHUT	Kingdom, Sovereignty	4438	David

In the book *The Book of Our Heritage*, volume 2, by Eliyahu Kitov, the section on “Nisan – Pesach and the Omer,” we read the following:

“Our sages, who delved into the deeper meanings of the Torah, meanings that are hidden from ordinary understanding, have associated this period of seven weeks with seven attributes which are personified by our great ancestors. These characteristics are essential to the continued existence of the world and help mankind to rise from its lowly state, as the days which elapsed from the time of the Exodus to the giving of the Torah, enabled the Children of Israel to rise from being makers of bricks and garments of straw for Pharaoh, to become a people specially chosen by God, a nation of cohanim, kings and princes, all devoted to His service . . .

“Avraham personifies the virtue of **‘Loving Kindness’**. Through his selfless love of mankind, the whole world was brought nearer to God . . .

“Itzchak personifies **‘Strength Of Character’**, and from him the world learned to fear God. His whole being was devoted to the service of God and to the fear of Him. In this he neither faltered nor flagged . . .

“Yaakov was the personification of **‘Glory’**. All his actions, whether towards God or towards his parents, towards Esav or Lavan, whether they concern the struggle with the Angel, his treatment of his children or his attitude to Pharaoh; all were perfect . . .

“Moshe typifies **‘Eternity’**, the eternity of the Torah. All earthly possessions, those we give to others and those we accept from them, are of transient value. The Torah alone is of permanent worth . . .

“Aharon’s special characteristic was **‘Splendour’** . He loved peace and pursued peace, he loved mankind and brought them near to the Torah. Anyone who saw the splendour and sanctity of Aharon, how he absorbed the teachings of his younger brother and, free from all envy, rejoiced over his greatness, could not help but be influenced by him and his teachings . . .

Yosef typifies that virtue which lies at the **‘Foundation’** of all morality. The righteousness of Yosef’s life was such that he rose to the greatest possible heights of sanctity . . .

“King David typifies **‘Sovereignty’**. It was not David’s wisdom or strength that brought him to kingship, nor did he achieve it simply by inheritance. His kingdom was granted him by the King of Kings. God took him from the sheepfolds, from tending the flocks of lambs, to tend the flock of Israel. God chose him for this task for He knew that even were he to rise to the greatest heights, in his own eyes, he would always be a humble servant. David was of lowly origin, yet all the kings from east and west, came to do him homage. He taught the world that God is the Supreme King. He taught mankind to sing songs of praise to the Master of the Universe . . .

“Each of these seven qualities is closely intertwined with the others and all are inter-dependent. None exists in isolation...Each characteristic has a light of its own which it sheds on the others even while it absorbs their light...Our sages have designated the seven weeks of counting as an opportunity for correcting the various defects of character, by stressing these seven special qualities . . .

“When we count the forty-nine days of the Omer from the second night of the festival, it reminds us that each day marks a step away from the defilement of Egypt, and a step towards spiritual purity. At the end of this period the Israelites were worthy of receiving the Torah . . .” (*The Book of Our Heritage*, volume 2, by Eliyahu Kitov).

A Christian Example

Let’s apply the principle of the Omer count to overcoming the fleshly pulls of human nature and building the fruits of the Spirit of God in our lives.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal.5:19-21, NRSV).

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not

be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God” (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another” (Gal.5:22-26).

<i>Works Of The Flesh To Overcome NIV</i>	<i>Fruit Of The Spirit To Live And Walk By - NIV</i>
<p>SEXUAL IMMORALITY IMPURITY AND DEBAUCHERY IDOLATRY AND WITCHCRAFT HATRED DISCORD JEALOUSY FITS OF RAGE SELFISH AMBITION DISSENSIONS FACTIONS AND ENVY DRUNKENNESS ORGIES AND THE LIKE Those Who Live Like This Will Not Inherit The Kingdom Of God</p>	<p>LOVE JOY PEACE PATIENCE KINDNESS GOODNESS FAITHFULNESS GENTLENESS SELF-CONTROL</p> <p>Against Such Things There Is No Law</p>

“Counting the Omer” toward working on yourself and seeking spiritual perfection has proven to be a tremendous “tool” for walking the Christian life and drawing closer and closer to God who says to us, like Abraham, “Walk before me, and become perfect” (Gen.18:1).

Chapter 8

Astonishing New Revelation on PENTECOST!

There is much more to the observance of Shavuot -- or Pentecost -- than meets the eye at first glance! How should this most mysterious of all the annual Holy Days be observed? Why is it the only holy day whose date is ambiguous in the Scriptures? Why do we "count fifty" in its anticipation?

The festival of Shavuot -- or Pentecost, which means "fiftieth day" -- is the most mysterious of all God's annual holy days. It is cloaked in mystery -- and even the date of its observance is highly controversial!

Why is there more argument over this holy day than any other -- with the possible exception of Passover?

The ancient Sadducees claimed this holy day always fell on a Sunday -- counted fifty days from the weekly Sabbath falling within the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread. The Pharisees, however, claimed it fell on the fiftieth day *after the Passover holy day* -- the first day of Unleavened Bread! Modern end-time remnants of God's Church get all mixed up on both *how to count*, and *when to count from* -- so most of them wind up observing this day on a Sunday every year -- the very day the Roman Catholic Church observes "Whitsunday," their Pentecost, counting fifty days from *Easter Sunday!* The pagan influence of such a practice should be obvious from the very bare facts!

I have written many articles showing that the Sunday-Sadducee reckoning of Pentecost cannot be right -- it is totally in error. To summarize the evidence that this is actual fact, consider the following evidence:

Proof as to the Date of Pentecost

Jesus Christ said the Sadducees were, on the whole, ignorant of the Scriptures. He admonished them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt.22:29). Should God's people then follow the Sadducean reasoning?

Jesus further said we should not look to the Sadducees for guidance in spiritual matters - at no time and in no place did He ever sanction or approve of the Sadducees! But, on the contrary, He plainly said of the Pharisees: "The scribes and *Pharisees* sit in *Moses' seat*: *ALL THEREFORE whatsoever they bid you observe, THAT OBSERVE and do*; but do not ye after their works [their hypocrisy and vain traditions]: for they say [keep the Law], and do not" (Matt.23:2-3).

Jesus plainly showed the Pharisees had authority which came down from Moses' time and authority. They were the official, sanctioned interpreters of the Law. Therefore, when it comes to God's Law, the dates of holy days, and the calendar, their rule was the official word -- except where their determinations clearly differed with and conflicted with the words of Christ Himself! This passage would clearly imply that the Pharisees are the ones we should follow when it comes to observing the date of Pentecost!

In support of this conclusion, the apostle Paul also points out that he himself was a Pharisee, and had been taught "according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3). He had, in fact, been brought up "at the feet of Gamaliel," one of the most highly respected Pharisee "rabbans," or chief rabbis (same verse). Paul later told the church at Philippi, in all candor and honesty, that he was "an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, *blameless*" (Phil.3:5-6).

The only question, then, is *what day did the Pharisees sanction for Pentecost, or Shavuot?*

The answer is very clear in all historical references. The Pharisees counted fifty days from the Passover! Therefore, the correct date for Pentecost would be fifty days from Nisan 16. During ancient times, when the months of the Hebrew year could have 29 or 30 days, therefore, Pentecost could fall on either Sivan 5, 6, or 7! Today, with the Jewish calendar now in use, it always falls on Sivan 6, and whatever day of the week Sivan 6 falls upon!

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, makes this plain. He wrote in *Antiquities of the Jews*: "But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them. And while they suppose it proper to honor God, from whom they obtain this plentiful provision, in the first place, they offer the first fruits of their barley, and that in the manner following: They take a handful of the ears, and dry them, then beat them small, and purge the barley from the bran; they then bring one tenth deal to the altar, to God: and, casting one handful of it upon the fire, they leave the rest for the

use of the priest; and after this it is that they may publicly or privately reap their harvest. They also at this participation of the first-fruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering to God.

"When a week of weeks has passed over after this sacrifice, (which weeks contain forty and nine days,) *on the fiftieth day, which is Pentecost . . .*" (Josephus, *Ant.*, 3,x, 5-6).

Alfred Edersheim, in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, declares, "The expression, 'the morrow after the Sabbath,' has sometimes been misunderstood as implying that the presentation of the so-called 'first sheaf' was to be always made on the day following the weekly Sabbath of the Passover-week. This view, adopted by the 'Boethusians,' and the Sadducees of the time of Christ . . . rests on a misinterpretation of the word 'Sabbath.' As in analogous allusions to the other feasts in the same chapter [Leviticus 23], it means not the weekly Sabbath, but the day of the festival. The testimony of Josephus, Philo, and of Jewish tradition, leaves no room to doubt that in this instance we are to understand by the 'Sabbath' the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it may fall" (p.257).

Finally, as a proof that indeed the fifty days are counted from the day after the Passover holy day, Nisan 15, we can cite the evidence from the Septuagint (LXX), which was translated from the Hebrew into Greek by leading orthodox Jewish scholars around 250 years before the time of Christ. More and more, in recent years, scholars have come to see that the Septuagint is actually based on an ancient version of the Hebrew Scriptures much in use during the time of Christ. In fact, most quotations in the New Testament are from the Septuagint! Since this translation was made long before there were any Sadducees or Pharisees in existence (those schools of religious teaching did not develop until after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, circa 165 B.C.), its authority in this matter is of very ancient authenticity and credibility.

In the passage dealing with the offering of the wave sheaf, and the counting of the days after that till Pentecost, found in Leviticus 23, the Septuagint translates as follows: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the evening times is the Lord's passover. And *on the fifteenth day* of this month is the feast of unleavened bread. And the *first day* shall be a holy convocation to you . . . And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying . . . When ye shall enter into the land which I give you, and reap the harvest of it, then shall ye bring a sheaf, the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest; and he shall lift up the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you. *On the morrow of the FIRST DAY the priest shall lift it up. . . . And ye shall number to yourselves FROM the day after the sabbath, FROM the day on which ye shall offer the sheaf of the heave-offering, SEVEN FULL WEEKS: until the morrow after the last week ye shall number FIFTY DAYS. . .*" (LXX, Lev.23:5-16). The "first day" mentioned in this passage obviously refers to the first day of Unleavened Bread -- Nisan 15. The "morrow" after this day would have to be Nisan 16. Thus the "count" to Shavuot or Pentecost begins Nisan 16. Fifty days later, on the Jewish calendar, brings us to Sivan 6, and whatever day of the week that occurs upon!

So much for the "Sunday" Pentecosters! They are barking up the wrong tree. They have ignored or never looked at all this clear cut evidence which proves them

wrong. Or, on the other hand, they have blinded themselves to the truth in order to maintain their own human (church) "traditions" of men! Jesus Christ says to them, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by *your tradition*? . . . But in *vain* do they *worship me*, teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men*" (Matt.15:3, 9).

Observing Pentecost -- a New Look

But Pentecost is not only observed on the wrong day, by most Messianic Jewish believers, as well as most Christian groups, which claim to observe God's Holy Days, its vital message is also not generally understood, and its observance is done with little or no understanding!

What is the real meaning of this Holy Day? What is its vital significance in God's Plan?

In the Scriptures it is called *Shavuot*, which means "Weeks" (Deut.16:10). That is, it takes its name as "Feast of Weeks" because it culminates the *counting of the weeks* that lead up to it! (Deut.16:9-10).

But how many believers and "Christians," or even Sabbath-keeping Christians, do you know who faithfully "*count the omer*" every year, between Passover and leading up to Pentecost? *How many?* Or, should I say, *how few?*

Indeed, as Jesus Christ/Yeshua Himself said: "Enter ye in at the *strait [narrow] gate*: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it*" (Matt.7:13-14).

One major reason so many Christians are ignorant of these things, and the Biblical commands to "count the omer," and to observe Shavuot/Pentecost, is because of much latent and deeply hidden feelings of anti-Semitism -- hostility toward anything and everything "Jewish" in nature! Yet, Jesus Christ Himself declared, unequivocally, "Salvation is *of the Jews*" (John 4:22).

Shavuot or Pentecost is also called, in the Scriptures, "the day of First-fruits" (Num.28:26), as well as "the feast of harvest, of the first-fruits of thy labours" (Exo.23:16), and "the feast of weeks, of the first-fruits of wheat harvest" (Exo.34:22). Why the emphasis on "first-fruits"?

Few indeed understand it, but Pentecost or Shavuot pictures, in a sublime and amazing way, the Christian's journey through life, leading up to the second coming of the Messiah! Passover pictures our repentance, and forgiveness of sin, and acceptance of Christ as our "sacrificial lamb" -- the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Christ is our "Passover," sacrificed for us (I Cor.5:7). The Israelites' journey out of Egypt -- a type of "sin" and bondage to sinful human nature -- pictures the Christian or Messianic believer's journey as a believer in the Messiah, coming out of sin,

and wickedness, and journeying forward through the desert -- a type of this world's tangles, troubles, trials, and temptations.

Finally, the Israelite's standing before Mount Sinai, as God came down to the mountain-top, and revealed Himself to them, and entered into a binding covenant with them as His people, was also a type -- a type of the second coming of the Messiah in an awesome blaze of glory, to gather His saints, to marry them as His virtuous "bride," and to punish the evil and rebellious nations of the world!

The "First Coming" at Mount Sinai

Among the Jewish people, the festival of Pentecost, or Shavuot, celebrates as well the time of the giving of the Law, the Torah, by God to Israel at Mount Sinai. Israel left Egypt on the 15th of Nisan, at the full moon at the middle of the month (Num.33:2).

On the third month, which is Sivan, on the third day of the month, they came to the "wilderness of Sinai" (Exo.19:3). On this day Moses went up to God on the mount, and God offered to make Israel His special covenant people (v.3-6), and the people agreed (v.7-8). The next day Moses returned the people's words to the Lord, and God told Moses, "Go unto the people, and sanctify them *today and tomorrow*, and let them wash their clothes, *and be ready against the third day: for the third day* the LORD will come down *in the sight of all the people* upon mount Sinai" (v.9-11).

Careful calculation shows that the "third day" here would have been Sivan 6 -- the very day of Pentecost! God came down, in glory, and met with the people, and gave them His inexpressible, glorious Covenant, summarized in the Ten Commandments -- and they became His official "bride," entering a marriage covenant with them (Jeremiah 3:14). Therefore, Pentecost is connected in the Scriptures with ancient Israel receiving the Law, and becoming God's "bride," and the Lord Himself descending from heaven with great glory!

Moses recorded of this spectacular event: "And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because *the LORD descended upon it in FIRE*: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And *when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder . . . And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount*" (Exo.19:18-20).

We tend to read over these Scriptures and fail to register their awesome portent!

This awesome event was a very *type of the second coming of CHRIST the Messiah!*

Notice! God came down to earth -- to the top of a mountain! At this time, He made His people Israel His "bride." They entered a unique, special covenant! But later, Israel broke that covenant, and transgressed God's commandments. In fact, within forty days they turned to idolatry, and commanded Aaron to fashion them a golden calf to worship, thinking Moses had disappeared, and perhaps been eaten by a wild animal upon

mount Sinai, or had fallen into a crevasse and perished. So much for their commitment to their recent "betrothal" to God!

Because of this wickedness, when Moses returned from communing with God on the top of mount Sinai, he broke the tablets containing the Ten "Devarim" or Ten Words of God -- commonly called the "Ten commandments." If he had delivered the tablets to Israel, in their naked, exposed, wicked state, they would have been guilty of adultery. Moses knew they were not worthy of such a wedding gift. So when he returned to the mountain top, for another forty days, beginning Elul 1, He again communed with God, and God gave him another set of tablets -- two stones containing the Ten commandments. This time, Israel was faithful. When Moses returned from the mountain top, the date was Tishri 10 -- the very day of the Feast of Yom Kippur -- the Day of Atonement! And on this date, therefore, God "consummated" His marriage with Israel of old.

What does this have to do with Christians, and believers in the Messiah?

Pentecost and the Bride and Redemption

The Feast of Pentecost is a *Type of Redemption!* The counting of fifty days from Passover to Pentecost is a type of the life of overcoming and enduring to the end. For the Jewish people, observant Jews, this period of time has always represented a period of maturing relationship between Israel and God, individually. It represents a time of spiritual growth and maturation to spiritual adulthood. It also represents a period of romance and spiritual courtship. God in essence "rescues" His bride-to-be from slavery, brings her through the wilderness with many miracles, and cleans and purifies her, removing all blemishes and spots and wrinkles, preparing her for the ultimate "marriage" covenant at Sinai. *This was all a TYPE!*

In truth, our acceptance of Christ represented our "betrothal" to Him, as part of His bride-to-be, spiritually. The Church, in Scripture, is referred to as the "bride of Christ." Paul says to the Corinthians, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have *espoused you to one husband*, that I may present you as a *chaste virgin to Christ*" (II Cor.11:2). God says, "And I will betroth thee to me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD" (Hosea 2:19-20).

Christ is going to present a wife to Himself, "in her virginity" (Lev.21:13). As Paul wrote, Christ Jesus "loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph.4:25-27).

Therefore, when the Messiah returns from heaven, He will take the saints -- the true believers in Him, who follow and obey Him -- as His bride forever! At His coming, John tells us in the book of Revelation, He will take His bride to Himself: "Alleluia: for

the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the *marriage of the Lamb and his wife is come, and his wife hath made herself READY*. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Rev.19:6-9).

This same bride, the "first-fruits" to God and to the Lamb, are pictured also in Revelation 14, where we read: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads (the name YAHVEH, or in the Hebrew, ]. . . . And they sung as it were a new song before the throne . . . and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were *redeemed from the earth*. These are they which are *not defiled* with women; and they are [spiritual] virgins. *These are they which follow the Lamb* whithersoever he goeth. *These were REDEEMED from among men, BEING THE FIRSTFRUITS UNTO GOD, and to the Lamb*. And in their mouth was found *no guile*: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev.14:1-5).

This is the picture of the true BRIDE OF CHRIST, ready to meet Him when He comes! Will you be among them? Are you becoming purified -- made white? Are you being clothed with righteousness -- which is keeping the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172)? Are you a spiritual "virgin," uncontaminated by the pagan teachings and falsehoods of this world, and its Babylonian whorish religious "traditions"? Are you also "without guile"? Think about it!

These are the "first-fruits"!

These are the ones pictured by the harvest festival of Pentecost -- the feast of Weeks!

Parable of the Ten Virgins

When God came down to mount Sinai, in blazing glory and power, the trumpet blew with a resounding sound, growing louder and louder! It, also, was a "type."

When the Messiah comes for His bride, pictured by Pentecost, we read:

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto *ten virgins*, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out [or, "going out"]. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that buy and sell, and buy for yourselves.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; *and they that were READY went with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*

"Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh"* (Matthew 25:1-13).

Let us examine this parable. Again, the church is compared to a BRIDE -- ten virgins, who are awaiting their Lord's return. The wise ones are prepared and ready -- they have "oil" in their lamps. The oil is a type of God's Holy Spirit, that flows through the candelabra -- the seven pipes of the menorah, a type of God's Church (Zech.4:2-6; Rev.1:20).

When the bridegroom returns, a "cry" is made. "The bridegroom cometh!" What will that coming be like?

The Awesome Second Coming

Let us notice what happens when Christ Jesus/Yeshua the Messiah returns to this earth. A few key Scriptures tell us the story:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, *with a shout, with the VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL, and with the trumpet of God:* and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess.4:14-17).

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be CHANGED, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMPET: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed, for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Cor.15:51-52).

"Immediately *AFTER the TRIBULATION of those days*, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven [comets, meteor showers], and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: *AND THEN shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven:* and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and *they shall SEE the Son of man COMING in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* And he shall send his angels, with a GREAT SOUND OF A TRUMPET, and they shall GATHER TOGETHER HIS ELECT from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other [that is, from around the world!]" (Matt.24:29-31).

Let us notice carefully, now! Pentecost pictures both the first coming of God, to mount Sinai, in glory and splendor, with earthquakes and fire, and the long blasting sound of a piercing trumpet (Exodus 19:18-20). But it also pictures the great SECOND coming of Christ, the Messiah, in awesome glory and splendor, to judge and reward His saints, who will be gathered to meet Him in the air, from around the world, as He returns "like fire" -- as the "lightning" -- "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth

even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt.24:27).

Before both comings is the loud clarion call of a TRUMPET! At both comings, God comes down TO EARTH, and stands upon a mountain top! (see Exo.19:20; Zech.14:4; Acts 1:9-11). At His first coming, to mount Sinai,, the people SAW Him coming (Exo.19:11). At His second coming, "Behold, he cometh with clouds, *and every eye shall see him*" (Rev.1:7).

Will Christ Return in a Secret "Rapture"?

Now, before going further, notice seven things about the second coming of the Messiah. Many people today believe that when He comes, He will secretly "spirit away" all the true Christians to heaven in a massive "rapture" attack. That is, Christians around the world will suddenly disappear, no matter where they are or what they are doing. Christian pilots will disappear from airplanes, Christian motorists will suddenly disappear from behind the steering wheel of automobiles, or even "big rigs," causing devastating auto accidents. Christian surgeons will suddenly disappear, while performing open heart surgery -- and Christian nurses, and so forth. You get the idea.

But is this idea true?

The lessons of Pentecost prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that these modern day "Christian" stories and ideas are nothing but *fables and myths!* The Scriptures do not allow for any "secret rapture" of the saints before the Great Tribulation! Let's study and review the actual Biblical evidence on this matter!

Seven Proofs the Secret Rapture is Ridiculous

Here are seven powerful proofs that the commonly held and virtually idolized "rapture theory" is totally untrue:

1) First of all, *the descent of God to the top of mount Sinai clearly did not involve or describe SOME "SECRET RAPTURE" of the nation of Israel -- yet it was a TYPE of the Second Coming of Christ!* When God came down to mount Sinai, He came down ONCE! And He came in glorious power and splendor (Exodus 19:9-11).

Even so, when Christ returns to this earth, He is coming ONCE MORE -- NOT TWICE MORE! And when He comes, He is coming in GLORY, and splendor! Matthew tells us: "When the Son of man shall come in *his glory, and all the holy angels with him . . .*" (Matt.25:31).

2) Secondly, when He comes, His coming will be accompanied by a TRUMPET BLAST, even as His coming to mount Sinai was accompanied by a loud trumpet blast! Again, *there is no way this can be SECRET!* *The blast of the trumpet is meant to be HEARD!* *It is a clarion call to ANNOUNCE the presence of the KING MESSIAH!* (I Cor.15:51-52; I Thess.4:14-17).

3) When the Messiah comes, His coming will be accompanied with the LOUD VOICE of a SHOUTING ARCHANGEL! *Again, this is not some mystical "silent" shout, or a whisper of some sort! A SHOUT is a SHOUT!* A shout is the lifting up of the voice to a high powerful pitch, and much volume and noise! A "shout" is meant to be heard! (I Thess.4:14-17).

4) Finally, when the Messiah comes, He will then -- at that time -- *gather* His saints, the living and the dead, who will rise to meet Him in the air -- and then return to earth with His as His feet stand upon the Mount of Olives! This means that the saints are *on the earth, when He comes -- they are NOT up in heaven!* *When He comes, He sends His angels to GATHER them from the four winds, from every direction, on the earth!* (Matt.24:31).

5) When Christ Messiah comes, He will not come "part way" -- and then return up to heaven with His saints! Rather, when He comes, He will come ALL THE WAY DOWN TO EARTH -- and will STAND upon a mountain top, even as He did at Sinai! There was no "dipsy doodle" coming to earth at that time -- nor will there be in the future. Christ will not come like a "yo yo" -- going down, up and down again! Rather, as the Scriptures tell us:

"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. And I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle . . . Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. *And his feet shall STAND IN THAT DAY UPON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES*, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof . . ." (Zech.14:1-4).

Notice! When the Messiah comes, His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives *on that very day of His coming! Not weeks, months, or years later!* Isn't this PLAIN?

6) Further evidence of this is given in the New Testament book of Acts, where the gospel writer Luke tells us of the ascension of Christ into heaven, in full view of the disciples:

"And when he [Christ] had spoken all these things, *WHILE THEY BEHELD, HE WAS TAKEN UP; and a CLOUD received him out of their sight.* And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN*" (Acts 1:9-11).

Now let's get this, and get it good! Was Jesus secretly "raptured" out of their sight, invisibly? NO! Not at all! He was taken up into heaven *IN A CLOUD*, and they SAW Him ascending, as they WATCHED with their eyes gazing steadfastly on Him, as He disappeared into the remote heavens! And take careful note! The two angels told them that when He returns, *it will be in the VERY SAME MANNER as they SAW Him go into heaven!*

Clearly, then, Jesus will NOT come in some clandestine, secret, invisible manner in which nobody will notice or see him. Rather, the WHOLE WORLD WILL SEE HIM -- AND WILL SHAKE WITH HORROR AND FEAR!

7) Finally, there is one respect in which Christ's coming will be "like a thief in the night" (Rev.16:15). That is, in regard to the TIME of His coming! Although most thieves who come at night, seek to hide their activity from prying eyes, when Jesus Christ returns He will not "hide" Himself at all. But His coming will be "like a thief" in the respect that *no one will know PRECISELY WHEN HE IS GOING TO COME!*

Jesus Himself said, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken up. *Therefore be ye also READY: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh*" (Matt.24:42-44).

Pentecost, the only Festival of God which has a "movable date," is the perfect picture and type of the "second coming of Christ," because -- like Pentecost, in the ancient Jewish calendar -- the second coming of Christ could occur on a number of different dates, and we do not know for certain exactly when He will return!

Thus, even in this respect, Pentecost, or "Shavuot," the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of heightening expectation and anticipation, as we count down the days and weeks before it comes, Pentecost is a unique symbol of the second coming of the Messiah!

The Early and Latter Rains

The early church observed the Feast of Pentecost. The apostle Paul bode his friends farewell at Ephesus, in Asia Minor, saying, "I must by all means keep this *Feast [Pentecost]* that cometh in Jerusalem" (Acts 18:21). We read later, that Paul "hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the *day of Pentecost*" (Acts 20:16). Why the urgency? Why Pentecost? Obviously, because Paul desired to observe this Holy Day in Jerusalem, at the Temple!

Interestingly, the early church actually began on the Holy Day of Pentecost. We read in Acts, chapter 1, that Jesus Christ told the disciples before He parted, and was taken up into heaven, that they should "*NOT depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence*" (Acts 1:4-5).

A review of the dates shows that this statement was made on the 27th of Iyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar (corresponding to our May 13, this year). It was the 40th day since Christ had first appeared to the disciples following His resurrection (Acts 1:3). Thus, since Pentecost would come on Sivan 6th, this was eight days before

Pentecost! (the month Iyar has 29 days). Was Jesus telling His disciples, in effect, to wait until Pentecost?

In Acts, chapter 2, we find a most remarkable occurrence, fulfilling the promise and prophecy of Christ. Notice!

"And when the day of Pentecost was FULLY COME, they were all with one accord in one place [together]. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it 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. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in his own tongue, wherein we were born? . . . And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:1-12).

On the first Pentecost, in Moses' day, when God came down on top of mount Sinai, and delivered the Decalogue to mankind, His appearance was accompanied with "fire" (Exo.19:18). And on this first Pentecost following the ascension of Christ the Messiah into heaven, there was again a mighty display of power from heaven -- tongues which appeared as "like as of fire," and a rushing mighty wind, like a tornado (Acts 2:2-3).

In his sermon on that day, Peter explained the phenomenon which had just occurred to the assembled multitude, saying, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel; *And it shall come to pass, in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of MY SPIRIT upon all flesh:* and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens *I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.* And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapours of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16-18).

What Peter quoted was a prophecy by the prophet Joel, about 800 years before that time, which foretold the very end of the age. Yet God inspired Peter to draw from that prophecy to explain the miraculous events of that Pentecost! God's Spirit was poured out on His people then, even as it will be poured out once more *during our end-time generation, before the coming of the dreadful and awesome "Day of the Lord"!*

That event was the "early rain" of God's Spirit. But soon, now, we are going to see and witness and *experience* the fulfillment of the "*LATTER RAIN*" of God's Holy Spirit! The prophet Hosea foretold:

"Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After TWO DAYS will he revive us: in the THIRD DAY he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; *and he shall COME unto us, as the RAIN, as the LATTER and FORMER RAIN unto the earth*" (Hosea 6:1-3).

What is this talking about? A "day" with God is as a thousand years (II Pet.3:8-10). The Jewish nation was smitten when it rejected the Messiah in 30 A.D., and He was crucified to fulfill Biblical prophecy (Dan.9:24-26). Two days is 2,000 years. This is a prophecy that after about two millennia, or 2,000 years, from the time God began punishing His people for their rebellion and rejection of the Messiah, they would begin to return to Him, and confess their sins, and at that time He would begin to intervene, to heal their wounds, and to bind them up! *This is speaking of OUR AGE, TODAY!* According to Jewish eschatology, from 4 B.C. to 1997, is the "age of the Messiah," or "Messianic age." At the end of this period, in the beginning of the "third day," or third thousand year period, "we will LIVE in his sight." *This speaks of the second coming of the Messiah!*

Note that the prophecy goes on to point out that this is discussing the "going forth of the LORD" -- that is, of His coming to earth from heaven! And notice, it says He shall "come to us" TWICE -- "as the rain, *as the latter and former rain UNTO THE EARTH*" (Hosea 6:33).

Christ came as the "former rain" in 27-30 A.D. Upon His ascension into heaven, on the following day of Pentecost, He sent the *former rain* -- His *Holy Spirit* -- upon His disciples!

Christ is coming once again -- this time as the "latter rain." And prior to His coming, He will once again send forth the "rain" of His *Holy Spirit* upon His disciples! He will once again send His Holy Spirit with POWER upon His true disciples!

Luke records that before Christ departed to heaven, He told His disciples:

"Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: *but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be ENDUED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH*" (Luke 24:46-49).

Luke shows that they waited eight days. And on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples with enormous power and miraculous energy!

But Jesus gave the disciples final instructions, which also apply to us, of this generation. He declared: "*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive POWER, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: And ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all*

Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

The time of the "latter rain" is almost upon us!

The Real Meaning of Pentecost

According to Jewish tradition, Pentecost is the day the fruit of trees is judged in heaven. Thus it pictures the judgment of the "first-fruits." True believers and followers of the Messiah are the "first-fruits" to God of all the people of the world (see James 1:18; Rom.16:5; Rom.8:9-10, 23). We are to be "bearing fruit" (John 15:16). We will be judged according to our fruitfulness!

We read in *The Jewish Festivals: History and Observance*, by Hayyim Schauss, of Pentecost, or Shavuot:

"It is the festival when home and synagogue are decked in green, and all the world is fragrant with plants and flowers, for it occurs in the most beautiful and balmiest season of the year. . . .

"The word *Shavuot* means weeks, and was therefore used to designate the festival that ended the weeks of the grain harvest. . . The grain harvest started with the reaping of the barley and after seven weeks ended with the cutting of the wheat, an occasion for a festive holiday. . . .

"The beginning of the grain harvest was marked by the sacrifice at the sanctuary, of the *omer*, the first sheave of the newly cut barley; fifty days later, at the close of the harvest period, two loaves of bread, baked from the wheat of the new crop, were offered as a sacrifice. This bread-offering was called 'the first-fruits of the wheat harvest,' and the festival was therefore also called *Yom ha-Bikkurim*, the day of offering the first loaves of the new crop to God" (p.86-87).

The festival of Shavuot is the only Jewish festival "for which there is *no fixed date*, and it was therefore a matter of great discussion in the period of the Second Temple" (*ibid.*).

In principle, however, we see that this Feast must occur *at the end of barley harvest*, when the "first-fruits" of the harvest, known as the "omer," have been completed -- and it cannot occur until the first of the wheat harvest is ready, so that the two loaves of the "first-fruits" of wheat may be offered. This period of fifty days allows for the full maturation of the barley harvest, and also for the beginning of the wheat harvest.

What lesson can we learn from this? Christ, the Messiah, cannot return to this earth *until the first-fruits of the spiritual crop are ready!* That is, His return, which is symbolized by the Feast of Pentecost, cannot occur **UNTIL THE BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY!** (Rev.19:7)!

When the harvest is ready, in the eyes of the Father, the Messiah will return -- with shouts of acclamation and joy!

Hayyim Schauss goes on:

"According to the Pharisees, therefore, it was necessary to offer the *omer* on the sixteenth day of Nisan; Shavuot, therefore, coming on the sixth day of Sivan.

"The Pharisaic tendency became standardized as the procedure for Orthodox Judaism, and to this very day Orthodox Jews begin 'counting' *S'firah*, on the second day of Pesach. The *S'firah* is a form of benediction in connection with which the fifty days between the supposed offering of the *omer* and the observance of Shavuot are counted. Daily, after the evening prayers, the days and weeks are counted off and the fiftieth day is Shavuot" (p.88).

He continues:

"It appears that as far back as the days of the second Temple, Shavuot was a twofold festival. It was the festival of the wheat harvest, when a sacrifice was offered from the new wheat crop; it was also considered the observance of the pact entered into between God and mankind. . . . The festival is celebrated, according to [the book of Jubilees], as a symbol of the pact God made with Noah, in which he promised no future general flood, is renewed each year" (p.89).

Does the observance of Pentecost go back to the covenant God made with Noah never again to flood the whole earth with a Deluge, in punishment for sins? It is a fact that the observance of the day became closely interlinked with the giving of the Torah, because the Law of God was given on mount Sinai upon that very day -- Sivan 6 -- and the marriage covenant God entered into with Israel at that time.

Pentecost and the Book of Jubilees

However, the book of Jubilees does claim that originally the observance of this Holy Day does go back to Noah's time -- and even before! From the time of Creation itself, God said that He established the sun, moon and stars in the heavens to be "for signs, and for seasons (Hebrew *moadim*, meaning also "fixed times" or "festivals"), and for days, and years" (Gen.1:14). We read in the book of Jubilees:

"And he gave to Noah and his sons a sign that there should not again be a deluge over the earth; he placed his bow in the clouds as a sign of the eternal covenant that no water of the deluge should again come over the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth.

"On this account it is also ordained and written on the tablets of heaven that the *celebration of the festival of weeks* should be in this month, once a year, for a renewed covenant in each year and year. And during the time this festival was being celebrated in heaven, from the days of creation to the days of Noah . . . and Noah and his sons observed it . . . until the time when Noah died. But his children violated it until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. But Abraham alone observed it, and Isaac and Jacob observed it, for these are his children. . . . and in thy [Moses'] day the children of Israel forgot it until I renewed it for them on this mountain. And thou command the children of Israel that they should observe this festival in all their generations as a commandment for them one day in the year, in this month, they shall celebrate this festival. For it is the festival of weeks and is

a festival of first-fruits; for this festival is of a double nature and double kind, as it is written and engraved concerning its celebration" (Jubilees 6:14-19).

The book of Jubilees was written about a century before the time of Christ, and seems to reflect a great deal of oral history and ancient Jewish beliefs handed down from generation to generation. It provides an astonishing glimpse into the hidden history of God's Holy Days.

Notice that the book of Jubilees emphasizes the "covenantal" aspect of the feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost! This covenantal concept is the real grist -- the true inner depth-- of this awesome Holy Day!

Pentecost -- the Day of the Covenant

As the Israelites witnessed God's own Presence at mount Sinai, and heard the living God speak to them directly, from the mountain, we can only faintly imagine their emotions, their feelings, their transformation in the presence of the Almighty. Says Joel Ziff in *Mirrors in Time*, "The Israelites fully and directly experienced God's Essence and Presence at Mount Sinai. In this respect, as we hear the Word of God, our old understanding dies, creating a possibility for new learning" (p.111).

Says Ziff:

"This change in consciousness is symbolically noted in the description of how the Israelites 'heard' the lightning and 'saw' the thunder at Sinai, as it says in the Torah: 'All the people *saw the sounds*' (Exodus 20:13). They now can see and hear what was previously unknown, hidden, and heard only from a distance" (p.111).

How is it that the people "saw the thunderings," and "the noise of the trumpets" (Exodus 10:18)? Can we really ever "see" a "sound"? Actually, the answer is yes -- when in a higher state of consciousness, attuned to the presence of God, and His Spirit, a combined form of seeing and hearing can occur -- a deeper awareness of sight and sound. The senses can become integrated in a unique way, leading to greater awareness and perceptivity. Writes Avraham Yaakov Finkel in *The Essence of the Holy Days*,

"It occurs in an individual who is capable of rising above the limitations of the senses. Such a person can see sound and hear a vision. A prophet can do this. When receiving divine prophecy, the prophet divests himself of his corporeality, and his sense of hearing and vision blend into one. At Mount Sinai, after undergoing fifty days of spiritual refinement, the children of Israel attained the level of prophecy. They 'saw the sounds,' and thereby the belief in God was anchored in their hearts" (p.188).

Pentecost and Transcendental Change

The children of Israel were so attuned to God, at that moment, that when God asked them if they would obey His covenant, they replied in unison, together, "*Naaseh venishma!*" That is, "We will do and we will hear" (Exodus 24:7). Consider this! They

were so close to God, at that moment, that there was no hesitancy or doubt in their minds. They not only agreed to "do" God's Law, and keep His commandments, *but they agreed to DO it even before HEARING it!* They said "we will *do* it," and then said, afterward, "we will *hear* it"! This exemplified real faith and commitment!

The "Pentecost experience" had already begun to *change* them, and their entire outlook on life. One may ask, How can you *do* something before you even *hear* it? Avraham Finkel states:

"Look at it this way. For example, if you want to open a door, you certainly don't have to tell your hand, 'Turn the knob.' Your head and your mind encompass all your limbs, and if your mind wants to take a certain action, your hand instinctively senses this without being told specifically.

"At the Giving of the Torah, there existed a *perfect union* between the Holy One, blessed is He, and the people of Israel. God was the Head of the nation. Consequently, when God wanted Israel to accept the Torah, the entire nation sensed what was asked of them. There was no need to teach them the specific details of the Torah" (p.196).

In this state of close union with God, they accepted His Torah in faith -- in complete submission and commitment to do His will. They did not have to have it all spelled out first!

Says Joel Ziff on the Sinai experience:

"The experience at Mount Sinai is described using the image of a wedding in which God is the groom standing under the marriage canopy -- the *chuppah* -- with the Israelites as the bride. God and Israel make an *eternal commitment* to one another. God gives the Torah, and the Israelites pledge to adhere to its precepts. *A wedding represents the BEGINNING of a relationship.* Although vows are made, the young couple must still struggle to translate those vows into reality, overcoming differences and difficulties. In the same way, the commitment made at Sinai also represents a beginning of relationship. There are many difficulties to overcome: shortly after Moses ascends Mount Sinai, the Israelites make the golden calf, losing trust and violating their commitment.

"This beginning is also symbolized by the offering of the first ripe fruits that begins at this time For this reason, Shavuot is also known as *Yom HaBikkurim*, the day of the first fruits. We not only harvest the agricultural produce; we also begin to nourish ourselves with the fruits of our learning.

"This same quality of commitment is reflected in the story of Ruth, which is read during the Shavuot service. Ruth, the ancestor of King David, is respected because of her commitment and devotion in caring for her mother-in-law Naomi. . . .

"The images of Shavuot allow us to receive a personal revelation that transforms our understanding, help us clarify a vision of our future, and motivate us to make a commitment to manifest that vision" (Ziff, *Mirrors in Time*, p.113).

Pentecost, then, represents a "peak experience." It is or should be a true epiphany -- a time of tremendous closeness to God and His revelation. It ought to be a transforming experience -- involving commitment, rededication, renewal of spiritual vows to God, devotion, worship, and reverence. It should be a profound experience,

causing us to reach deep down inside ourselves, and truly humbling ourselves before our Mighty God and Everlasting Father, and our Saviour and Messiah.

After working on ourselves for forty nine days, and stripping off the impurities of "Egypt" and the sinful inclinations, and the *yetzer hara*, the tendencies and impulses to sin and do evil, we stand before God -- ready for a transforming experience -- ready to receive a renewal and an infusion of His Holy Spirit, that will transform us spiritually.

Writes Joel Ziff of this principle:

"On the fiftieth day [Pentecost], an integration occurs that incorporates and transcends the previous learning. We surrender what we think we know to a higher understanding. We link the spiritual Essence to the material level of existence. At this time, all the parts are integrated, subsumed into a larger oneness. An integration occurs in which the whole is larger than the sum of its parts" (p.115).

Obviously, there is far more to Pentecost than most of us have remotely imagined!

As we observe this Holy Day of God, we should reflect on our own covenantal relationship with God, and Christ, our Messiah. We should also reflect on the other covenantal relationships in our lives -- husband and wife, parents and children. We should look upon Pentecost as a special day of commitment and covenant renewal, every year.

Pentecost holds the promise of being a key to the transformation process in our lives -- from carnal, earthly, to spiritual, divine. It represents the high peak of revelation and religious experience, contact with God on a person level, in a higher plane.

The apostle Paul says, accordingly, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be ye not conformed to this world, but *BE YE TRANSFORMED by the RENEWING of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

Final Preparations

Among the Jews, especially those from eastern Europe, the whole period from Sivan 1, the festival of the New Moon, to Sivan 6, is replete with joy. The New Moon is a semi-festival in itself, and from it there are only four days until the Feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost. Thus the four in-between days, also, become "minor holidays." Children only attend school for half a day; the three days before Shavuot are "marked off" as the days the Israelites were forbidden to approach the holy mountain, Sinai, and the only remaining day, Sivan 2, was considered significant because on that same day of the week Yom Kippur is bound to fall.

Writes Rabbi Irving Greenburg in *The Jewish Way*:

"As one approaches the event of Revelation [Sinai-Giving of the Torah-Shavuot],

preparation intensifies. The three days before Shavuot are known as the *shloshet yemay hagbalah*, the three boundary days. In the biblical account, Moses instructed the people to use the three days before the Sinai theophany for purification. The boundary days act out the historical image as if the contemporary Jews are encamped three days from Sinai. People get haircuts, buy new clothes, and mourning ceases in anticipation of the great day. Weddings, another form of covenantal relationship, are scheduled during this period.

"The holiday is ushered in at nightfall on the fiftieth day. Since Shavuot occurs in the summertime, the stars come out quite late. Thus, the dictum of the Torah, 'You shall count . . . seven *complete* weeks,' is fulfilled" (p.82).

As Pentecost approaches, the weather is mild. Says Schauss:

"The sun pours oceans of light warmth upon the town. The trees are green with leaves and the fields are gay with flowers. The grass is fragrant and makes the heart feel light and summery. All await the beautiful festival, when Jewish houses are decked in green, when dairy dishes grace every Jewish table

"Even in school the instruction is festive and breathes the spirit of the holiday. The children are taught the Book of Ruth. So clear is the imagery thereof that they are carried back to the days of old, when Jews reaped the harvest of the fields of their own land" (p.90-91).

The story of Ruth is especially appropriate for Pentecost for many reasons. It was at Pentecost that Boaz "married" Ruth. It was the beginning of wheat harvest, and Ruth went out into the fields to glean from the harvest of Boaz, her next-of-kinsman. She proposed to him the eve of Pentecost, and he accepted, according to Jewish tradition. The Scriptures clearly reveal it was the beginning of barley harvest when Ruth began gleaning (Ruth 1:22). She continued reaping until the end of barley harvest (Ruth 2:21), which puts the story at the point of Pentecost! Therefore, the connection is obvious (Ruth 2:6-11). The story of Ruth pictures the marriage of the Church, typified by Ruth, the Gentile convert, and Jesus Christ, the Messiah, typified by Boaz, of the tribe of Judah.

According to Jewish legend, Pentecost also pictures the day of the dragon's conflict, when the Messiah will destroy Leviathan, the crooked serpent (see Isaiah 27:1). On Pentecost, the words of *Akdomus*, a beautiful Aramaic ode composed by the Chazan of Worms in the eleventh century, are chanted in the synagogue, presenting a vivid picture of the day when the coming Messiah will have arrived, ushering in a time of eternal peace and bliss on earth.

Says Hayyim Schauss, as the ode *Akdomus* is chanted, the children see "the golden thrones, approached by seven stairs; seated on the thrones are the saints, gleaming and shining like the stars of heaven. Above them are spread canopies of light, and below ripple streams of fragrant balsam. There is no end to the joy and happiness of the saints. They dance in Paradise, arm-in-arm with God himself. He entertains them with a mammoth spectacle, arranged especially for them, the combat between the Leviathan and the Behemoth" (p.91-92).

Schauss goes on:

"The teacher tells of the feast which God will prepare after the coming of the Messiah. . . . He pictures the saints seated around a table made of precious stones, eating the flesh of the Leviathan and the Behemoth" (p.92).

How interesting! In the book of Revelation we read of a similar "feast," which will be given after the coming of the Messiah. The apostle John records:

"Blessed are they which are called unto the MARRIAGE SUPPER of the Lamb" (Rev.19:9).

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and the flesh of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great" (Revelation 19:17-18).

What a Feast that is going to be!

The All-Night Vigil on Pentecost Eve

The fact that Jesus Christ told the disciples to "wait" in Jerusalem, and to "tarry" there, until they were to be empowered by God from on high, by receiving the Holy Spirit -- the Spirit of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim.1:6-7) -- is highly significant, because the Jews have an age-old tradition about staying up all night, on the eve of Pentecost, to study the Laws of God, to get in "final preparation" for the "Revelation" of God -- and meeting with God -- which symbolically is to occur on "Pentecost."

The disciples were waiting, no doubt in much anticipation -- both for the coming of Pentecost, as they were faithfully "counting the omer" each day during the seven weeks of seven days each, or 49 days -- and for the expectation of the coming "Promise from on high" -- the Holy Spirit! Was their vigil also connected with the Jewish practice of the intensifying preparation for Pentecost, as the Holy Day approached?

Especially the evening before the great day of the Feast, this preparation among God's people intensifies, as the anticipation builds to a climax. Says Rabbi Irving Greenburg:

"There is a custom to stay awake the entire night of Shavuot in preparation for the Revelation. The kabbalists saw this as time to prepare the bride's (Israel's) trousseau for the wedding (with God) in the morning. What is the preparation during this long night? It is the study of Torah, preparing a Jew for what he or she is about to receive. . . .

"Many congregations today carry on the tradition of all-night study by scheduling various classes and study groups to make the learning more meaningful. Good all-night sessions are an exciting, if tiring, off-beat learning experience. Those who stay up all night pray the morning service immediately at daybreak -- carrying through the symbolic acting out of 'eagerness' and anticipation to receive the Revelation. The service, which is full of joy and celebration, includes

the chanting of the entire Hallel as on Passover" (*The Jewish Way*, p.82-83).

In *The Three Festivals*, by Rabbi Yosef Stern, we discover:

"Throughout the world Jews observe the centuries-old custom of conducting an all-night vigil dedicated to Torah learning on the first night of *Shavuos*. . . One explanation for this tradition is that it compensates for a tragic error committed by the Jewish nation as they were about to receive the *Torah* at Sinai: On the very morning *Hashem* came to give the *Torah*, they overslept! *Hashem* had to arouse them and remind them that it was time to receive the Ten Commandments. To atone for this blunder, Jews have accepted upon themselves the custom of remaining awake all night."

One of the reasons for the all-nighter, according to Rabbi Stern, is that it is believed that "the study of the Mosaic books during the night will hasten the arrival of the *Messiah*." According to Stern, the forty-nine days from Passover to Pentecost represent a time of "spiritual purification (*taharah*) that grows in intensity during the seven weeks of *sefirah*" until it reaches a climax on the night of Pentecost, or Shavuot (p.203). During these forty-nine days, we eliminate and get rid of the forty-nine levels or degrees of spiritual contamination and degradation we have accumulated. Thus these are forty-nine days representing forty-nine levels of spiritual purity. Each day we jettison another piece of impurity, another contaminant, another vice, until, after forty-nine days -- seven times seven -- we reach true purity, maturity, and perfection!

Says Rabbi Stern:

"During these days and weeks, our personal efforts to cleanse ourselves of spiritual impurities are critical. However, if we make sincere efforts during *sefirah*, we can be assured that *Hashem* [God] will shower us with an outpouring of *taharah* on the night of *Shavuos*, as the Sages said (*Shabbos* 104a) someone who comes to purify himself will receive [Divine] help" (p.204).

This "Divine help" is described as an out-pouring of *taharah* -- *divine purification*. This help comes to us through the Holy Spirit of God! Jesus Christ declared:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

"Howbeit when it, the Spirit of truth, is come, it will guide you into all truth: for it shall not speak of itself; but whatsoever it shall hear, that shall it speak; and it will shew you things to come" (John 16:13).

Rabbi Stern says that this *taharah* that descends and comes upon us, as we study Torah and the truths of God's Word, is exceedingly fragile. In his words:

"The *Zohar* also reminds us that the *taharah* that descends on those who immerse themselves in *Torah* study on this night is a fragile thing. Unless we take active steps to preserve it throughout the year we cannot be assured that it will remain

with us. . . . Through our efforts during the seven weeks of *sefirah* we merit the creation of a 'pure heart' for ourselves. However, it takes the all-night vigilance of Shavuot to give it permanence and to turn it into a 'steadfast spirit' that will endure throughout the year" (Stern, *The Three Festivals*, p.204).

Although the Scriptures do not tell us that we must stay up all night, on the eve of Pentecost, to observe this day, this custom seems to go back to earliest times. And Jesus Christ did tell us, "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do" (Matt.23:2-3). The staying up all night practice is *not* a commandment for God's people. Nevertheless, it certainly would not be wrong to do it, as a final "preparation" for the Day of "Revelation" -- Pentecost!

After counting the "omer" for forty nine days, faithfully, it seems fitting that this "spiritual odyssey," or journey, should be capped off with a special celebration -- a special night of "final preparation" for FINAL EXAMS, as it were -- a night devoted to Bible study, prayer, and meditation, drawing closer to God in preparation for the ULTIMATE PENTECOST PERSPECTIVE -- the soon arrival of our Messianic King and Husband

-- Yeshua Notzri -- Jesus the Nazarene!

In college, or at the university, students often "cram" for finals during the weeks immediately before final exams are to occur. They study extra hard, burn the midnight oil, and sometimes pull an "all-nighter" in order to get that final "term paper" prepared and written and presented on time. They review their class notes, assignments, and previous tests, so that they can be as prepared as possible for "finals."

So it should be with Pentecost. Have we ever looked at it that way before?

Pentecost, in typology, is the time of Final Exams -- the day we will be "judged," and evaluated, by our Teacher, and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Do you want to flunk the test?

When Christ returns at the seventh and final trumpet (Rev.11:15), He will *judge the saints!* John writes, "And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the *time of the dead, that they should be JUDGED, and that thou shouldest give REWARD unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, both small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth*" (Revelation 11:18).

The apostle Paul wrote:

"According to the grace of God, which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have LAID THE FOUNDATION, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed HOW he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that [which] is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; *every man's work shall be made manifest:* for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any

man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Corinthians 3:10-15).

Paul also wrote, saying, "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for *we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Romans 14:9-13).

It is not my purpose, in this article, to condemn those who do not see the full story behind Pentecost -- or the full light God has shed upon this wonderful Feast day. But for those of us who do understand, let's observe this Festival with new joy, new meaning, new zeal, renewed dedication and commitment, and new vigilance!

Chapter 9

What Is the True Meaning and Symbolism of PENTECOST?

Not only do thousands observe Pentecost or Shavuot on the wrong day, but millions don't have any true understanding of its deep rich symbolical meaning and spiritual significance! Here the awesome and incredible truth is made crystal clear and plain as day!

Millions of people don't understand the true meaning of the Pentecost holy day, because of one of two reasons: The Jews observe the correct day, but don't understand its real significance because they don't recognize the true Messiah -- and this day is symbolical of the Messiah and His coming in a very unique way! Thousands of others don't understand the true meaning of this day because, although they understand who is the true Messiah, *they are ignorant of the true day on which to observe Pentecost, and its vital linkage with the Passover season!*

But God has revealed the awesome meaning of this holy day during these "last days." Let's take a good look at the mystery of Pentecost -- the "Festival of Shavuot" or "Weeks" -- also called *Yom Ha'Bikkurim*, or "Day of The Firstfruits."

Going Through the Desert Wilderness

To understand Pentecost, then, let's notice it's direct relationship to Passover. We read that on the day after the "sabbath" -- the high holy day of Passover, the 15th of Nisan -- the people were to bring an "omer" or sheaf of firstfruits of the barley harvest to the priest, to be waved for them (Lev.23:11). And from that day, which would be the 16th of Nisan, they were to "count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week -- fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, *as firstfruits to the LORD*" (Lev.23:15-17, Tanakh).

Leading up to Pentecost, then, was a period of 49 days -- seven full weeks -- counted from the day after Passover. Passover pictures the sacrificial lamb of God shedding His blood in atonement for the sins of each sacrificer, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; I Cor.5:7). Putting leaven out of our homes for the seven days during the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures putting sin out of our lives. On the seventh day of unleavened bread, Israel came through the Red Sea in a miraculous deliverance from Egypt, a type of "sin." This pictures the "baptism" of every repentant sinner who confesses his sins and acknowledges Christ as the Messiah and Saviour (I Cor.10:1-4).

The forty-nine day journey through the wilderness pictures the Christian's life of overcoming, rooting out sin, and conquering the fleshly impulses -- the "evil impulses" or *yetzer ha'ra* of human nature (Jer.17:9; Rom.8:7). The number "49" of course is significant: It is 7 X 7, or perfection perfected. Thus we are to have our spiritual character "perfected" during this life of overcoming, so that we can be worthy to stand before the Son of man at His coming!

What, then, does all this lead up to? It leads up to the "fiftieth day" -- that is, Pentecost!

The Two Loaves and the Bread of Life

Pentecost occurs at the culmination of the march through the wilderness of 7 X 7 days -- a "perfect" or "complete" march. The seven weeks picture the seven stages or thresholds of "overcoming" sin and developing the character and divine nature of God -- replacing human nature with its earthly pulls with DIVINE nature (Gal.4:19; II Pet.1:4). What is to happen, then, on the "fiftieth day" -- the "Feast of Weeks"? This Feast could be described as the "FEAST of the Weeks of Overcoming"! It is the PRESENT -- the GIFT of God that He gives to His people who have obeyed His commandments, and served Him faithfully!

The Feast of Pentecost, therefore, pictures SALVATION -- and the GIFT of becoming ONE with God -- spiritual ONENESS!

Notice! This feast pictures the harvest of the "firstfruits to the LORD" (Lev.23:17). On this Festival day two loaves of beautiful bread are offered to God, as wave offerings, made of the finest flour (v.17). What do these two loaves of bread picture?

Jesus Christ said, "I am that bread of life" (John 6:48), and, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51). He commands His true followers to eat of His "bread" -- which is His body, broken for us (Matt.26:26). In so doing, we become like Him -- and receive of His spiritual essence. Therefore, the apostle Paul writes, speaking of the Church of God: "The bread which we brake, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are ONE BREAD, and one body: for we are all

partakers of that ONE BREAD" (I Cor.10:16-17).

In other words, Jesus Christ is pictured in the Scriptures as being a loaf of bread -- the righteous loaf that came down from heaven. But the Church also is pictured as being ONE BREAD -- that is, ONE LOAF -- also. Thus we have two loaves -- One is Christ, and the other is the Church!

Some might object, saying, "But these two loaves are leavened, and leaven is a type of sin. So how can they represent Christ and the Church?"

It is true that "leaven" in the Bible sometimes represents sin, because of the way in which leaven works. Paul says, "A little leaven leaveneth a whole lump" (Gal.5:9). In this passage he is talking about false teachings, that begin to influence and change a person's behavior for the worse.

Jesus Christ told His disciples, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt.16:6). The disciples understood how "he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the DOCTRINE of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (v.12).

Leaven, in these cases, is a type of a corrupting and perverting influence -- something that changes the nature of a product for the worse! But leaven is also a type of GOD'S KINGDOM -- and a type of God's Holy Spirit -- which changes a person's nature for the better!

Jesus Christ also taught: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto LEAVEN, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the *whole was leavened*" (Matt.13:33). Like the leaven which renders mere flour into bread dough, and causes it to rise up, and become delicious and tasty, so the Spirit of God changes our human nature, and causes it to transform into God's Holy and righteous divine nature! Jesus Christ would hardly have said, "The kingdom of heaven is like SIN," would He? Obviously, in this case "leaven" does not picture "sin" at all!

Therefore, the leavened loaves offered to God on Pentecost in no way represent loaves of bread saturated with the leaven of SIN! That would be ridiculous! God would never accept an offering transformed by the influences of SIN. Rather, these loaves contain leaven, which represents the transforming quality of God's Holy Spirit!

"The Firstfruits of God"

Notice that the two loaves of leavened bread offered on Pentecost are also called "the FIRSTFRUITS to the LORD" (Lev.23:17). Who or what, then, are the "firstfruits"?

The apostle Paul points out that as true followers of Christ, we are they "which have the FIRSTFRUITS of the Spirit" (Rom.8:23). The apostle James tells us, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of FIRSTFRUITS

of his creatures" (James 1:17). Also, John in the book of Revelation, describes the Church of God -- true believers in the Messiah -- as spiritual "virgins," who have not been defiled by the "women" -- the false churches -- of this paganized world. John says, of them, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were REDEEMED from among men, BEING THE *FIRSTFRUITS UNTO GOD and to the Lamb*" (Rev.14:1-4).

Thus the Church of God, true Christians, are the "firstfruits" -- and also are "one bread."

But in First Corinthians, the apostle Paul says further: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become THE FIRSTFRUITS [Greek, literally, *firstfruit, singular*] of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: *CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS [Greek, singular, 'FIRSTFRUIT']*; afterward they that are Christ's AT HIS COMING" (I Cor.15:20-23). When are the "firstfruits" going to be presented to Christ? "AT HIS COMING!"

Do we get it then? WE ARE THE "FIRSTFRUITS," pictured by the two loaves of bread offered to God on the day of Pentecost! One loaf pictures Christ Himself! The other loaf pictures the Bride of Christ, the Church of God! Pentecost, then, pictures the great celestial WEDDING DAY -- THE WEDDING CELEBRATION -- OF THE MESSIAH AND HIS BRIDE, SPIRITUAL "ISRAEL"!

"A Wedding Coming Soon"

About 20 years ago, or so, a young couple at Ambassador College -- Matthew and Sharron Kalliman -- sang a number of "folk-songs," spiritual melodies, which Matthew had written himself, and performed in church services and at the Feast of Tabernacles, accompanied by guitars, and sometimes additional musical instruments. At that time we did a record of some of Matthew's songs, based on the seven days of Creation and the plan of God. One of the beautiful songs was titled "A Wedding Coming Soon," about the future wedding of Christ and the Church of God (the true saints of God).

This wedding is described in Revelation 19. We read: Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for *the MARRIAGE of the Lamb is come, and his WIFE hath made herself ready*. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev.19:6-9).

It is, of course, interesting to note that ancient Israel also entered into a "wedding" contract with God at Mount Sinai, on the very day of Pentecost, when they came out of Egypt under Moses. God Himself, the One who became the Messiah, came down to the top of Mount Sinai, and "revealed" Himself to Israel, and spoke the Ten Commandments in their hearing (Exo.19:20; 20:1-17). This was surely a momentous event. This was a

special "revelation" of God to mankind. It occurred in the desert. We read: "And all the people SAW the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the NOISE of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking . . ." (v.18).

Notice that the people "SAW" the thunderings, and the "noise" of the trumpet. How do you "SEE" thunderings and noise? Generally speaking, we "hear" thunder with our ears; you cannot "see" it. Likewise, we "hear" noises with our ears, which can hear only a small portion of the entire spectrum of the band of "sound waves." But we do not "see" noises or other sounds. Yet the Scriptures are very explicit, here. God is telling us something special. To "see" sound implies that the Israelites received a special REVELATION from God -- they were able to do that which is not normal, according to the senses of the flesh. Their awareness was heightened, and their sensory receptacles were decloaked, and they were able to SEE sounds, thunderings, and lightnings -- they had a unique awareness of these sound waves. They experienced a sort of enlightened and mystical epiphany. This occurred on Pentecost, at Mount Sinai, when God spoke to mankind!

Pentecost and the Marriage Covenant

Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God, and agreed to be obedient to Him (Exodus 24:3, 7). This was followed by a magnificent "Feast" when they were enabled and permitted to "see God" and not be killed (vs.10-11). This was a MARRIAGE covenant! Jeremiah the prophet records the words of God: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for *I am married unto you*" (Jer.3:14).

Interestingly, then, Pentecost itself pictures the MARRIAGE of the Bride and the Lamb of God -- the Messiah! He was also the One who married ancient Israel, in a physical covenant, called the Old Covenant. But Israel rebelled, and He divorced her (Jer.3:8,9-11, 20). He then died for His bride, in order to redeem her to Himself, to pay the penalty of her sins.

At the second coming of the Messiah, He will MARRY His new bride, Redeemed Israel (Gal.6:16). He will inaugurate the NEW COVENANT, which is also a Marriage Covenant, only this is not a physical covenant alone with physical promises of health and wealth and prosperity; this is a spiritual covenant with better promises, of spiritual inheritance, eternal life, and salvation, and becoming a very son of God through the resurrection of the dead (see Heb.8: 7-10; Rom.8:16-18; Heb.11:39-40).

Mount Sinai and Mount Zion

The Old Covenant was made and ratified at Mount Sinai, and was a marriage covenant (Gal.4:22-25). The New Covenant will be concluded with the Church at the second coming of Christ, when He sets foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech.14:4; Acts 1:9-10), and returns to Mount Zion.

The Old Covenant was of the flesh, and compares to Rahab, and the child Ishmael, the child of the flesh (Gal.4:24-25), which generates bondage and slavery. But

the New Covenant is spiritual, and compares to Isaac, the child of promise, and faith, and brings true freedom through the Messiah, of whom Isaac was a "type" -- "Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all" (Gal.4:26-27). We in the Church are not children of the "bondwoman," but of the free (Gal.4:28-31).

The apostle Paul further compares, or contrasts, these two covenants, Mount Sinai with Mount Zion, in the book of Hebrews. He writes: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, not unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more . . . But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN [that is, "firstfruits"!], *which are written in heaven [our names are inscribed in the Book of Life in heaven!]*, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the *mediator of the NEW COVENANT*, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Heb.12:18-25).

The Revelation at Mount Sinai

In his book *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, Joel Ziff writes about the holy day of Shavuot or Pentecost:

"The revelation at Mount Sinai was not only a mystical, intellectual, and inner experience. God's Presence manifests itself in concrete and practical form, in the Ten Commandments engraved in stone, and in the Torah with the 613 *mitzvot*, action imperatives that guide and inform every aspect of life. According to Shneur Zalman [the early 19th century leader of Chabad hasidism], at the time of revelation on Mount Sinai, the light of God's Essence, the *Ayn Sof*, the Infinite, is manifest through the Torah. In the same way, the personal revelation we experience is not limited to a cognitive discovery that remains within us. It translates into new rules and guidelines for ourselves in how to approach our situation more constructively. Understanding informs action" (p.112).

Each year, as we observe the day of Pentecost, after having "counted the Omer" for forty-nine days, and achieving a pinnacle of "perfection," and arrive at the foot of "Sinai," we should prepare ourselves, as our ancestors did, for the moment of "Revelation." We should rehearse the giving of the Law, study over the Ten Commandments, and the Torah, and reflect on what this day means -- a day of MARRIAGE to God, and of COVENANT, agreeing to obey God and keep all His commandments -- as we enter into a NEW RELATIONSHIP typified by this day -- the relationship of BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM!

Ziff portrays this truth from his own understanding of this day, as a Jew, in this way:

"The experience at Mount Sinai is described using the image of a WEDDING in which God is the GROOM standing under the marriage canopy -- the *chuppah* -- with the Israelites as the BRIDE. God and Israel make AN ETERNAL COMMIT-

MENT TO ONE ANOTHER. God gives the Torah, and the Israelites pledge to adhere to its precepts. A WEDDING REPRESENTS THE BEGINNING OF A RELATIONSHIP. Although vows are made, the young couple must still struggle to TRANSLATE those vows into reality, overcoming differences and difficulties. In the same way, the commitment made at Sinai also represents *a beginning of relationship*. There are many difficulties to overcome: shortly after Moses ascends Mount Sinai, the Israelites make the golden calf, losing trust and violating their commitment" (p.113).

Notice four imperatives here -- four golden truths. First, the great occasion at Mount Sinai is compared to a WEDDING -- a marriage ceremony. The bride and groom exchange their "I do's," and the "bride" willingly agrees to "obey" her husband -- to keep His commandments. The couple "exchange vows." He agrees to protect and provide for her, and to love her and cherish her, through all times, good and bad, and to love her forever; she agrees to be faithful to Him, to obey Him, to love Him, and to endure life's trials with Him, despite distress, tests, problems, difficulties, discouragements, hard times, or whatever.

Secondly, this wedding represents a new relationship -- a new COMMITMENT on the part of both parties. This is an eternal, everlasting "commitment."

Thirdly, this wedding constitutes a TRANSFORMING experience -- it is a NEW RELATIONSHIP! Two who were formerly separate now "tie the knot" and become ONE! There is a NEW ONENESS that is instituted. Even as Adam took Eve as his wife, and "they twain" became "ONE FLESH" (Matt.19:5-6; Gen.2:21-24), even so Christ and the Church will become "ONE SPIRIT" -- that is, One, in spirit Essence, in Spiritual Unity.

Even so, as Paul wrote, in this life we are to be TRANSFORMED until we are ready to become ONE with Christ! He wrote, "And be not conformed to this world: but *be ye transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom.12:2).

Paul likewise wrote to the Ephesians, "That ye put off concerning the former conduct the OLD man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and *be RENEWED in the spirit of your mind*; and that ye put on the NEW man, which after God is CREATED in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph.4:22-24).

To the Colossians, Paul writes: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on THE NEW MAN, which is *renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*" (Col.3:9-10).

As the people of God, we are being changed -- transformed -- into the very IMAGE and spiritual likeness of Jesus Christ!

Fourthly, this new relationship also bespeaks A NEW BEGINNING -- A NEW AWARENESS -- A NEW CREATION!

"The Eighth Day of Passover"

This truth is manifest in the fact that Pentecost is the fiftieth day -- the final day of a Jubilee cycle of days (compare Lev.25). The fiftieth day represents the Jubilee year, the year of Freedom and Liberty and Release! "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of Jubilee to sound . . . And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and PROCLAIM LIBERTY throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Lev.25:9-10). Pentecost, which by definition means "the fiftieth day," is the JUBILEE DAY -- the day of true freedom, guaranteed by the Laws of God, and the Covenantal Power of God!

But, being the END of one cycle, the day of Pentecost is also known as "the eighth day" of Passover -- and the conclusion of the Passover festival season. Even as "Shemini Atzeret" is the "Eighth Day" and follows the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, so Pentecost or Shavuot is the "eighth day" of the Passover festival. The number "eight" is very significant. A week has "seven" days, and the first day of the next week is known as the "eighth day." Thus "eight" signifies a NEW BEGINNING, or the beginning of a new cycle, a new phase, a NEW CREATION. There were "eight" souls on Noah's ark that were saved, to enter a New World after the Deluge (I Pet.3:20).

The number "eight" in Hebrew *sh'moneh*, from the root *shah'meyn*, meaning "to make fat," "cover with fat," "to super-abound." As a participle, it means "one who abounds in strength." As a noun, it is "superabundant fertility," "oil," etc. As a numeral, then, it is the super-abundant number! As seven represents the day of completion, then eight, which follows seven, means "over and above perfect completion," or "the first of a new series." (See *Number in Scripture*, by E. W. Bullinger, p.196).

Thus the marriage of Christ and His Bride, the Church, constitutes a NEW BEGINNING -- a NEW relationship! And the whole earth will experience a NEW BEGINNING -- the Messianic Kingdom or Age -- which is THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

Says Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time*:

"This beginning is also symbolized by the offering of the FIRST RIPE FRUITS that begins at this time; The day of FIRST-FRUITS is when you bring a new grain offering to God as part of your Shavuot festival. It shall be a sacred holiday to you when you may not do any mundane work' (Numbers 28:26).

"For this reason, Shavuot is also known as *Yom HaBikkurim*, the day of the firstfruits. We not only harvest the agricultural produce; we also begin to nourish ourselves with the fruit of our learning.

"This same quality of *commitment* is reflected in the story of Ruth, which is read during the Shavuot service. Ruth, the ancestor of King David, is respected because of her commitment and devotion in carrying for her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth, whose husband had died, returns with Naomi to the land of Israel rather than stay in the land of her birth, Midian.

"The images of Shavuot allow us to receive a personal revelation that *transforms our understanding*, help us to clarify a vision of our future, and motivate us to make

a commitment to manifest that vision" (p.113).

On the Feast day of Shavuot, a new harvest begins -- the wheat harvest. On this day the "first ripe fruits" of the harvest are brought to the priests. On this day then the "spring" harvest, which occurs with the "firstfruits," is depicted -- that is, the harvest of true Christians and followers of God, *who are "harvested" at the second coming of Christ!*

The spring harvest from Passover till Pentecost was the barley harvest. But now the two loaves of bread are offered, at the beginning of the wheat harvest, symbolizing the perfected Christ and the perfected Church, being presented before God the Father, and "married" by Him to each other.

The Wheat Harvest -- A New Season!

The two loaves of wheat bread also represent a further symbol of transcendent, integrative learning. As we grow in understanding, and spiritual knowledge, we become more useful and valuable to God. Wheat is considered the greatest, most nourishing and balanced food for humans. In this depiction, we are symbolized by the fullness of the finest wheat bread, made from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest!

Writes Joel Ziff:

"The bread offering of Shavuot signals the manifestation of the quality of 'wheat,' integrative and intuitive learning in contrast to the barley offering of the *omer*, which nourishes the 'animal' soul associated with the *Sefirot*.

Connection with the Archtypal Father

This quality of learning is also symbolically described as a connection with God as Father in contrast to the image of the Divine Mother associated with the counting of the *omer*. The mother's role in nourishing the child with her milk is direct and clear. The Father's role is more difficult to comprehend, associated traditionally with the role as economic provider. The mother offers the infant milk, and the father puts bread on the table. . . . The child is too young to understand logically, but *wheat* gives the infant a knowledge that transcends what can be understood through the logical cognitive processes. The infant feels the connection and expresses it. The infant longs for the father, has trouble separating from the father, and cries when the father leaves . . . This knowledge is more powerful than the logical process. *It is this aspect of God that we experience at Shavuot.*

". . . . At Mount Sinai, we make connection with God as Divine Father, receiving a nourishment that is complex and less obvious. . .

"Shneur Zalman associates the bread offering with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet using the mystical process known as *gematria* for making connections through numerology. The Hebrew word for *wheat*, *chittah*, adds up to twenty-two, the same as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Once we have the basic sounds of the vowels associated with the time of the counting of the *omer*, we can combine them with letters to produce words, sentences, and conversations, the traffic of relationship. The letters represent the *transcendent experience of Shavuot and the giving of the Torah*" (*Mirrors in Time*, p.115-117).

Notice! The counting of the Omer, in the desert, is one plane of relationship, which connects us with God as our Provider, who sent the manna in the wilderness. But when the Israelites reached the Mountain of Sinai, a whole new relationship commenced. They saw God then as Father. The basic building blocks they learned in the wilderness, by counting the Omer (learning how to count -- a rudimentary concept), is now replaced by a transcendent new relationship -- typified by the outpouring of God's Voice -- His Words -- the Torah, which incorporates all His law and commandments. This new relationship is compared to firstfruits of "wheat," whereas the desert wilderness experience is compared to the firstfruits of "barley." As wheat transcends barley, in richness and desirability, so our new relationship with God transcends our old relationship. As "wheat," we are on a much higher, newer level -- a higher and more exalted "plane" of existence -- a much greater REVELATION of God!

Integrative and Synergistic CHANGE

Joel Ziff compares it to the driving of a car. First a young person learns each isolated aspect of driving -- starting, steering, acceleration, braking, turning, watching the rear view mirror, backing up, etc., etc. It is a long series of movements and adjustments, which must learn to be coordinated together. But eventually, when that learning process is complete, we arrive at the time when we can put it all together. Once we practice and learn each separate skill, we finally come to the point where we can simply "drive." We put it all together, and as we become more skilled, it becomes more intuitive, and synergistic. We develop a "feel" for it, which we no longer have to be consciously aware of. It becomes like "habit." All the little individual "steps" are integrated into a larger "whole."

Says Joel Ziff:

"One's competence increases as each of the component skills is mastered. Eventually, a breakthrough occurs: all the pieces become integrated, without focusing on each as an individual skill. The prior learning dissolves into a new synergy, a whole greater than the parts, a more intuitive, nonlinear integration. The step-by-step, left-hemisphere [of the brain] learning from the time of the counting of the *omer* provides a foundation that is integrated and TRANSCENDED by the intuitive synergistic learning of SHAVUOT" (p.118).

Thus the Feast of Shavuot pictures a rapid and accelerated CHANGE -- a new dimension of learning -- a new level of experience -- a new plane of existence -- a new platform of reality. It represents not merely a quantitative "leap" from that of the counting of the Omer, but a *qualitative jump* in existential reality! Whereas the counting of the Omer represents the human being working on overcoming the animal lusts and instincts, and the evil impulses (*yetzer ha'ra*) within human nature, and the trials and learning processes of this present life; the day of Shavuot, Pentecost, is a day of "Revelation" -- a day of Transcendence -- a day picturing the CHANGE that will occur within our very natures at the coming of Jesus Christ to take His Bride to Himself, and to inaugurate the Kingdom of God!

Joel Ziff explains:

"Insight is meaningless if it does not translate into CHANGE in what we do and how we respond. For example, in working with addictions, twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous stress the need for making a *commitment to change*. There is also a recognition that commitment does not instantly translate into behavior. For this reason, the recovering addict is enjoined to take '*one day at a time*.' Sometimes, one is not able to sustain the commitment, falls back into old addictive behavior, and must *begin once more in the struggle for recovery*.

"In the same way, for each of us, as we develop our understanding of new situations and how to cope with them, *we arrive at a point where we are able to make a commitment to CHANGE [i.e., Shavuot]. Although this is an important step, we are ONLY BEGINNING: much effort is needed to translate that commitment into reality*" (Joel Ziff, *Mirrors in Time*, p.120-121).

The Feast of Pentecost, then, is involved with CHANGE -- commitment to obey God, and commitment to keep His laws faithfully, and commitment to CHANGE our behavior. Shavuot represents the BEGINNING of a commitment; it represents the *beginning of a process*.

Ziff continues:

"In this same way, as each of us experiences a moment of REVELATION [such as is depicted by the revelation at Mount Sinai], we then need to make a commitment to that vision, so that the thought and idea can be translated into reality. We spend the rest of the cycle of the year IN THAT PROCESS [the process of CHANGING]" (p.121).

Shavuot, which means "Weeks," or Pentecost, which means "Fiftieth Day," both represent the concept of *commitment to CHANGE*. This holy day of God represents a great day of CHANGE! It soars above the mundane life of dreary and difficult "overcoming," and fighting the pulls of the world and human nature, depicted by the forty-nine days (seven weeks) of counting the Omer. It lifts one above the mundane to the celestial; from the mud to the stars; from the earthly to the divine; from going one-on-one in battling one's problems, to going face to face in experiencing the Revelation of GOD!

A Great "CHANGE" That Is Coming

This picture of "change" is depicted in the New Testament. We read of the day Pentecost pictures -- the day the Bridegroom meets His Bride -- which is the time of the second coming of Christ, the "revelation" of Yeshua the Messiah. Paul wrote, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall *be revealed [i.e., His "revelation" as at Pentecost!]* from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess.1:7-8).

Peter speaks of Christ's coming as a great "Revelation," also -- "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you *at the revelation* of Jesus Christ" (I Pet.1:13).

At this spectacular revelation, we -- God's true people, who obey Him and keep His commandments -- will be CHANGED! Paul wrote, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead [in Christ] shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be CHANGED. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Cor.15:51-53).

The end of the "weeks" we come to Shavuot, which depicts this incredible CHANGE which will occur at the second coming of Christ, when the "firstfruits" are CHANGED and GLORIFIED and given eternal life! Paul says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the *image of the heavenly*" (I Cor.15:41-49).

Paul also wrote of this incredible day and what it pictures: "For our conversation [Greek, "citizenship"] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall CHANGE our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil.3:20-21). John puts it this way: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the *children of God* . . . and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that *when he is revealed, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, for we shall see Him as He is*" (I John 3:1-2).

The patriarch Job, in the Old Testament, wrote: "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my CHANGE come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to [finish] the work of thine hands" (Job 14:14-15).

A New Understanding of Pentecost

When we consider the deep significance and meaning of the day of Pentecost, the day of "firstfruits," and how it fits into God's overall plan, it should fill us with exuberance and anticipation -- exhilaration and excitement!

Think about it! This day does not merely describe the coming of God's Holy Spirit upon the Church of God, in 30 A.D. It does not merely represent the beginning of the Church "age" when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church for the first time (see Acts 2). Rather, it is the FOCAL POINT of the entire spring festival season, the CULMINATION of events that transpire from Passover until Pentecost!

Pentecost, as the "little Jubilee" -- being the "fiftieth day" -- is a type of the day of

the coming of Messiah, on the "Great Jubilee," at the last trumpet, when the "great trumpet shall be blown" (Isaiah 27:13). It typifies the harvesting of the "first-fruits" unto God, that is, the Church of God down through the ages.

As the time of the giving of the Law, and the old covenant, a marriage covenant between God and Israel, Pentecost also pictures the "marriage" of Christ to the Church, which will occur at His second coming. And it depicts the day when the Church will be glorified, and be given incorruptible bodies, and immortality, and eternal life, in the God Family -- a fitting glorious Bride for a loving and glorious Groom! It depicts the day of our "epiphany" -- our complete CHANGE from mortal to immortal, from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit, from human to DIVINE!

Pentecost is also the day in which God finally "REVEALED" Himself to Israel, amidst thunder and lightning and many signs and wonders, after the Passover deliverance, and the journey through the wilderness. Even so, it also depicts that coming day when CHRIST will once again be "revealed from heaven," in awesome power and glory.

How many of us understand this dramatic scenario? How many understand that Pentecost is not just a "forgotten feast," that has no special meaning or importance? It is one of the three pilgrimage festivals. And as the conclusion of the Passover season, it has very special meaning to those of us who are true Christians, depicting the day of our salvation, the return of Christ as the Bridegroom, and the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride! Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

Chapter 10

PENTECOST --

The Final Analysis

The correct counting of Pentecost remains a volatile issue in the minds of some who insist that when all is said and done, Pentecost must be counted from the weekly Sabbath, not the 16th of Nisan, as the Jews have done for millennia. They insist that the word translated "Sabbath" in Leviticus 23:16 cannot refer to "week," or be translated that way. This, they claim, is "fatal" to any argument that we should count from Nisan 16. What is the truth? Can we determine this matter, once and for all? Are YOU willing to look into this subject, personally, and OBEY GOD?

The single verse of Leviticus 23:16 has been used by proponents of the Sadducean Pentecost counting method to justify their "Sunday" or even a "Monday" Pentecost. This, they claim, is their "conclusive proof" that Pentecost should not be counted from the day after the fixed first annual holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

According to these people, the Hebrew word *shabbat* means exclusively the seventh day of rest -- and can never mean "week." For example, if you look up the word "Sabbath" in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, you will find that in the overwhelming number of cases it refers to the weekly Sabbath. On a few occasions it refers to a high holy day or annual Sabbath. In a few cases, it refers to the sabbath-year of rest, every seven years.

Now, some Bible translations translate it as "week" or "weeks" in Leviticus 23:15-16, but others do not. Merely quoting Bible translations, in this case, does not prove one way or the other how the word ought to be translated. According to critics, those who translate the word as "week" or "weeks" are simply wrong!

Were the Pharisees Wrong?

The Pharisees, whom Jesus Christ described as the guardians of the law of God (Matt. 23:23), understood the "Sabbath" of Leviticus 23:11 to refer to the first day of Passover or the first day of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Nisan, which was a high Sabbath day of rest (*Ency. Judaica*, vol. 14, pp. 13-19).

The apostle Paul who was also a Pharisee before his conversion, still acknowledged that he was a "Pharisee" years after his conversion. He cried out to a council of religious leaders, approximately 60 A-D., 26 years after his conversion in 34 A-D., "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6). Paul also said that as a Pharisee he was, "as touching the law, a Pharisee," and that as "touching the righteousness which is in the law, BLAMELESS" (Phil 3:5-6).

Does this sound as if the Pharisees were wrong in the way they counted Pentecost?

If the Pharisees were wrong in the way they counted Pentecost, since they counted from the first day after the annual Sabbath, as Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century shows beyond any doubt, then Jesus Christ, the Messiah, our Savior, would not have said to His disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe, and DO. . ." (Matt 23:2-3).

Consider for a moment. The Pharisees very plainly said that people should count the days till Pentecost beginning with the day after the 15th of Nisan -- beginning with the 16th of Nisan. Jesus said that His followers should DO whatever the Pharisees bid them observe, concerning the law of God. Therefore, He was telling them very plainly that they, too, should count Pentecost from the 16th of Nisan!

According to some modern churches, therefore, Jesus either made a mistake, or He contradicted Himself! Because they teach that Pentecost must be counted from the day after the WEEKLY SABBATH, not the day after the HIGH HOLY DAY that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread!

Who is right? These "self-appointed experts"? Or Jesus Christ, and the Pharisees, whose teaching in this regard He endorsed and supported?

These things are not mere "academic" issues of nothing but intellectual importance. These things involve OBEDIENCE TO THE LAWS OF GOD! We are either RIGHT, or we are WRONG! There is no "middle ground" on this issue. There is no room for compromise!

Though there are some who accuse me of being a "false prophet" because of my strong teachings concerning the laws of God, particularly the presentation I make concerning Passover and Pentecost, the facts are plain enough if we are willing to look at them with an objective, unbiased approach. Why do some insist, stubbornly, on "getting around" these plain, "Thus-saith-the-Lord" Scriptures? I must shake my head with

amazement, and sadness, and even a degree of anger when I see the stubborn, stiff-necked, self-righteous refusal on the part of some to sincerely look into and investigate this question with an open mind and honest heart!

The Hebrew Word "Shabbat"

Obviously, Jesus would not tell us in one place that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, and that we should DO what they tell us to observe, and then turn around and contradict Himself somewhere else! Our Messiah was, and is, PERFECT! He did not he, or make mistakes. He was a perfect "sin offering" for us, without blemish, without spot, without sin! (Heb. 5:9, 9:14, 26-28).

What, then, about the word "Sabbath" which some make such a huge point over? Can we prove that it also means "week" or "weeks"? What is the truth? The fact that in the vast majority of cases, a word is used one way, does not mean that it cannot sometimes have another meaning. A scientist studying "bats," small nocturnal flying mammals, would most often be thinking of them when using the word. However, a baseball player in the major leagues, upon hearing the word "bat," would almost always think immediately of a baseball bat, a slender, carved piece of wood with a handle, smoothly sanded and polished, which he uses to hit the ball. One word -- two totally different meanings!

Now, as I have shown in other places, one way we can come to understand the Biblical usage of word is by studying related passages of Scripture, where the same subject is being discussed. Let us do this, for a moment, concerning the word "SABBATH" as used in Leviticus 23:11, and 15-16.

First, notice what Moses was inspired to write in Leviticus, word for word:

"And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the SABBATH, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; SEVEN SABBATHS shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the SEVENTH SABBATH shall ye number fifty days. . ." (Lev. 23:15-16, KJV).

Now the Jewish Scriptures, called the *Tanakh*, render these verses this way:

"And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering -- the day after the Sabbath you shall count off seven WEEKS. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the SEVENTH WEEK fifty days (The Holy Scriptures, the New Jewish Publication Society Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text).

Obviously, the King James Version says one thing; the official Jewish Scriptures, based on the Massoretic or Traditional Text of the Old Testament, says clearly "weeks" and "WEEK" when the King James Version says "Sabbath" and "Sabbaths.

If it were merely a matter of opinion, we could chose whoever we wanted to

believe, I suppose. But human opinion has nothing to do with it!

Many Bible scholars and translators admit that "weeks" and "week" could be used in these verses -- as well as "sabbath" and "sabbaths." Some few today however, claim that ONLY "Sabbath" and "Sabbaths" can be used -- that "weeks" and "week" are totally incorrect! Do such men have even a shred of evidence to prove their contention, which flies in the face of all scholarship?

Years ago, when Herbert W. Armstrong wrote a booklet entitled "Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days -- Which?", he admitted in that booklet:

"It is of very grave importance that we figure the right day. This day, and this day only, is made holy by the Eternal Creator. Suppose at the same time the Church of God was founded, the apostles had miscounted. And 'when the day of Pentecost was fully come' (Acts 2:1) they, instead of being all with one accord in one place were in discord, some having observed the day preceding, and some waiting until the following day!" (p.24).

That is a good question! CHAOS would have been the result! Confusion!

Pentecost -- "Feast of WEEKS"

The parallel Scripture which tells us HOW to count "Pentecost," is found in Deuteronomy 16:9. We read:

"SEVEN WEEKS [שבוע, SHAVUAH] shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the SEVEN WEEKS from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the FEAST OF WEEKS. . ." (Deut. 16.9-10, KJV).

Says the Jewish Holy Scriptures, the *Tanakh*:

"You shall count off SEVEN WEEKS; start to count the SEVEN WEEKS when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the FEAST OF WEEKS to the Lord you God" (same verses).

It should be perfectly obvious to anyone, I believe, that these verses clearly show that the "seven Sabbaths" referred to in Leviticus 23:15, and the "seventh Sabbath" actually refer to SEVEN WEEKS, and the SEVENTH WEEK! This passage of holy Scripture, inspired by God in the book of Deuteronomy, leaves us no room for doubt or questions. It PLAINLY says "SEVEN WEEKS"! The word translated "WEEKS" here is shavuah, and all commentators admit and agree that it always refers to WEEK and WEEKS, and not the Sabbath day!

Gesenius' Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, says of the Hebrew word "SHABBAT" the following:

"Shabbat -- 1) to rest, to keep as a day of rest . . . The primary idea appears to be that of to sit down, to sit still . . . 2) to cease, to desist, to leave off. . . 3) to celebrate a Sabbath. . .

"Shabbath, const. state . . . 1) Sabbath, the seventh day of the week . . . 2) PERHAPS A WEEK, LIKE THE SYRIAC AND GREEK (Matt. 28: 1) Lev. 23:15; compare Deut. 16:9." (p. 804).

This same authoritative lexicon says of the word "shavua," in Deuteronomy 16:9:

"Shavua. Dan. 9:27, Gen. 29:27, should be rendered the week of this woman) . . . a hebdomad, septenary number . . . 1) of days, a week, Gen. 29:27, 28. Daniel 10:2, 'through three weeks' . . . the feast of (seven) weeks, Pentecost, so called from the seven weeks which were counted from the Passover to this festival, Deut. 16:9 . . ." (p 800).

This word *always* means weeks and never means "Sabbath." Therefore, when this word, and the word "Sabbath," are used in precisely the same way, in similar sentences, it is very obvious to all but the most blind that "shabbat" in the Hebrew can also refer to a "week," or "weeks." As Gesenius points out, in both the Syriac and Greek languages, the word "Sabbath" can also be translated "week."

For example, in Matthew 28.1, we read, "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the WEEK. . ." The Greek word for "WEEK" here is *SABBATON*, *THE VERY SAME WORD TRANSLATED "SABBATH"* in the first part of this very verse!

The emphasis of Pentecost is on "weeks. " It is called in the Scriptures, the "Feast of Weeks." The emphasis is not on "Sabbath days," at all, but WEEKS! As God instructed the Hebrews, "Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the Lord, *AFTER YOUR WEEKS BE OUT*, ye shall have an holy convocation . . ." (Num. 28:26, KJV).

"On the day of firstfruits, when you present to the Lord an offering of new grain during the FEAST OF WEEKS, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work" (*ibid*, NIV).

In this verse, the word "shabbat" must refer to "weeks," for it does not make any sense for "Sabbaths" to "be out"! Weeks can be "out," that is, "completed," but hardly could "sabbaths" be "out." This is speaking of weeks being fulfilled or completed.

Biblical Usage of "Shabbat"

Since this is a very controversial point to some few churches, let us draw on the Scriptures themselves to prove that the word "SHABBAT" can refer to other than the weekly Sabbath or an annual Sabbath!

Turn to Leviticus 25. We read here of the "Sabbath year" of rest for the land (verses 1-4). Notice what God says:

"But in the seventh year shall be a SABBATH unto the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vine" (Lev.25:4, KJV).

Now notice verse 8: "And thou shalt NUMBER SEVEN SABBATHS OF YEARS unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven SABBATHS OF YEARS shall be unto thee forty and nine years."

Here, plainly, "sabbaths of years" must mean "WEEKS OF YEARS"! There is no other way to understand it! A "sabbath" of years would simply be "seven years" -- or a complete "week of years"!

In this verse, the word "shabbat" obviously CANNOT refer to the Sabbath day! It plainly refers to the number *SEVEN, or WEEK*. "Seven SABBATHS of years" means seven weeks of years, or seven sevens of years -- the identical meaning that seven SHAVUA of years would have!!!

Thus in Hebrew, just as in Syriac and in Greek, the word "shabbat" can also refer to week or weeks -- there is simply no skirting, avoiding, or getting around this fact!

How plain! Yet some people are like those depicted by Winston Churchill, who once said that some people walk along, stumble across the truth, pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and continue on as if nothing had happened to them!

How true!

Other people, when confronted with the truth of God, tend to get all confused in their mind. When the truth does not conform to what they have previously believed, or what they have assumed to be true, they react with dismay, consternation, bewilderment. The error in their minds, like a pea-soup fog, blocks their minds from seeing the crystal clarity of the new truth!

Others have the attitude, "Don't confuse me with the facts." Still others say, "Leave me alone. I'm content with what I've always believed. Don't disturb my slumber."

I think of the minds of such people as being like a cement mixer, churning up sand, rocks, cement, and water to make concrete. Once the concrete is poured out, and the sun bakes it for a while, and it dries, it becomes permanently set. The minds of such people are like that concrete -- all mixed up, and permanently set!

From the Ambassador College Correspondence Course

It is very interesting to me that one of the groups which insists that Pentecost must be counted from the weekly Sabbath, as the Sadducees counted it, and who dismiss the teaching of the Pharisees totally, is the Worldwide Church of God. Yet, in an old lesson

of the *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, the authors admitted that the word "Sabbaths" meant "weeks" and not Saturdays. Notice this remarkable admission:

"3. How many days were the Levites to count? Lev. 23:15-16.

"Comment: The phrase 'seven Sabbaths' does not mean to count seven Saturdays, but 'SEVEN WEEKS,' as Hebrew scholars admit. The word 'Sabbath' here comes from an original Hebrew word which can mean 'weeks' (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*). The Greeks who translated the word into 'Pentecost' clearly understood that it meant weeks, and that they should number, not seven Saturdays, but seven weeks and a day -- or fifty days! Now turn to Numbers 28:26. Here you will find the expression "After your weeks be out." The Hebrew word here can mean only weeks, not Sabbaths" (Lesson 35, original course).

Another Authority Speaks Out

The Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, by M'Clintock and Strong, volume VIII, published in 1877, says about Pentecost:

"Pentecost, the second of the three great annual festivals on which all the males were required to appear before the Lord in the national sanctuary, the other two being the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles. It fell in due course on the sixth day of Sivan, and its rites, according to the law, were restricted to a single day . . . The time fixed for the celebration of Pentecost is the fiftieth day reckoning from 'the morrow after the Sabbath' of the Passover (Lev. 23:11, 15, 16). The precise meaning, however, of the word [shabbat] in this connection, which determines the date for celebrating this festival, has been a matter of dispute from time immemorial. The Boethusians and the Sadducees in the time of the second temple (Mishna, Menachoth, x, 3), and the Karaites since the 8th century of the Christian era, took [shabbat] in its literal and ordinary sense as denoting 'the seventh day of the week,' or 'the Sabbath of creation,' and maintained that the omer was offered on the day following that weekly Sabbath which might happen to fall within the seven days of the Passover, so that Pentecost would always be on the first day of the week. But against this it is urged

"(a) That Joshua 5:1 1, where [the morrow after the Passover] is used for [the morrow after the Sabbat] shows that [shabbat] in Lev. 23:11 DENOTES THE FIRST DAY OF PASSOVER, which was to be a day of rest.

"(b) The DEFINITE ARTICLE in [ha-shabbat, or 'the Sabbath'] in Lev. 23:11 REFERS TO ONE OF THE PRECEDING FESTIVAL DAYS.

"(c) The expression ['shabbat] is also used for the Day of Atonement (Lev.23:32), and the abstract ['shabbat'] is applied to the first and eighth days of Tabernacles (ver. 39) and the Feast of Trumpets (23:24), as well as to 'WEEK' (23:15; 25:8); hence this use of sabbaton in the N.T. (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 18:12).

"(d) According to Lev. 23:15 the seventh week, at the end of which Pentecost is to be celebrated, is to be reckoned from the Sabbath. Now if this Sabbath were not fixed, but could happen on any one of the seven Passover days, possibly the fifth or sixth day of the festival, the Passover would in the course of time be **DISPLACED FROM THE FUNDAMENTAL POSITION** which it occupies in the order of the annual festivals.

"(e) The sabbatic idea which underlies all the festivals, and which is **SCRUPULOUSLY** observed in all of them, shows that the reckoning could not have been left to the fifth or sixth day of the festival, but must have **FIXEDLY BEGUN ON THE 16TH OF NISAN**. Thus, each Sabbath comes after **SIX EVEN PERIODS**:

"1. The Sabbath of days, after six days

"2. The Sabbath of months, after six months

"3. The Sabbath of years, after six years

"4. The Sabbath of sabbatic years, after six sabbatic years

"5. The Sabbath of festivals = the Day of Atonement, after six festivals; hence the **SABBATH OF WEEKS**, i.e., **PENTECOST**, must also be at the end of six common weeks after Passover, which could be obtained **ONLY** by reckoning from the 16th OF NISAN, as this **ALONE** yields six common weeks; for the first week during which the counting goes on belongs to the Feast of Passover, and is **NOT** common.

"(f) The Septuagint, Josephus, Philo, Onkelos, and the synagogue have understood it in this way and acted upon it, and most Christian commentators espouse and defend the traditional interpretation . . . It is therefore **EVIDENT THAT THE JEWS, WHO DURING THE SECOND TEMPLE KEPT PENTECOST FIFTY DAYS AFTER THE 16TH OF NISAN, RIGHTLY INTERPRETED THE INJUNCTION CONTAINED IN LEV.23:15-22**" (*Cyclopeifia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, by M'Clintock and Strong, vol. VII, p.924-925).

The Evidence from Joshua

The reference cited above mentions the evidence from the book of Joshua that the "morrow after the Sabbath" of Leviticus 23:11 must refer to the first annual Sabbath of Passover. Let us look at this verse in Joshua more closely. Notice:

"On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the **PASSOVER**. The **DAY AFTER THE PASSOVER, THAT VERY DAY, THEY ATE SOME OF THE PRODUCE OF THE LAND: unleavened bread and roasted grain**" (*Joshua S. 1-11*).

Remember, the Israelites were not permitted to eat of the grain of the harvest **UNTIL** the "wave sheaf offering" had been presented on "the morrow after the Sabbath"

(Lev. 23:11). God commanded, "You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, UNTIL THE VERY DAY you bring this offering to your God" (Lev. 23:14).

Since the Israelites ate that grain on the morrow AFTER THE PASSOVER and remember, the Passover was slain on the 14th of Nisan, but EATEN on the 15th of Nisan therefore, this "morrow" would have to be the 16th of Nisan!

Therefore, "the day after the Sabbath" of Leviticus 23:11 must be the same day as the "DAY AFTER THE PASSOVER" of Joshua 5. 11!

Remember, the *Bible* interprets its own symbols and figures of speech, and makes its own puzzles plain. All we need to do is "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES" and we will find the answer to these enigmas which have stumped theologians and Church leaders for years!

Sadly, many are still befuddled and perplexed by these questions!

Follow the Sadducees?

Some insist that we must observe the same day as the Sadducees of Jesus' time. But who were the Sadducees? As we have already seen in the works of Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, they were a Hellenizing sect which was subservient to the Pharisees in terms of practice. The people all followed the Pharisees. Although many of the priests were Sadducees, this did not mean they governed the set times for holy days, or regulated Temple rituals and practice. They were forced by circumstances beyond their control to cooperate with the Pharisees, who had the people on their side.

Should we follow the capricious teachings of the Sadducees, as some continue to suggest? Let us look into the Bible itself and see. What does Jesus say about their knowledge of the laws of God, and His commandments?

When a group of Sadducees came to Jesus asking Him a "technical question," Jesus rebuked them. Notice the account:

"That same day the SADDUCEES, WHO SAY THERE IS NO RESURRECTION, came to him with a question. 'Teacher,' they said, Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?'

"Jesus replied, 'YOU ARE IN ERROR BECAUSE YOU DO NOT KNOW THE SCRIPTURES OR THE POWER OF GOD. . .' (Mat. 22:23-29, NIV).

Does this statement of the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ, sound as if we should look to the doctrines of the SADDUCEES for our beliefs?

Be honest with yourself! Confess it! Do you really believe that? If the Messiah Himself blasts the Sadducees, and rakes them over the coals, and makes a broad, sweeping denunciation of their teaching, saying **THEY KNOW NOT THE SCRIPTURES**, nor the **POWER** of God, would you then go to **THEM** for spiritual "enlightenment" as some insist today on doing?

How amazing! How dumfounding! How flabbergasting!

I must confess, that I would not trust anybody with that kind of mentality working for me. With that kind of "wisdom," or foolishness masquerading as wisdom, they are sure to destroy whatever business they control, given enough time!

True, many Sadducees were priests. But most of the priests of that time were reprobates, renegades, disobedient to God, and used their priestly power to serve the king, not God. They were clever politicians, seeking political favor and handouts, and did not really serve God at all. Jesus roundly condemned them in scathing language, many times.

Josephus tells us that the high priesthood during those times was a game of musical chairs, with the priests subservient to the king, who appointed them to office according to HIS pleasure. King Herod had the priests slavishly seeking his favor and pleasure, as he was the one who appointed the high priests. We read:

"Herod was then made king by the Romans, but did no longer appoint high priests out of the family of Asamoneus; but made **CERTAIN MEN TO BE SO THAT WERE OF NO EMINENT FAMILIES, BUT BARELY OF THOSE THAT WERE PRIESTS.** . . .

"Archelaus also, Herod's son, did like his father in the appointment of high priests, as did the Romans also, who took the government over the Jews into their hands afterward.

Accordingly, the **NUMBER OF THE HIGH PRIESTS**, from the days of Herod until the day when Titus took the temple and the city, and burnt them, **WERE IN ALL TWENTY-EIGHT**; and the time also that belonged to them was **A HUNDRED AND SEVEN YEARS**" (*Ant.*, XX,x, 1).

These high priests only reigned for about 3.8 years, on the average. They were shuttled in and out like an express elevator. Originally, however, God had appointed this office to be for life, and it was hereditary, through the sons of Aaron -- not an office to be held at the whim of a pagan or heathen king or despot! (see Exodus 28:1; 40:12-15). But by the time of Christ, the office of high priest had degenerated into disgrace, disrepute, and disregard. Says the *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*:

"The chief priests who are mentioned in the N.T. were the officiating high priest, former high priests still alive, and members of their families. They were AN ANOMALY OF THE TIMES. The law that regulated the succession to the high priesthood HAD COME INTO ABEYANCE THROUGH POLITICAL CONFUSION AND FOREIGN DOMINATION. HIGH PRIESTS WERE MADE AND UNMADE AT THE WILL OF THE RULERS" (article "Priests," p.764).

Are these the kinds of men we should look to for leadership and determination of God's commandments, the figuring of dates of God's holy days, and spiritual guidance and enlightenment? You be the judge!

Are these the kinds of men we should look to for leadership and determination of God's commandments, the figuring of dates of God's holy days, and spiritual guidance? GOD FORBID!

Any who would look to the Sadducean priests for spiritual truth and guidance must have rocks in their heads! You figure it out!

Why can't grown men, supposed to be ministers of the Most High God, see this plain and stark truth? Or are they, too, blind, like the "king who had no clothes," and didn't know that he was stark naked?

Bo Reicke, in *The New Testament Era*, wrote:

"When he became king, however, Herod repressed both the patricians and the priestly aristocracy, turning the Sanhedrin into a DOCILE INSTRUMENT FOR CARRYING OUT MS POLICES . . . Ananus 1, or Annas, held the office of high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. He was the head of a priestly family that, upon his accession, began to supplant the family of *BOETHUS, WHICH WAS RELATED TO THE HOUSE OF HEROD* and had hitherto dominated the priesthood . . ." (p.142).

Boethus, who was related to the house of Herod, was himself a Sadducee. These high priests were completely confused spiritually; they dwelt in a spiritual wasteland. They had perverted the ways and truths of God. Their spiritual degeneration was so gross and despicable that Jesus went so far as to tell them pointedly, "You DO NOT KNOW THE SCRIPTURES" (Matt. 22:29, NIV).

What about the Samaritans?

There was one other renegade, heretical group during the time of Christ which also counted Pentecost from the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They were the infamous "Samaritans." Who were they? Should we respect and follow their reckoning in this matter?

Rather than give you my own personal opinion, notice what Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had to say about the Samaritans. One time when Jesus was going through the

countryside of Samaria, He stopped at a village called Sychar. It was about noon, and a Samaritan woman came to the well, where Jesus was resting, to draw water. Jesus asked her for a drink, which amazed her. Notice the account:

"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For JEWS DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH SAMARITANS)" (John 4.7-9, NIV).

All through the history of Israel, the Samaritans had been a PLAGUE to the Jews who returned from Babylonian exile. They opposed the construction of the Temple, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and were a continual pestilence. Their teachings were a smorgasbord of pagan Babylonian beliefs which they combined with some of the beliefs of the apostatizing Kingdom of Israel, which had been carried into captivity (see II Kings 17). They even went so far as to build their own competing "temple" at Mount Gerizim about 400. B.C., out of disdain and hatred of the Jews.

Should we look to pagan Samaritans, who adopted some of the beliefs of the northern Kingdom of Israel, and misinterpreted the Scriptures, and combined some Bible teachings with their pagan superstitions, for guidance in faith and practice?

Jesus Himself answers this question. Later on in this same chapter of John, He tells the woman from Samaria:

"YOU SAMARITANS WORSHIP WHAT YOU DO *NOT KNOW*, we [Jews] worship what we DO KNOW, for SALVATION IS FROM THE *JEWS*" (John 4.22).

If you want to follow someone who doesn't even know what he is worshipping, such as the SAMARITANS, then as the old saying goes - "have at it." "Be my guest." But include me out!

"This Is My God"

Famous novelist Herman Wouk, himself a Jew, discusses Pentecost in his book *This Is My God*. According to Wouk:

"On the morning of the second day of Passover [Nisan 16], in olden times, the community brought a measure called an omer of barley into the Temple for a ceremony hailing the earth's awakening fertility . . . with this omer the annual harvest actually began; new produce was never eaten in Palestine until after the barley rite . . . From the day the measure of barley came to the Temple, seven full weeks were told off. On the fiftieth day the nation celebrated the summer festival Shavuos . . . The Talmud calls it Atzeres, or Last Assembly Day, implying that the holiday is the end of a single religious observance that starts with Passover. Leaving Egypt was the beginning of the event; the climax was Sinai.

"The Rabbis found, analyzing the narrative texts of Exodus, that the revelation at

Sinai occurred fifty days after the second day of Passover, the date of Savous. The summer festival therefore became the feast of Sinai revelation . . ." (*This Is My God*, p.74).

Another Commentary, called *Aid to Bible Understanding*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, says concerning Pentecost:

"A later name used to denote the festival of harvest or festival of weeks, called also 'the day of the first ripe fruits'. . .-It was to be celebrated on the fiftieth day from Nisan 16, the day that the barley sheaf was offered (Lev.23:15,16). In the Jewish calendar it falls on Sivan 6. It was after the barley harvest and the beginning of the harvest of wheat, which ripened later than the barley. Ex. 9:31,32.

"The Israelites were not allowed to begin the harvest until the firstfruits of the barley had been presented to Jehovah on Nisan 16. Therefore, in Deuteronomy 16:9, 10 the instructions are: 'From when the sickle is first put to the standing grain you will start to count seven weeks. Then you must celebrate the festival of weeks to Jehovah your God.' . . . The Jews traditionally hold that Pentecost corresponded to the time of the giving of the law at Sinai, when Israel became a distinguished people. It was early in the third month (Sivan) that the Israelites gathered at Sinai and received the law" ("Pentecost," p.1284-1285).

Pentecost and Josephus the Jewish Historian

It is well known that the Pharisees observed Pentecost on Sivan 6. It is also well known that Josephus, Jewish historian of the first century, who was himself a priest, a famous general in the war against the Romans in 70 A.D., was a Pharisee as well. He writes about Pentecost:

"But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them They also at this participation of the first fruits of the earth sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering to God.

"6. When a week of weeks has passed over after this sacrifice, (which weeks contain forty and nine days,) on the fiftieth day, which is Pentecost . . . they bring to God a loaf made of wheat flour" (*Antiquities*, III, x, 5-6).

Observing this day was the customary practice of the Jews in the time of Christ. Josephus tells us that ALL THE MULTITUDE followed the teachings of the Pharisees in this respect. He tells us: ". . .the Pharisees, who are one of the sects of the Jews . . . These have SO GREAT A POWER OVER THE MULTITUDE, that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are presently believed" (*Antiquities*, XIII, x, 5).

Concerning the Sadducees, the other sect of the Jews, which included some of the

aristocracy and some of the high priests, who counted Pentecost from the day after the weekly Sabbath which fell during the Days of Unleavened Bread, Josephus tells us: ". . . the Sadducees are able to persuade NONE BUT THE RICH, and have not the populous obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the *MULTITUDE ON THEIR SIDE*. . . ." (*Anti.*, XIII, x, 6).

Who Were the PHARISEES?

Since the Pharisees were very important during the time of Christ, and He had many "run-ins" with them, it behooves us to know as much about them as possible. Who were they? What did they believe?

In his book *The New Testament*, Bo Reidke describes the origins of the sect known as the Pharisees, who Jesus said "sat in Moses' seat." Reidke writes:

"At the beginning of the Maccabean revolt in 167 B.C., we read of a group of Hasidim or Pietists (Hebrew singular Hasid, 'Pious') who had pledged themselves to obey the law and consequently opposed the Hellenizing policies of Antiochus IV and joined the Maccabean movement (I Macc. 2:42). In 161, some outstanding scribes belonging to this group were deceived by Alcimus, the Hellenistic high priest (I Macc. 7:12-18); this forced them once more into association with the Maccabees. Scholars are wont to consider these Hasidim the predecessors of the Pharisees, or even a parallel or particular group of them. This view is in harmony with the Pharisees' appearance at the end of the century as a school still closely associated with the house of the Hasmoneans. . . ."

Reidke continues:

"Both in the New Testament and in Josephus, as well as in the overwhelming majority of the Rabbinic passages, the Pharisees appear as the very opposite of an isolated sect: they are a most expansive popular party, with highly developed social relationships and structures. In Rabbinic literature, the context in which the name appears suggests a meaning such as 'Puritan,' a zealous proponent of ritual purity Since this interpretation agrees with the passages from the New Testament and Josephus (such as Matt. 15:2; Josephus Ant. XVIII, 12-15), we may assume the same meaning for the preChristian and early Christian period. The basic concept was therefore not that of separation from the rest of the people . . . but rather separation 'from the poutions of the peoples of the land' (Ezra 6:2 1; 9: 1; I 0: 11; Neh. 9:2; 10:28) and 'from the nations of the world with their abominations' (Mekilta Exod. 19:6, 71a). In this sense the Pharisees may be thought of as PURITANS God had revealed the norms of purity through holy Scriptures, traditions, and scribes: The Pharisees sought to develop this revelation and make it applicable to society, so that every Jew could realize the ideal of the covenant people To preserve and develop the purity of this Levitical covenant people, the scribes had to master and interpret the commandments and statutes EXACTLY, according to the model of Ezra and his Levites (Neh.8:7-9; 13). Reicke goes on, describing the exacting attitude the Pharisees had toward the law:

"IN SCRUPULOUS DETAIL the Pharisees analyzed and discussed the books of the Bible, which provided the legal norm . . . Pharisaism, then, was an attempt to transfer concretely to the covenant people the PURITY revealed by God through Scripture and tradition . . . Among the obligations of the Pharisaic brethren were strict observance of cultic purity (Mishna Dem ii.3), such as the washing of hands (Mat. 15:2 and parallels), as well as THE SCRUPULOUS OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDMENTS" (see *The New Testament Era*, Bo Reicke, Fortress Press, Phila., 1981, p.156-161).

The Apostle Paul and Pentecost

The apostle Paul also admitted to being a Pharisee, which tells us he also observed Pentecost on Sivan 6, counting fifty days from the 16th of Nisan. There is no indication in all the New Testament, or in any of Paul's letters, that he ever discontinued this practice.

Paul himself observed Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Being a Pharisee, he must have observed it at the very same time as the other Pharisees. When he arrived in Jerusalem, to keep the Feast, he went up to see James, and all the Jerusalem elders of the Church, to report what God had done through their ministry. When they had done this, James and the others said to Paul:

"You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and ALL OF THEM ARE ZEALOUS FOR THE LAW. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses . . . What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites, and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in those reports about you, but that YOU YOURSELF ARE LIVING IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW . . ." (Acts 21:17-24, NIV).

The next day Paul went to the Temple, as instructed, and encountered a crowd there. What were they doing in Jerusalem at that time? The same thing Paul was -- observing the day of Pentecost! Paul was there at the same time Jews from around the world had gathered, and the scattered Jews that came were undoubtedly Pharisees, and not Sadducees. Paul was therefore keeping the same day they were observing.

Some of the Jews recognized Paul, and spread the word that he was a rebel against God's laws, stirring up a mob against Paul. When they were about to stone him, Roman soldiers intervened, and rescued him, and gave him leave to speak to the crowd. In his defense, Paul declared:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city under GAMALIEL [a leading teacher or "Rabban" among the Pharisees]. I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today" (Acts 22:23, NIV).

Paul knew the laws of God. He had been thoroughly grounded in the teaching of the Torah by Gamaliel, one of the leading and most prestigious rabbis in the land. It is very obvious, therefore, that he observed Pentecost on THE SAME DAY Gamaliel and the Pharisees observed it, and ALL the multitude did -- on SIVAN 6!

Later, in his defense before Felix the governor, Paul declared:

"You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or any where else in the city. . . .

"After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me IN THE TEMPLE COURTS doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me" (Acts 24.17-19, NIV).

Paul had come to Jerusalem to worship and to keep the Feast of Pentecost. Great crowds were there from everywhere, observing the Festival. Paul was at the Temple making Pentecost offerings. From the story of his arrest and capture, we can see that he was there, observing Pentecost, at the very same time as the rest of the Jews from the entire region!

Paul, who had been taught the truths of God from the Pharisees, since he was a child, and who was very meticulous as to the laws of God, would not have made an error and been observing Pentecost on the wrong day. He certainly would have had nothing whatever to do with those reprehensible Sadducees! But he was keeping Shavuot, with the rest of the Jews, on the same day that the Pharisees had always taught it should be observed!

Why "Count" Pentecost?

Why does God command that we "count fifty days" each year from Passover till Pentecost? Some have assumed that this was because the date had to be reckoned from the weekly Sabbath that fell on different days during the Passover week. This assumption, however, is simply not true. We read in the *M'Clintock Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*:

"The interval between the Passover and Pentecost was evidently regarded as a RELIGIOUS SEASON. The custom has probably been handed down from ancient times, which is observed by the modern Jews, of KEEPING A REGULAR COMPUTATION OF THE FIFTY DAYS BY A FORMAL OBSERVANCE, BEGINNING WITH A SHORT PRAYER ON THE EVENING OF THE DAY OF THE OMER, AND CONTINUED ON EACH SUCCEEDING DAY BY A SOLEMN DECLARATION OF ITS NUMBER IN THE SUCCESSION, AT EVENING PRAYER, while the members of

the family are standing with respectful attention . . . As above noted, in accordance with the injunction in Lev. 23:15, 16, the Jews regularly count every evening the fifty days from the SECOND DAY OF PASSOVER until Pentecost, and they recite a prayer over it . . . As the counting of these fifty days, on the first of which the sickle was brought out for cutting the corn, and on the last of which it was laid up again because the harvest was entirely finished, is not only a *CONNECTING LINK* between Passover and Pentecost, but may be regarded as *PREPARATORY* for the feast of Pentecost . . . Maimonides, who remarks: '*Pentecost is the day on which the Law was given, and in order to MAGNIFY THIS DAY, the days are counted from the first festival (i.e., Passover) to it, just as one who is expecting the most faithful of his friends is accustomed to count the days and hours of HIS ARRIVAL; for this is the reason of counting the omer from the day of our Exodus from Egypt to the day of the giving of the Law, which was the ultimate object of the Exodus. . .*' (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, pp. 926-928).

The day of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai was also the day God "married" Israel, and the nation became His "BRIDE." Thus the counting of the days till Pentecost assumes a very sacred, vitally important significance! It is as if we are literally "COUNTING THE DAYS" till the coming of Jesus Christ, OUR BRIDEGROOM, and the forthcoming marriage of the Church to Him! (Rev. 19:6-10). Are you, personally, "counting the days"?

Pentecost, the reaping of the first (spring) harvest, pictures the entire CHURCH OF GOD, MADE WHITE, AND GLORIOUS, BECOMING THE LITERAL "FIRST FRUITS" OF GOD'S KINGDOM AND BECOMING THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB OF GOD FOR ALL ETERNITY!

Think about that! Let its awesome splendor sink into your mind. What a GLORIOUS FESTIVAL! The Christian's journey out of sin, pictured by Egypt, and out of bondage to Satan, pictured by Pharaoh, requires a "journey through the wilderness," and continual intervention and miracles by Almighty God, to get us to our destination where the Laws of God become written upon our hearts and minds, at the resurrection, and at the coming of our Lord to RESCUE His bride from the wrath of Satan and the destruction and devastation of the world!

What a JOYOUS FESTIVAL this ought to be to those of us who truly seek to obey God, and keep His commandments! How wonderfully vital and deeply significant it is for us to observe this holy festival of Almighty God! How important it is that we observe it on the right day -- the "wedding day" -- and not at some other time -- at the "appointed time" -- so that we don't miss our own future "Wedding"!

M'Clintoch and Strong continue:

". . . So intimately connected are the beginning of the harvest at Passover with the termination of it at this festival (Pentecost), that Pentecost was actually denominated, during the time of the second temple, and is called in the Jewish literature to the present

day, 'THE CONCLUSION,' or, 'THE TERMINATION OF PASSOVER'. . . It was, as we have seen, ESSENTIALLY LINKED TO THE PASSOVER -- that festival which, above all others, expressed the fact of a race chosen and separated from other nations. It was not an insulated day. It stood as the CULMINATING POINT of the Pentecostal season" (p.928-929).

Says M'Clintoch and Strong, further:

"Those early fathers who were best acquainted with the Jewish tradition testify to the same thing, that the law was given on Pentecost, and that the Jews commemorate the event on this festival. It was therefore on this day, when the APOSTLES, *IN COMMON WITH THEIR JEWISH BRETHREN*, WERE ASSEMBLED TO COMMORATE THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE GIVING OF THE LAW FROM SINAI, and were engaged in the study of Holy Writ, in accordance with the CUSTOM OF THE DAY, that the HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDED UPON THEM. . ." (*ibid.*, p.929).

Notice! The apostles observed Pentecost on the same day as their Jewish brethren. "In common with their Jewish brethren," who were also assembled in Jerusalem at that very same time to observe Pentecost, from regions throughout the Middle East, The apostles "were assembled to commemorate the anniversary of the giving of the law from Sinai," and were studying the Scriptures, as was "the custom of the day"!

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Luke writes in the book of Acts, about that first Pentecost, when all the brethren were gathered together, in Jerusalem: "When the day of Pentecost CAME, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1). At this very same time, devout Jews from around the world were assembled in Jerusalem.

"Now there were STAYING IN JERUSALEM GOD-FEARING JEWS from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5, NIV).

What were all these Jews doing staying at Jerusalem? Why were they there? The answer is obvious: They were there, like the apostles, to CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF PENTECOST! These were "God-fearing Jews" -- not ungodly Jews, who had the wrong day! They were keeping Pentecost, just like the apostles were, ON THE VERY SAME DAY!

Let's face it. The evidence is absolutely overwhelming that Pentecost should be observed on the same day as the Jews keep it, the 6th day of Sivan, 50 days after the Passover festival begins! There is absolutely no evidence otherwise. It is amazing how people can remain mired in ignorance, steeped in error, and bogged down in the mud, when the TRUTH is so plain, so self-evident, so palpably strong and blatantly obvious!

Honest Objections Examined

Some claim that Jewish tradition concerning Pentecost is not reliable evidence of which day we should observe, because II Kings 22 makes it clear that at one point in Jewish history the temple itself has been closed down, when apostasy set in due to the malign influence of the wicked king Manasseh.

Says Ronald Dart, evangelist, the Temple had been "long closed, and that even the priesthood were ignorant of the requirements surrounding the Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread," because the "book of the Law" had been lost. From that time forward, Ron Dart claims, "the Jews had nothing to go on (relative to the issue at hand) that is not available to us."

Is this observation true?

Ronald Dart is a former minister of the Church of God, International, and now the head of an organization called Christian Educational Ministries (CEM). As such, he wields considerable influence among former Worldwidiers and members of various "non-aligned" churches. But how solid and sound is his reasoning that Jewish tradition is useless in determining such matters as Passover and Pentecost?

The Reign of King Josiah

During the reign of king Josiah, the king decided to have repairs made on the Temple of God, which had fallen into disrepair. As work was commencing, Hilkiah the high priest told the king's secretary, Shaphan, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord" (II Kings 22:8). Shaphan took it to the king and read from it, and when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes, and sent the priests to inquire of God's prophetess Huldah about the warnings written in the Book of the Law (verses 11-13). He declared, "Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book . . ." (v. 13).

Some commentators believe that this "book of the Law" which was discovered in the Temple was the entire Pentateuch; others believe that it was a copy of part or all of the book of Deuteronomy. According to Ron Dart of the Church of God, International, this means that all the correct knowledge of the holy days had been lost!

But is that what this Scripture says? Not at all. Such an inference is not warranted by the facts. This discovery of the book of the Law in the Temple occurred during the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (II Kings 22:3). Prior to him Amon reigned

only two years (II Kings 21:19). Prior to him was the wicked king Manasseh who led the nation into idolatry. He reigned fifty five years (II Kings 21:1). It is obvious that due to his evil influence, the temple of God, and His truth, were neglected during his reign.

However, this does not mean the truth was lost or buried. The prophet Isaiah prophesied during Manasseh's reign. The father of Manasseh was the righteous king Hezekiah, who led Israel in observing the Passover and laws of God correctly. We read:

"Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; HE KEPT THE COMMANDMENTS THE LORD HAD GIVEN MOSES . . . (II Kings 18:56).

Obviously, the truth of God had not become "lost" by the time of Hezekiah, or during his reign, which lasted twenty nine years (II Kings 18:2). It was thoroughly OBEYED, including all the commandments God had given to Moses! Obviously, Hezekiah KNEW when Passover and Pentecost should be observed! He reigned from 726 B.C. to 698 B.C. During his reign the Temple was cleansed, the Levitical priesthood was purified (II Chron.29), During his reign the nation of Judah celebrated Passover with such joy and gladness as had not been seen since the time of Solomon (II Chron.30).

Is Ronald Dart trying to tell us, then, that *within just one generation ALL the truth of God was lost, and the people has a total memory black-out and collective amnesia, so they forgot ALL the commandments of God, and the dates of every annual holy day?*

Is such a thing possible? Or is it incredible fiction and preposterous fantasy -- like aliens living under the earth, and U.S. and Soviet astronauts on the moon as early as the 1950s?

Adam Clarke in his commentary points out the truth of the matter. Consider his cogent and logical presentation of the evidence:

"It is scarcely reasonable to suppose that this was the ONLY COPY of the law that was found in Judea; for even if we grant that Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon had endeavored to destroy all the books of the law, yet they could not have succeeded so as to destroy the whole. Besides, Manasseh endeavored AFTER HIS CONVERSION to RESTORE EVERY PART OF THE DIVINE WORSHIP, and in this he could have done nothing without the Pentateuch; and the succeeding reign of Amon was too short to give him opportunity to undo everything that his penitent father had reformed. Add to all these considerations, that in the time of Jehoshaphat teaching from the law was UNIVERSAL in the land, for he set on foot an itinerant ministry, in order to instruct the people fully: for 'he sent to his princes to teach in the cities of Judah; and with them he sent Levites and priests; and he went about through ALL THE CITIES OF JUDAH and taught the people, having THE BOOK OF THE LORD WITH THEM;' see II Chron.17:7-9. . ."

Josiah had begun to restore the correct worship of God during the beginning of his reign, yet this "book" was not discovered in the Temple until the 18th year of his reign. It is certainly "not likely that during these eighteen years he was without a copy of the Pentateuch," as Adam Clarke continues. He goes on:

"The simple fact seems to be this, that this was the ORIGINAL of the covenant renewed by Moses with the people in the plains of Moab, and which he ordered to be laid up beside the ark, (Deut. 31:26) and now being unexpectedly found, its ANTIQUITY, the occasion of its being made, the present circumstances of the people, the imperfect state in which the reformation was as yet, after all that had been done, would all occur to produce the effect here mentioned on the mind of the pious Josiah."

Clearly the WHOLE TRUTH was restored, and Ron Dart is therefore sadly mistaken when he says the Jews at that time lost the true knowledge of God concerning the holy days. That is NOT what the BIBLE says!

The Critical Experimental Commentary adds this observation:

"It was the TEMPLE COPY, which, having been laid (Deut. 31:25,26) beside the ark in the most holy place, and during the ungodly reigns of Manasseh and Amon perhaps under Ahaz, when the temple itself had been profaned by idols, and the ark also (II Chron. 35:3) removed from its site, was somehow lost, and now found again during the repair of the temple..."

But according to Ron Dart, the Jews lost the truth of the correct time to keep the Passover and Pentecost during this period prior to Josiah's reign. Now, I ask you: Does that really make any sense at all? This very episode is the story of THE FINDING OF THE LAW -- NOT ITS LOSS! Certainly, whatever had been glossed over or lost during the reign of wicked Manasseh was restored during the reign of Josiah, the righteous king! We read of this Josiah:

"Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who TURNED TO THE LORD as he did with ALL HIS HEART AND WITH ALL HIS SOUL AND WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH IN ACCORDANCE WITH ALL THE LAWS OF MOSES" (II Kings 23:25, NIV).

Obviously, Josiah returned to God with all his being, "in accordance with ALL THE LAWS OF MOSES." That would include the laws concerning Passover and Pentecost as well -- "ALL THE LAWS," the Scriptures declare! Clearly the WHOLE TRUTH was restored, and Ron Dart is therefore sadly mistaken when he says the Jews at that time lost the true knowledge of God concerning the holy days. That is not what the BIBLE says!

Another Objection Examined

Another question some have raised is: "If God had meant Pentecost to be observed

on Sivan 6 every year, then why is this not mentioned, and why did God command us to count 50 days to establish the correct day?"

The answer to this question is given by Nick Wood of England, who says:

"The answer is ridiculously easy and lies in the fact that when the LAW was given to Moses there was no fixed calendar. The months were ascertained by visual observation of the New Moon and depending on whether there were 29 or 30 days in the first and second months, Pentecost could fall on either Sivan 5, 6 or 7. It was not the DATE that was important, rather the count of exactly 50 days. The fact that now there is a fixed Hebrew calendar and Pentecost always falls on Sivan 6 makes no difference."

The key to understand Pentecost is the number "50." God intended it to always be precisely 50 days from Passover, beginning counting the day after the Passover was actually eaten (Nisan 15). "Fifty" is God's number of "liberation" or "liberty" (Lev.25). The "Jubilee year" occurred every fifty years. It was the great year of release, freedom, when "Liberty" was to be "proclaimed throughout the land" (Lev.25:10). Thus, counting "50" from Passover to Pentecost, typified our coming to spiritual "liberty" in Christ! It represented our "journey to freedom"!

This period of time is, in a sense, a "small Jubilee" period, of 50 days -- days to be celebrated, representing our freedom from slavery and our journey to meet with God, in complete liberty and freedom. Thus it pictures our Christian life, as we await and look forward to with expectancy, the return of Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom and King!

The number "50" therefore is extremely significant, and is no small thing. It is very important that we "count 50" every year, from Passover to Pentecost. It is the COUNTING THAT COUNTS!

Another Objection Answered

Another objection which has been raised to a Sivan 6 Pentecost concerns the authority of the scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses' seat, according to Christ (*Matt. 23:12*). It has been claimed this fact only refers to their judging, not their teaching the law of God.

Ron Dart, formerly of the Church of God, International, writes:

"When Moses 'sat,' what did he sit to do? According to Exodus 18:3, he sat to judge the people. Jethro, his father-in-law suggested he not attempt to judge the people alone, but to set up a system of judges to distribute the work load. This is institutionalized in Deuteronomy 17:8-13. Here there was a judicial system to settle matters of controversy, primarily concerned with liability for damages and civil disputes (v.8). Three categories of people were involved in this, priests, Levites, and judges. Their judgment was binding, but it could not be arbitrary; it was to be based on the law" (v.11).

What about this question? In Exodus 18.13 we read, "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses SAT to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening." Now, let's be honest with the Word of God. Ron Dart makes a great "to do" over the fact that Moses sat, judging the people, implying that is the only authority conferred by the "seat of Moses," where the Pharisees sat.

Is this true? Let us read on, and see what ELSE Moses did, while he "sat" in his seat! Jethro was concerned that Moses would wear himself out, handling so many people's problems. He asked him why he did this.

"And Moses said unto his father in law, 'Because the people come unto me to INQUIRE OF GOD: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I DO MAKE THEM *KNOW YHE STATUTES OF GOD, AND HIS LAWS*' (Exodus 18.15-16). Do you see? Moses, in his "seat," TAUGHT THE PEOPLE THE LAWS, COMMANDMENTS, AND STATUTES OF GOD! He was a ruler and a teacher. He expounded and interpreted God's Laws, and helped people see HOW THEY APPLIED in specific, human and societal situations.

This was the primary function of those who later "sat in Moses' seat." This was what Jesus said plainly that the Pharisees were responsible for. He said they sat in Moses' seat, and He plainly said we are to do what they said and observe what they said, Notice His precise words again, and write them on your heart:

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: ALL therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that OBSERVE AND DO . . ." (Matt.23;1-3).

Clearly, their authority was to be obeyed so long as it was not used to contradict the very Word of God itself, or the express commands of Jesus Christ, the Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14). The apostles themselves ran into this situation, when the scribes and Pharisees commanded them not to preach in the name of Jesus. Peter responded, "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

The fact that the Pharisees, and priests of Jesus' day, sometimes abused their authority, did not give the people license to disobey their God-appointed office, in those matters where there was no conflict with the Word of God!

Let me reiterate this vital point: The fact that the Pharisees, and priests of Jesus' day, at times abused their authority, did not give the people license to disobey them when they taught the commandments of God, for those commandments did not originate with the Pharisees, but with GOD!

We all know that the Pharisees were hypocrites, and fools, in Christ's time (see Matthew 23), and had become a "generation of vipers." But that did not do away with their authority from God, as they "sat on Moses' seat," to teach the commandments of God! We know that they added many human "do's and don'ts" to the law of God, and human traditions, sometimes making the law of God of no effect -- such as the "washing

of cups, pitchers and kettles" (Mark 7.4). These things they "added," however, were not binding upon the people. God never gave them authority to ADD TO His law -- merely to explain and interpret it!

Jesus rebuked them severely for this excess and abuse of their God-given authority. He castigated them for sometimes supplanting their own traditions of men for the commandments of God (Matt.5, 15; Mark 7). But He never once accused them of changing the day of a holy day, or counting Pentecost wrongly, or found fault with their calendar calculations!

Jesus very plainly said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever THEY bid you observe, *THAT OBSERVE AND DO*" (Matt 23:2-3).

As the *Jamieson, Fasset and Brown Commentary* points out:

"In Moses' seat that is, *AS INTERPRETERS OF THE LAW GIVEN BY MOSES*.

"All therefore -- that is, all which, as *SITTING IN THAT SEAT*, and *TEACHING OUT OF THAT LAW*, they bid you observe, that observe and do. The word 'therefore' is thus, it will be seen, of *GREAT IMPORTANCE*, *AS LIMITING THOSE INJUNCTIONS WHICH HE WOULD HAVE THEM OBEY TO WHAT THEY FETCHED FROM THE LAW ITSELF*. In requiring *EXPLICIT OBEDIENCE* to such injunctions, He would have them to recognize the *AUTHORITY BY WHICH THEY TAUGHT* over and above the obligation of the law itself -- an important principle truly; but He who denounced the traditions of such teachers (chap. 15:3) cannot have meant here to throw His shield over these [traditions, and rules which were *not* "fetched from the law itself"] . . ."

In other words, "Moses' seat" meant authority to administer the *LAW OF GOD INCLUDING PASSOVER AND PENTECOST* -- the Law given by God to Moses. And, as long as they were administering that Law, they were to be *OBEYED*. However, this did not include their own humanly devised traditions, because such "traditions of me" were *NOT* given to Moses and were never part of the Law!

"What about the Septuagint?"

In previous articles, I have pointed out that Biblical scholars conclude that the early apostles often quoted from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, the first translation of the Old Testament, which was made into the Greek language in about 250 B.C. Jesus Himself must have been very familiar with the Greek translation.

Ron Dart is one of those who criticizes my use of the Septuagint in proving Pentecost should be counted from the day after the first holy day of Passover. He reluctantly admits that the gospel writers, and Paul, may have used the Greek text, the Septuagint. But he claims this is an insignificant fact, and does not provide evidence that the Septuagint was "inspired" by God, and he speaks of certain alleged "Jewish fables" concerning its origin.

What is the truth about the Septuagint? Shall we all just believe Ron Dart, and go home?

Of course, I recognize that just because the apostles often used the Septuagint, and quoted from it, does not prove that they endorsed every word of that translation! I never said such a thing. However, rather than argue about words, let's just read what *Unger's Bible Dictionary* has to say about the LXX:

"The Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew Old Testament enjoys the unique distinction of being the first book or rather library of books, for such it is, known to be translated into another language. This translation is called the Septuagint and was made in the third and second centuries B.C. During this period the entire Hebrew Bible was put into the Greek language. It was in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (235-246 B.C.) that the Pentateuch was put into the Greek tongue. Originally the term Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, was applied to the Greek Pentateuch."

Concerning the origin of the LXX, Unger states: "THE SEPTUAGINT WAS THE BIBLE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY before the New Testament was written. After the New Testament Scriptures came on the scene, they were added to the Septuagint to form the completed Scriptures of Christianity.

"Besides this momentous ministry, the Septuagint met the religious and liturgical requirements of Jews living in Alexandria, Egypt. This was the center of culture and learning of ancient Judaism."

Concerning the origin of the LXX, Unger states:

"Uncertainty attaches to the origin of the Septuagint and its beginning is enshrouded in legend. Its alleged seventy-two translators (six from each of the twelve tribes) is traditional, the number seventy apparently being an approximation for seventy-two.

"Representing a *PREMASORETIC HEBREW TEXT*, THE SEPTUAGINT IS ACCORDINGLY OF *BASIC TEXTUAL AND EXEGETICAL VALUE*. . ." (Unger, "Versions of the Scriptures," p. 1147).

How important is the LXX? Unger's goes on:

"Importance of the Septuagint. *The importance of the Septuagint from every angle CAN SCARCELY BE OVERESTIMATED.* This can be asserted despite its deficiencies and limitations. Religiously and spiritually the Septuagint gave the great revealed truths concerning creation, redemption, sin and salvation to the world. It released these from the narrow isolation of the Hebrew language and people and gave them to the Greco-Roman world through the divinely prepared instrument of the Greek language, the lingua franca of the Greco-Roman age (300 B.C. to A.D. 300). The Septuagint was a definite

factor in the preparation for the coming of Christianity and the New Testament revelation. In making the Old Testament available in the same universal language in which the New Testament was destined to appear, it presaged the giving of the Holy Scriptures in one international and universal language of the period" (p. 1149).

Notice how important the Septuagint Version was! Who cannot see the Divine Hand of the Almighty God in its translation, origin, and preservation? The LXX is of incredible value! It should not be "dissed," dismissed, and deprecated by small-minded men of shrunken spirit who seemingly have nothing better to do than criticize!

Unger goes on:

"As the first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into a foreign language, the Septuagint gained great fame. The very fact that it was put into the language of culture and education of the day made its use wide. Philo of Alexandria used the Septuagint widely. Josephus depended upon it. *JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS QUOTED FROM IT* as well as from the Hebrew With the dawn of Christianity the Septuagint became *THE SCRIPTURES OF CHRISTIANS*. It was venerated and quoted and used in controversy. The Old Latin, Egyptian, Ethiopic, Gothic, Slavonic and other versions were made from it and it was used in early missionary activity" (*ibid.*).

As a translation, says the *New Bible Dictionary*, "The Pentateuch again ranks high. It is generally competent and faithful" ("Text and Versions," p.1259). This authority continues:

"It acts also as a linguistic and theological bridgehead between the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New; for it served as 'Bible' to generations of Greek-speaking Jews in many countries, AND IT IS OFTEN QUOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. (Luke and the writer to the Hebrews use it most. . ." (*ibid.*).

The *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* says:

"The quotations from the O.T. in the N.T. are USUALLY CITATIONS FROM THE LXX, either verbatim or with unimportant verbal changes . . ." ("Versions," p.973).

Now Ron Dart may dispute the authority and usefulness of the Septuagint, and claim it was not important, but his private opinions are nothing more than that -- personal, private opinions.

Unbiased and open minded scholars, as a whole, have concluded that the Septuagint was of PRIMARY IMPORTANCE as the first major translation of the Scriptures into the UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE of the cultural, educated world of that time. It was used by Jesus, the apostles, and the early Church! Therefore, it has great importance for us in determining exegetical questions regarding the original Hebrew text, where there are questions of meaning -- such as the controversy concerning the "morrow after the Sabbath" in Leviticus 23:11, 15.

Perhaps that is why Dart refuses to give credence to the Septuagint. To do so would be "fatal" to his arguments against a Sivan 6 Pentecost! For notice, now, what the Septuagint has to say concerning this problem.

I quote from the Septuagint, in Leviticus 23. Remember, this was the Bible used by the EARLY, GREEK-SPEAKING CHRISTIANS and Jews. Notice carefully the pivotal Scripture concerning the counting of Pentecost, found in Leviticus 23, quoted exactly from the LXX:

"These are the festivals for the Lord -- holy, set days, which you shall proclaim in their set times. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings, is the Passover for the Lord. And on the fifteenth day of this month beginneth the festival of unleavened bread for the Lord. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. Now the FIRST DAY shall be a holy, set day for you. You shall do no sacrificial service, but offer whole burnt offerings to the Lord seven days, and the SEVENTH DAY shall be a holy set day for you. You shall do no sacrificial service.

"Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say unto them, When you are come into the land which I give you, and are about to reap the harvest thereof, you shall bring a sheaf, as the first fruits of your harvest, to the priest, and he shall offer up the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you ON THE MORROW AFTER THE FIRST DAY, the priest shall offer this up" (Lev. 23:4-11).

How interesting and plain this makes this controversial verse of Leviticus 23:11, which some claim tells us to offer the wave sheaf on the day after the *weekly* Sabbath. *NOT SO!* The Septuagint very plainly says, "on the morrow after the FIRST DAY," and there is no way you can interpret the "first day" to ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST! It clearly does not refer to the weekly Sabbath -- the weekly Sabbath is the "SEVENTH DAY," *by its own definition!*

To be sure you understand this point clearly, notice that verse 7 of this chapter identifies the "first day" for us and plainly tells us "THE FIRST DAY" IS THE FIRST DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD!!!

This passage in the LXX, therefore, makes the truth incredibly plain and clear as crystal. It ought to END the controversy over Pentecost, and PUT TO SILENCE the obstinate voices of shrill critics. But will it? Let each individual look deep down into his or her own heart, and examine their own personal motives. Will we recognize and admit the truth? What does it take? How much "PROOF" is required?

Another "Honest" Objection Scrutinized

It is often claimed by some who cling to observing a Monday Pentecost, that the primary reason they do this is because they believe that God originally revealed the TRUTH to Herbert Armstrong, and they have held fast to that truth, even when the

Church of God as a whole departed from it in the '70s. They often point out that the '70s was a time of corruption in the Worldwide Church of God, wholesale doctrinal changes began to occur, and the faith was "watered down."

Of course, to a degree what they say is true. I know. I was in Pasadena during the 60's, 70's, 80's, and 90's. The mid-seventies were a time of crisis, corruption, cover-up, and mishandling of sins. They were a time of doctrinal confusion, debate, and widespread apostasy. I know it to be true. But those who went off on their own, did so for all the wrong reasons! They "threw the baby out with the bath water." They did not "recapture" the truth of God. Rather, like a branch broken off from a tree, most of them soon died, and disappeared from the scene. A few hung on for dear life, but never amounted to anything. And *ALL of them persisted in fundamental errors taught by Herbert Armstrong!*

Those who claim God revealed all the basic, fundamental truth to Herbert Armstrong back when the Church began, in 1934, have a serious problem. Most of them have assumed that Herbert Armstrong, back in those halcyon days, observed Pentecost on a Monday.

But they are incredibly WRONG!

In a paper defending his personal belief in a Monday Pentecost, Raymond Cole, one-time evangelist in the Worldwide Church of God, who departed from the church in the mid-70's, to begin his own church, actually admitted the following earth-shaking, cataclysmic truth: He wrote, with astonishing candor:

"There were *SEVERAL YEARS IN WHICH ARMSTRONG WAS FOLLOWING THE RABBINIC CUSTOM OF SIVAN 6*, which meant that it could fall at various times, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Now it did so happen that Sivan 6 fell on a Sunday on one or two years *DURING THE TIME WHEN MR. ARMSTRONG ACCEPTED THE MODERN JEWISH RABBINICAL DATE FOR PENTECOST.*"

Raymond Cole goes on: "Converted and called in 1927, Mr. Armstrong was ordained to the ministry in 1931. He began keeping the Holy Days with others in 1934. Truth was revealed to him, as he has said, one doctrine at a time. A calendar was published in 1937 *SHOWING PENTECOST CORRESPONDING TO THE JEWISH DATE OF SIVAN 6*. But it must have been that very year that Monday observance was begun. For a diary of an early church member, Mrs. Lorinda (Stoneberg) Le Bleu (baptized in 1936 by Mr. Armstrong), shows that she did keep Pentecost on a Monday in the years 1937, 1940, 1941 and following."

Cole explains, "Jews sometimes keep both days, Sivan 6 and 7. So it may have been that the Pentecosts observed by Mrs. Le Bleu in 1937 and 1938 were still during the time when Mr. Armstrong *HAD ACCEPTED THE JEWISH RECKONING.*" Cole goes on to say that in 1939 the Jewish Pentecost and a Monday Pentecost would have been five days apart. Mrs. Le Blue's diary for that year shows a meeting on Monday, May 29,

which he suggests is definite proof that by 1939 Mr. Armstrong had changed to a Monday Pentecost!

But so what? Just because he changed, doesn't mean he did the right thing! As we have proved conclusively, I believe, in this book, Pentecost IS and SHOULD BE OBSERVED ON SIVAN 6 -- JUST AS THE JEWS OBSERVE IT, AND HAVE OBSERVED IT, WITHOUT PAUSE, FOR THE PAST *THREE THOUSAND, FOUR HUNDRED YEARS!*

How much proof does it take?

Interestingly, Herbert Armstrong at first had it right. God did reveal to him the truth! And He did it at the beginning of the church era! But for some reason, in the late 1930's, he lost this precious truth! He forsook it, and got all mixed up in "counting." He forgot the lesson of *what day to count from!*

At this same time in his life, he was suffering from many personal problems. These have been identified in other articles and books, and have been thoroughly documented and verified. His own children have verified the truth of his incest, and moral lapses, which occurred during those fateful years. Need I say more? That is also the time when he was certain that Hitler and Mussolini were the "Beast" of Revelation, and that World War II would end up in "Armageddon," and the return of Christ!

Herbert Armstrong made many mistakes, back then. But it is not my purpose to throw stones at the dead. He may well have repented of his sins, and failures, and could be in the kingdom of God. That is for God and Christ to judge.

However, the point I am making is that regardless of the reasons why he did it, Herbert Armstrong -- who had the truth about Pentecost, originally -- later changed his mind, and became convinced that the Sadducees ruled the Temple during Christ's day, and that their method of observing Pentecost was right -- *except he even disagreed with them on HOW to COUNT!* So he still wound up observing a day, Monday, which nobody in all history, ever observed, as "Pentecost"!

How incredible! When God allows "blindness" to occur to a person, He knows how to do it completely!

A Call to REPENTANCE!

We are fast approaching the END of this age. There is not much time left. God has revealed, in this very END TIME, the TRUTH about Pentecost. The question is, will we be willing to repent, and change, and "do the right thing"?

Will those who have been wrong, who have been observing the WRONG DAY, finally own up to their errors and mistakes, and REPENT BEFORE GOD, in humility and contrition, trembling before the Word of God (Isa. 66.2-3)?

Only they can answer that.

I would like to suggest the following: While Herbert Armstrong was being led of God, and His mind was open to God's truth, beginning in 1927, God did indeed reveal to him many startling, amazing truths. One of those was the key of the annual holy days. And God revealed to him THE RIGHT DAY to observe Pentecost SIVAN 6! And for many years, he and his wife alone observed the correct day. Then, even after the beginning of the "Philadelphia era" of the Work of God, for several years -- from 1934 until 1938 -- they still observed Pentecost on SIVAN 6!

Therefore, it was not a "Monday Pentecost" at all, but SIVAN 6, that was the original day God revealed to Herbert Armstrong and Loma D. Armstrong that should be observed!

The truth is, when Herbert Armstrong changed to a "Monday" Pentecost, departing from the practice of the Jews, HE WENT INTO ERROR! He began a long and checkered and grievous process of LOSING some of the truth which had formerly been revealed! And much truth God never did reveal to him. Why?

Why did Almighty God allow this to happen? Anyone familiar with the Armstrong legacy, knows that at about this time he also began going astray in Biblical predictions and prophecy. But why?

Isaiah declares: "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. BUT YOUR INIQUITIES HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM YOUR GOD: your SINS have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2, NIV).

It is a sad and tragic fact of history that during those latter years of the 1930's and early 1940's that Herbert Armstrong, for a period of ten years, as has been admitted by his own son who discovered the truth only in the 1970's, had succumbed to temptation, and had begun molesting one of his own daughters, over a period of many years, a heinous sin in the sight of God! He did this while carrying on as a minister, and the leader of what was then called the "Radio Church of God. "

No wonder, then, that God began to "embarrass" Herbert Armstrong, allowing Him to make vain and foolish predictions concerning prophecy, and allowed him to descend into error concerning various doctrines, including divorce and remarriage, the holy days of God, and particularly the calculation of Pentecost!

In 1974 the Church went through many changes. Some erroneous doctrines were changed, but in some cases the changes were worse than the original error! One of those was changing Pentecost from "Monday" to "Sunday," the day of Baal, the sun god of antiquity! In doing this, the Church began to embrace the doctrines of Catholicism, hierarchial-ism, and began rejecting the government and commandments of God!

Jesus said that if we desire to enter into life, we must "KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS" (Mat 19:17). He said explicitly to the young rich man who asked Him what good thing he must do to get eternal life, "If you want to enter life, OBEY THE COMMANDMENTS" (Mat 19:17, NIV).

On another occasion, Jesus said to His disciples, His true followers: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the LAW or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, NOT THE SMALLEST LETTER, NOT THE LEAST STROKE OF A PEN, WILL BY ANY MEANS DISAPPEAR FROM THE LAW until everything is accomplished" (Matt 5.17-18, NIV).

God's commandments were ordained for our eternal good and welfare. They are the commandments of LIFE. They are the way of LIFE. It is very important, then, that we observe them correctly, and keep God's holy days as He originally intended and commanded -- on the precise day He set aside for worship!

If YOU do not observe Pentecost the correct day which God commanded, when you know better, then you will have no part in the Kingdom of God!

Furthermore, if you do not observe Pentecost on the correct day which God commanded, you will not receive the End-Time outpouring of God's Spirit to see you through these tumultuous, traumatic "last days"!

Those who stubbornly refuse to obey God, even when the truth has come to them, will be cut off from God, and receive the reward for disobedience -- eternal DEATH! Is that strong enough a warning?

Indeed, this is very serious business!

Remember the words of the apostle Jude, who wrote so vividly: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and EXHORT YOU that ye should EARNESTLY CONTEND for the faith WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED unto the saints" (Jude 3).

And remember God's words to the Philadelphia era of His true Church: "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews, and are not, but do he; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the

earth.

"Behold, I come quickly: HOLD THAT FAST WHICH THOU HAST, THAT NO MAN TAKE THY CROWN.

"Him that OVERCOMETH will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sayeth unto the churches" (Rev. 3:8-13, KJV).

Are YOU "contending earnestly" for the faith and truth ONCE DELIVERED? Are YOU holding fast to that original truth, so that NO MAN can *steal your crown*, laid up in heaven for you?

Consider well what you have read here. Consider well the importance of observing Pentecost on the right, God-revealed day. Consider well the proofs I have set forth in this treatise. Your salvation, and eternal life in the Kingdom of God, could very well be at stake for you. It could mean suffering Great Tribulation and the wrath of God, as "correction" from the Almighty, if you refuse to check into these things, and choose to put these things "on hold," out of your mind, procrastinating, and "waiting for a more convenient season," to investigate these matters.

Is your salvation worth checking up, going to a local library, and reading the available literature yourself? Is your salvation worth *searching the Scriptures*, and "proving all things" (I Thess.5:21), as Paul said? Do you "love" the truth of God?

It is your own decision to make. May God help you to pray over these things, and inspire you, to look to Him for guidance, and to make the right decision!

Chapter 11

PAGAN Origin of the Sunday ‘Pentecost’!

Did you know that the Roman Catholic Church counts the day of Pentecost as 50 days after the pagan Easter, and observe the SAME DAY as the Worldwide Church of God? Did you know that the Sunday Pentecost of the Catholic Church is derived from the sacred festival of the ancient pagan goddess Flora?

Furthermore, did you know that a clear but obscure command given in the book of Leviticus, concerning the counting of Pentecost, PROVES beyond the shadow of a doubt that the counting MUST begin the day after PASSOVER?

Here is some serious new truth Sunday "Pentecost" observers should carefully consider! They could be headed straight into the fiery flames of Gehenna fire and final extinction at the Day of Judgment!

The Word of God Thunders

God Almighty commands in His Word, "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer.10:2). God says, further, "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye NOT do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye NOT do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do MY judgments, and keep MINE ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God" (Lev.18:3-4).

Among those things condemned by God was the worship of all pagan gods and goddesses. God warned His people, as they were about to enter the Promised Land, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen that which the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did CLEAVE unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day" (Deut.4:2-4).

Baalpeor was the "god of the opening," a Moabite deity worshiped on the summit

of Mount Peor with immoral, licentious rites. Many of the Israelites were seduced into the sensuous rites of his worship in the plains of Moab (Num.25:1-9; Psa.106:28; Hos.9:10). Baal was a common Canaanite word meaning "lord, master." The chief male deity of the Canaanite pantheon, he was associated with agriculture, and was worshipped as the god who gave increase to family, fields, herds and flocks. He was also identified with Hadad the storm god, whose voice thundered with the advent of rain, so necessary for good crops. The inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship. The cult included animal sacrifices, ritual meals, and licentious dances. Near the altar was a sacred pillar or massebah, and close by the symbol of the ashera, both of which symbolized human fertility -- the male and female sex organs. The temples and high places of Baal had chambers for sacred prostitution where both male and female prostitutes plied their religious "trade" in behalf of the god.

Baal's consort was Ashtoreth, also called Ishtar, or "Easter," the goddess of sex, sensual love, maternity and fertility. Solomon himself succumbed to her voluptuous worship (I Kings 11:5; II Kings 23:13).

This pagan worship was abhorrent to the God of Israel, who condemned it wholly and utterly. The Pharisees called "Baalzebub" -- the form of Baal worshipped at Ekron by the Philistines, who was viewed as the producer of flies and hence a god of medicine -- the "prince of demons" (Matt.12:24) -- that is, Satan the devil himself! Thus "Baal," in the pagan worship, was actually Satan the devil, the "god of this world" (II Cor.4:4; Eph.2:2).

Worshipping According to Pagan Customs Is DEMONISM!

Worshipping pagan idols is nothing less than demonism -- the worship of demons. As the apostle Paul wrote, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to DEMONS, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with demons. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons" (I Cor.10:20-21). The Jews of the time of Christ knew that the heathen deities were actually nothing less than demon worship. Their gods were fallen angels, or demons, the chief one being Azazel, or Satan, the prince of darkness.

That same pagan worship has continued down to our day, today -- only today, it is commonly called "Christian" -- but it observes and worships on the SAME OLD PAGAN FESTIVAL DAYS THAT THE PAGANS DID!

The first Sunday of the spring of the year after the new moon following the vernal equinox, the pagans celebrated by worshipping "Ishtar" or "Easter." Admits Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons*:

"Then look at Easter. What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears the CHALDEAN ORIGIN on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than ASTARTE, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people of Nineveh,

was evidently identical with that now in common use in this country. That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar" (*The Two Babylons*, p.103).

The pagan origin of Easter is well known. Writes Ralph Woodrow in *Babylon Mystery Religion*:

"The word itself, as the dictionaries and encyclopedias explain, comes from the name of a Pagan Goddess -- the goddess of Spring. Easter is but a more modern form of Ishtar, Eostre, Ostera, or Astarte. Ishtar, another name for Semiramis of Babylon, was pronounced as we pronounce 'Easter' today! And so the name of the Spring Festival, 'Easter,' is definitely paganistic, the name being taken from the name of the Goddess" (p.152).

How did this pagan festival creep into the professing Christian Church? Says Hislop:

"To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity -- now far sunk in IDOLATRY -- in this as in so many other things, to shake hands" (*The Two Babylons*, p.104-105).

In the spring, about a month after the festival of Easter, the pagans celebrated another festival, called the festival of Floralia, in honor of Flora, the goddess of spring and flowers!

Writes Will Durant in *The Story of Civilization*, Volume 3, "Caesar and Christ":

"April alone had six festivals, culminating in the Floralia; the Feast of Flora, goddess of flowers and springs, continued for six days of bibulous and promiscuous revelry" (p.65).

Says the *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*:

"Flora -- Roman goddess of growing corn and blossoming flowers, originally worshiped by the Oscans and Sabines. In Rome, her feast (Floralia) was celebrated from 28 April to the beginning of May. It was an uninhibited and somewhat immoral popular revel; Flora herself was known as *meretrix* = WHORE, but the lasciviousness was probably intended to promote fecundity . . ." (p.119, Manfred Lurker, 1987).

The cult of Flora was introduced in ancient Rome during the age of Romulus. She was also worshiped as a goddess of love, like Venus. The name "Flora" means "The Flourishing One," and is merely another form of that ancient deity Semiramis, who herself was the goddess of love, fecundity, and spring. Writes Barbara G. Walker in *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*:

"Annually honored at the May Day festival called Floralia. Lactantius noted with distaste that Flora was 'a Lady of Pleasure,' but she was prominent and important in Roman religion. Some said her name was the SECRET-SOUL

NAME OF ROME ITSELF. Her festival was 'a licentious orgy of NUDE DANCING and promiscuous behavior" (p.316).

The fact that she was "a Lady of Pleasure" and extremely licentious also identifies her with that ancient prostitute and "lady of pleasure," Semiramis, wife and consort of Nimrod, shortly after the Flood. Hislop tells us of Semiramis:

"The Chaldean Mysteries can be traced up to the days of Semiramis, who lived only a few centuries after the flood, and who is known to have impressed upon them the image of her own depraved and polluted mind. That beautiful but abandoned queen of Babylon was not only herself a paragon of unbridled lust and licentiousness, but in the Mysteries which she had a chief hand in forming, she was worshiped as Rhea, the great 'MOTHER' of the gods, with such atrocious rites as identified her with VENUS, the mother of all impurity, and raised the very city where she had reigned to a bad eminence among the nations, as the grand seat at once of idolatry and consecrated PROSTITUTION" (*The Two Babylons*, p.5).

Flora, "the Flourishing One," the "WHORE," can be none other than a Roman version of Semiramis, the Babylonian queen and goddess of fecundity! Says the *News Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*:

"In primitive central Italy, Flora was the goddess of budding springtime, of cereals, fruit trees, the vine and flowers . . . Her festivals, the *Floralia*, lasted from the twenty-eighth of April to the third of May and were rather licentious. ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF MAY there was ANOTHER FESTIVAL IN HER HONOR, a rose festival" (p.210).

Notice carefully, now. The festival of this ancient ROMAN GODDESS, widely worshiped in ROME during the time of the early Church, fell before and at the very time of PENTECOST! The Biblical feast of Pentecost occurs 50 days after Passover, and varies in date from about the middle of May till early June. In 1977, Pentecost fell exactly on MAY 23, the date of the rose festival of Flora! Thus the festival honoring Flora, the heathen goddess of licentious behavior -- the WHORE -- of springtime and flowers, fertility and whose rites included nude dancing and promiscuous behavior, fell RIGHT AT THE TIME SURROUNDING PENTECOST!

So what does this mean?

In volume 4 of his epic work, "The Age of Faith," Will Durant explains what happened to the Festival of Flora, as with so many other pagan festivals. Notice!

"Paganism survived in the moral sense, as a joyous indulgence of natural appetites; as a religion it remained only in the FORM OF ANCIENT RITES AND CUSTOMS CONDONED, OR ACCEPTED AND TRANSFORMED, BY AN OFTEN INDULGENT CHURCH. An intimate and trustful worship of saints replaced the cult of the pagan gods, and satisfied the congenial polytheism of simple but poetic minds. Statues of Isis and Horus were RENAMED MARY AND JESUS; the Roman Lupercalia and the feast of the purification of Isis became the Feast of the Nativity; the Saturnalia were replaced by CHRISTMAS celebrations, *THE FLORALIA*

BY PENTECOST, an ancient festival of the dead by All Souls' Day, the resurrection of Attis by the resurrection of Christ. PAPAN ALTARS were dedicated to Christian heroes; incense, lights, flowers, processions, vestments, hymns, which had pleased the people in older cults, were domesticated and cleansed in the ritual of the Church . . ." (p.75).

The Roman Catholic Church thus "baptized" the pagan Floralia, called it "Pentecost," a Biblical-sounding name, and observed it seven weeks after Easter Sunday!

God condemns pagan worship and idolatry. But the Roman Catholic Church substituted PAPAN holidays and festivals for the Feasts of God as outlined in the Bible! And notice! They converted the spring festival of Flora into a Sunday "Pentecost"!

How did pagan festivals become engrafted into the Church, and how were the true days of God eliminated? This is one of the most shocking, incredible stories of all history. To understand exactly what happened, and how a PAPAN day replaced God's true Holy Day of Pentecost, let us notice, now, the TRUE origin and commandment of God concerning "Pentecost"!

The Feast of "Weeks"

The Hebrew calendar tells us that Passover is celebrated at the full moon, with the sacrifice on Nisan 14 and the meal on Nisan 15, after the new moon following the vernal equinox -- and that fifty days later the festival of "weeks" or Shavuot (Deut.16:9-10) -- called Pentecost in the New Testament, meaning in Greek "The Fiftieth Day" (Acts 2:1) -- is to be observed. Notice! God said:

"In the fourteenth day of the first month AT EVEN [meaning, afternoon, toward the END of the day] is the LORD's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the FEAST of unleavened bread unto the LORD: SEVEN DAYS YE MUST EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. . . .

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I gave unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a SHEAF of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall WAVE THE SHEAF before the LORD, to be accepted for you: ON THE MORROW AFTER THE SABBATH the priest shall wave it And ye shall EAT NEITHER BREAD, nor parched corn, nor green ears, UNTIL THE SELFSAME DAY THAT YE HAVE BROUGHT AN OFFERING UNTO YOUR GOD: it shall be a statute FOR EVER throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

"And YE SHALL COUNT unto you FROM THE MORROW AFTER THE SABBATH, from the day that ye brought the SHEAF of the wave offering; seven sabbaths [weeks] shall be COMPLETE: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath [week] shall ye number FIFTY DAYS . . ." (Lev.23:5-16).

Many translations show that the word for "sabbaths" in verse 15 and "sabbath" in verse 16 can be rendered "weeks" and "week." In fact, the Jewish translation, the Tanakh, says:

"And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering -- the day after the sabbath -- you shall COUNT OFF SEVEN WEEKS. They must be COMPLETE: you must count until the day after the SEVENTH WEEK -- fifty days . . ."

This is obviously talking about "weeks," not sabbath days. We often use the expression, "a complete week," meaning a week of seven days, as opposed to a "partial week." However, to use this expression to refer to "complete sabbath days" doesn't make any sense. This is referring to complete WEEKS, not "sabbaths." *A Dictionary of the Bible* by James Hastings makes this truth obvious. He wrote:

". . . the use of the [shabat] in the general sense of WEEKS may be justified by the analogy of the Aramaic and Syriac, the interpretation of the LXX [Septuagint], and the use of [sabbaton an sabbata] in NT, eg. Matt.28:1, Lk.18:12 . . . It is at any rate certain that the Jews celebrated the sheaf-waving on Nisan 16, and Pentecost on the fiftieth day after (usually Sivan 6), without regard in either case to the day of the week" ("Pentecost," vol.3, p.741).

The Aramaic language is closely related to Hebrew, and is the language commonly spoken in the days of Jesus. "Sabbath," in that language, can mean "week." The same is true in Syriac and in Greek. Obviously, it must be true in the Hebrew language as well.

Further proof of this fact is in the Bible itself. Whereas in Leviticus 23:15-16, the word "sabbath" is used in regard to counting "seven sabbaths" to the "seventh sabbath," Deuteronomy 16:9 plainly says, "Seven WEEKS shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the SEVEN WEEKS . . . And thou shalt keep the FEAST OF WEEKS." Here the word is *shabua* and means "seven," "week." Thus the Bible itself interprets the meaning of "sabbaths" as used in Leviticus 23 as "weeks"! How PLAIN! That's why this festival is called "the feast of WEEKS."

Origin of a Sunday Pentecost

The Jews since time immemorial have celebrated Pentecost, by counting seven weeks from the first High Holy Day of Passover. But the pagan Samaritans, and the hellenizing Sadducees, a quasi-religi-political sect among the Jews, counted their "Pentecost" differently. According to them, the wave sheaf offering was to be done on the day following -- not the High Day Sabbath of Passover -- but the WEEKLY sabbath day that occurs DURING the feast of unleavened bread.

By so reckoning, they automatically place the day of the wave sheaf offering on none other than EASTER SUNDAY -- because that is the Sunday which occurs the day after the weekly Sabbath during unleavened bread! By so reckoning, therefore, they have adopted EASTER SUNDAY AS THE DAY OF THE WAVE SHEAF

OFFERING!

How insidiously clever! How ingeniously diabolical! Thus the Catholic "Pentecost" corresponds to the Sadducean and Samaritan "Pentecost" in ancient times! This brings up the question: These Samaritans were PAGANS from Babylon (II Kings 17:23-24). From where did they get their "Sunday" Pentecost? Since they were originally worshipers of the pagan deities, and then combined or amalgamated paganism with the Old Testament, undoubtedly their interpretation was influenced by their original PAGAN practice and observance of the Festival of Flora!

The Sadducees, in following the teaching of the Samaritans in this regard, were actually also influenced by HELLENISTIC PAGANISM! In the light of these facts, do you really believe that God Almighty commanded His people Israel to count off seven weeks from the WEEKLY Sabbath day which falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to determine the date for Pentecost?

The Official Jewish Teaching

The official Jewish practice has always been to count the fifty days beginning with the day after the FIRST HIGH HOLY DAY of Unleavened Bread. The Pharisees, who were the religious leaders of the Jews during the time of Christ, endorsed this practice. Josephus the Jewish historian of the first century attests that this was the Pharisaical practice. He wrote:

"But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that they do not touch them. . . They also at this participation of the first fruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt-offering to God.

"When a WEEK OF WEEKS has passed over after this sacrifice (which week contains forty and nine days), ON THE FIFTIETH DAY, WHICH IS PENTECOST . . . they bring to God a loaf, made of wheat flour . . ." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk.III, X, 5-6).

Josephus himself was a Pharisee all his life, and this is the way the Pharisees counted Pentecost. Was it the correct way? Were the Pharisees right in how they reckoned Pentecost, by counting from the day after the First High Holy Day, or from Nisan 16?

Jesus Christ Himself also endorsed this method. It is clear, from the gospel of Matthew, that He recognized the authority of the Pharisees in matters of the Law. Even though the Pharisees were wrong in many of their customs and teachings, concerning washings of hands, and the like, yet they were the custodians of God's Law, and Jesus said that they sat in "Moses' seat." Notice!

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in MOSES' SEAT: ALL THEREFORE WHATSOEVER THEY BID YOU OBSERVE, THAT OBSERVE AND DO . . ." (Matt.23:2-3).

Clearly, Jesus here admitted that the Pharisees calculated the holy days of God, including Pentecost, CORRECTLY! He ENDORSED their commandments concerning God's LAW. He nowhere in the gospels EVER disagreed with or contradicted the Pharisees in the way they calculated and reckoned Pentecost! Surely, if they had been in error on such a vital point, Christ would have clearly pointed it out and the apostles would have recorded it! But the silence of the Messiah on this point proves that the Pharisees did indeed figure Pentecost correctly!

The Apostle Paul's Example

Furthermore, the apostle Paul, who had been a Pharisee, taught at the feet of Gamaliel, says that he was "taught according to the PERFECT MANNER OF THE LAW of the fathers" (Acts 22:3). This would have been impossible, if Paul had been taught incorrectly by Gamaliel, one of the chief rabbis of the Pharisees!

In A.D. 60 Paul addressed the Jewish Sanhedrin, saying, "I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6). The Pharisees would have disowned him, and pounced on him, for saying this, if he had been teaching a contrary method of calculating Pentecost! But instead, they were the ones who interceded for him at this point, and defended him, from the wrath of the Hellenizing Sadducees, who calculated their version of Pentecost from the weekly Sabbath that fell during the Feast of Unleavened Bread -- just like the PAGANS calculated their festival of Flora!

If Paul had kept Pentecost like the Sadducees did, they THEY would have not been so angry with him, and the Pharisees would have disowned him. But Paul was as he claimed, a devout Pharisee. Therefore he observed Pentecost just like they did, and on the same day!

As a final proof of this fact, notice that in his letter to the Philippians, Paul said that he was

"Circumcized the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law [which included Pentecost], A PHARISEE; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the RIGHT-EOUSNESS WHICH IS IN THE LAW, BLAMELESS" (Phil.3:5-6).

If Paul, as a Pharisee, had been observing Pentecost on the wrong day, he could never have made this statement! It would have been a LIE! But, as a true apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul did not lie -- he bore witness and testified that as a Pharisee he observed God's LAW -- including the right day for Pentecost, counting from the First High Holy Day -- 'BLAMELESSLY'!!! And, according to most historians, Paul made this statement in 64 A.D. -- not many years before his final martyrdom

Should we not therefore follow his example, which he set, for the whole Church? Paul commanded the Corinthian Church, "Be ye FOLLOWERS OF ME, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor.11:1). If we follow Paul, then we, too, will observe Pentecost on

Sivan 6 -- not like the Sadducees did, on the seventh Sunday following Easter Sunday!

The Words That Will JUDGE Us!

Paul and Jesus Christ, the Messiah, both upheld the teaching of the Pharisees on this issue. To reject their teaching is tantamount to rejecting the gospel and words of Jesus Christ -- to reject Him as Saviour and Redeemer! And to reject Christ's teaching, and example, is to mean that you LOSE YOUR SALVATION! Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). If you reject His words, you quench the Spirit, and reject LIFE!

Jesus further said, "My doctrine [teaching] is not mine, but HIS THAT SENT ME" (John 7:16). To reject Jesus' plain words about Pentecost, then, is to reject the FATHER Himself! Jesus declared,

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not MY WORDS, hath one that judgeth him: the WORD that I have spoken, the SAME SHALL JUDGE HIM in the last day. For I HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF MYSELF; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:48-50).

These are surely serious matters, not mere curiosities to be taken lightly. Salvation itself is at stake! To hide one's eyes from the truth, to cower in sheer cowardice and refuse to face the facts, the truth, is tantamount to REJECTING truth and incurring the penalty for breaking the LAWS of God -- the reward for disobedience -- DEATH (Romans 6:23).

But there is even further proof.

Rather than just argue over this question endlessly, as some are wont to do, to justify their PAGAN practice of observing a PAGAN SUNDAY "PENTECOST," derived from the festival of the pagan goddess of flowers, FLORA, let us notice a fact which has apparently hitherto gone unnoticed among most of the rhetoric and heat of debate over this issue.

An Insolvable Paradox and Dilemma

Those who count Pentecost from the Sunday which falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, put themselves right on the horns of an insolvable dilemma. Notice! According to the commandments of God, we are COMMANDED TO EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD FOR SEVEN DAYS, during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. In Leviticus 23:6, God says,

"And on the fifteen day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: *seven days ye MUST east unleavened bread*" (Lev.23:6).

"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance FOR EVER. SEVEN DAYS *shall ye EAT unleavened bread*; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD, UNTIL THE ONE AND TWENTYETH DAY OF THE MONTH AT EVEN" (Exodus 12:14-18).

"SEVEN DAYS THOU SHALT EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LORD. UNLEAVENED BREAD SHALL BE EATEN SEVEN DAYS; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters" (Exo. 13:6-7).

Isn't this command perfectly clear? We are **COMMANDED TO EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD** for *all seven days* of the Feast of Unleavened Bread -- that is why it is literally called, "The Feast of Unleavened Bread"! Get the point?

Now, Joseph Tkach of the Worldwide Church of God says we don't have to eat unleavened bread all seven days. Who is he kidding? Who is he deceiving? Whom will you believe -- him? Or the Word of GOD? If you believe him, and follow him, then HE becomes your "god" -- and you become an IDOLATER!

But now notice something very interesting! God commands us to EAT unleavened bread EVERY DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD! Yet, God also commands, with absolute DIVINE AUTHORITY --

"And ye shall *EAT NEITHER BREAD, NOR PARCHED CORN, NOR GREEN EARS, UNTIL THE SELFSAME DAY* that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it is a STATUTE FOR EVER throughout your generations in all your dwellings" (Lev.23:14).

Let's understand this! They could not eat unleavened bread, after the First High Sabbath of the Feast, UNTIL they had offered the wave sheaf offering!

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins with the High Holy Day, Nisan 15, at sunset, and the holy day is observed until the following sunset (compare Lev.23:32). Just after sunset, at the beginning of Nisan 16, according to the Pharisees, the wave sheaf offering was brought and waved before the LORD. Therefore, from that point on, the people were able to EAT bread -- unleavened bread, of course -- for ALL the remaining six days of the Festival!

No problem.

But consider this! IF you claim the wave sheaf offering wasn't offered UNTIL THE DAY AFTER THE WEEKLY SABBATH, you have a serious problem. Why is this? According to the Hebrew sacred calendar, Passover can occur on DIFFERENT DAYS OF THE WEEK! For example, some years Nisan 14 can occur on Sunday,

Monday, Wednesday, etc. If it occurs on Sunday, then the Holy Day would be Monday, and the wave sheaf offering would be offered Monday night, after sunset (if there were still a tabernacle or Temple). The people of God would continue eating unleavened bread, after the wave sheaf offering on Monday night, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, till the end of the Festival.

No problem!

But IF the wave sheaf offering was offered on the Sunday following the WEEKLY SABBATH, as the Sadducees claimed, then we surely do have a problem! Because since the First Holy Day was a Monday, the weekly Sabbath would actually be the SIXTH DAY of the Feast of Unleavened Bread! Yet, God plainly commanded, saying NO BREAD WAS TO BE EATEN *until the wave sheaf offering!* Therefore, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sabbath -- FIVE DAYS during the very FEAST of UNLEAVENED BREAD -- BREAD WOULD HAVE BEEN FORBIDDEN TO BE EATEN!!!

God does not contradict Himself! The Sadducean Pentecost leads to a direct and unsolvable CONTRADICTION OF THE SCRIPTURES!

What a paradox! What a *humungous* PROBLEM for a Sunday Pentecost!

Truly, those who profess to follow the Sadducean reckoning are poised on the *sharp horns of an excruciating dilemma!*

If Passover were a Monday, then the First Holy Day would be Tuesday. The days of Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sabbath would come before the "Sunday" the Sadducees said the wave sheaf offering was to be performed. FOUR DAYS of the Feast would pass during which NO unleavened BREAD COULD BE EATEN during the FEAST of Unleavened Bread!

Yet God ALSO commands unleavened bread to be eaten ALL SEVEN DAYS!

Did God contradict Himself? Of course not!

Does the Sadducean Pentecost then make any sense at all? Of course NOT!

Absolutely *NOT!* It forces a direct contradiction in the Scriptures, if we follow it! God plainly commands, in Leviticus 23, "SEVEN DAYS YE *MUST* EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD" (Leviticus 23:6). The only way for this to be possible, is for the wave sheaf offering to be performed IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRST HOLY DAY!

To postpone the wave sheaf offering for four or five days, until the WEEKLY SABBATH is past, would *WRECK AND DESTROY* THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD, and would also *BREAK* THE DIRECT COMMANDMENT OF GOD!

God surely does not contradict Himself. "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). "Thy word is truth," Jesus said (John 17:17). Therefore, since bread was plainly forbidden until the wave sheaf offering was performed (Lev.23:14), as a statute forever, the WAVE SHEAF HAD TO BE PERFORMED RIGHT AFTER THE FIRST HOLY DAY -- AND NOT THREE, FOUR, FIVE, OR SIX DAYS LATER!

WHOM WILL YOU BELIEVE AND OBEY?

How about it? Whom will you believe? Will you now follow the Word of God, and the example of Jesus Christ, and the apostle Paul, and the early Church, and observe Pentecost on the fiftieth day after the First High Holy Day of Unleavened Bread -- which happens to be Sivan 6, according to the Jewish calendar?

Or will you follow modern churches run by men which persist in perverting the truth of God, and follow the erroneous Sadducean Pentecost, the Roman Catholic Sunday Pentecost, patterned after the ancient pagan festival of the Floralia?

Will you persist in observing a PAGAN counterfeit Pentecost, which really celebrates the festival of the pagan goddess Flora, the day adopted by the Roman Catholic Church as their "Whitsunday"?

Or will you obey the Word of GOD?

A Pagan Roman Emperor

The substitution of pagan holidays for God's holy days began after the death of the original apostles, and was codified and enforced by the Roman Emperor Constantine, at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

At the behest of Constantine, who sought to enforce "unity" upon the different factions of the Christian Church, the Biblical Passover was rejected in favor of Easter Sunday. In fixing the date for Easter, the Pagan Church also fixed the date for Pentecost 50 days after Easter Sunday, in place of the pagan Floralia festival!

In Constantine's immortal words:

"It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul . . . Let us then have NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THE DETESTABLE JEWISH CROWD . . . Strive and pray continually that the purity of your souls may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the customs of these most wicked men . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appear to demand, and in AVOIDING ALL PARTICIPATION IN THE PERJURED CONDUCT OF THE JEWS" (Eusebius, Life of Constantine,

3:18-19, NPNF, 2nd, I, pp.524-525).

The renown scholar J. B. Lightfoot asserts that Rome and Alexandria adopted Easter-Sunday to avoid "EVEN THE SEMBLANCE OF JUDAISM" (J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1885, II, part I, p.88). The same would apply, of course, to the pagan Pentecost, counted fifty days from Easter Sunday! When Constantine convened the Council of Nicea, it was not to return to the faith of the Bible, the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) -- it was to COMPEL THE WORLD TO ADOPT CHRISTIANIZED PAGANISM!

Thus the Roman Catholic Church and all western professing Christendom departed from the true festivals of God as set forth in the Scriptures, and embraced pagan days and celebrations, now calling them "Christian." Says Samuel Bacchiocchi, in *From Sabbath to Sunday*:

"In a document attributed to Irenaeus it is specifically enjoined not to kneel down on Sunday nor on Pentecost, that is, THE SEVEN WEEKS OF THE EASTER PERIOD, 'because it is of equal significance with the Lord's day.' The reason given is that both feasts are 'a symbol of the resurrection.' Tertullian confirms that custom but adds the prohibition of fasting as well: 'On Sunday it is unlawful to fast or to kneel while worshipping. We enjoy the same liberty from Easter to Pentecost.' F.A. Regan comments on the text, saying: 'In the season extending from EASTER TO PENTECOST, the same custom was followed, thus showing the RELATION between the ANNUAL and WEEKLY FEASTS'" (*From Sabbath to Sunday*, p.204-205).

The pagan Easter Sunday-pagan Pentecost Sunday tradition is tied together, and goes together like ham and eggs, or vodka and caviar. The Sunday Easter replaces the Passover, and the Sunday Pentecost, counted from Easter Sunday, replaces the true Sivan 6 Pentecost, counted from Passover!

Do you see? Do you understand?

Satan the devil has very cleverly, adroitly, substituted the days that WORSHIP HIM and his demonic empire of fallen spirits, for the worship of the True God of the Bible!

It is not just Easter itself which is pagan to the core, but the whole pagan complex of holidays -- the Pagan Easter AND the Pagan Pentecost! They are tied together. If you observe either one, you are following a PAGAN custom which Almighty God condemns!

In other words, NOT JUST EASTER ITSELF, BUT **THE WHOLE EASTER SUNDAY-PENTECOST SUNDAY TRADITION IS UTTERLY PAGAN -- A RELIGIOUS FRAUD PERPETRATED UPON THE NAIVE, GULLIBLE, AND UNSUSPECTING CHRISTIAN WORLD IN THE DAYS OF THE PAGAN ROMAN**

EMPEROR CONSTANTINE!

Truly, the devil has deceived the "whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

Obviously, therefore, a TRUE Christian, who seeks to obey GOD in all things, and to live by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of GOD" (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4), will follow Christ and Paul and the TRUTH of the Bible, and will avoid at all costs any compromise with paganism, and any festivals adulterated with pagan DEMON WORSHIP DISGUISED AS CHRISTIANITY!

What about you?

Will you continue to follow PAGAN WORSHIP, which the devil has palmed off on an unsuspecting Christianity? Will you thereby partake of the table of DEMONS?

Or will you clean up your act, and get right with God, and REPENT of ERROR, and HATE the evil (Proverbs 8:13), and do what God commands?

When Job saw his sin and error, he confessed to God and declared, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I ABHOR MYSELF, and REPENT in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

What about you and your family?

Will you also repent? Jesus Christ thunders, to all who hear Him,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: REPENT YE, and BELIEVE the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus also said, to the Jews of His day, and to all of us, today:

"Suppose ye that these Galileans [whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices] were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

"I tell you, Nay: but, EXCEPT YE REPENT, ye shall all LIKEWISE PERISH.

"Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

"I tell you, Nay: but **EXCEPT YE REPENT**, ye shall all likewise **PERISH!**" (Luke 13:2-5).

Chapter 12

The REAL Meaning of the Feast of Trumpets!

Does the "Feast of Trumpets" portray the second coming of Jesus Christ? Don't be too sure! It is about time we took a closer look at this vital holy day of God! Here is new understanding regarding this key annual holy day, and its REAL meaning!

For many decades multiple thousands have been taught, and have taken for granted, the teaching that the Feast of Trumpets -- also known as Rosh Hashanah -- pictures the second coming of Jesus Christ to this earth to set up the Kingdom of God! It seemed so clear -- doesn't this day picture the blowing of trumpets? And doesn't Jesus Christ return at the sound of a great trumpet? Therefore, by extension, doesn't this day portray the second coming of Christ at the blowing of the "last trumpet" (I Cor.15:51-52)?

Let's not just take this teaching for granted, and "assume" that it must be true. For if we analyze it carefully, we should see immediately that there is something here that just doesn't "add up" right. First of all, the holy day itself is not called the "Feast of the Great Trumpet," or "Feast of the LAST Trumpet." Not at all! Rather, it is named "The Feast of TRUMPETS" -- that is to say, *the word trumpets is PLURAL!* This is the Feast of MANY "trumpets" -- not just the "last" trumpet!

How many trumpets are going to be blown at the second coming of Jesus Christ? According to the Word of God, just ONE trumpet is mentioned! Notice it!

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the TRUMPET OF GOD: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess.4:16-17).

Notice! This verse does not say MANY trumpets are going to be blown when Christ returns -- but just ONE trumpet, the "trumpet of GOD"! When the Messiah returns, there will be a loud NOISE -- the voice of the archangel -- and a SHOUT -- and

also the loud TRUMPET BLAST of ONE TRUMPET!

The apostle Paul writes further about this colossal event, the return of Christ:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMPET: for the TRUMPET SHALL SOUND, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE SHALL BE CHANGED . . ." (I Cor.15:52).

Notice further! Not only does Jesus Christ return at the sounding of a single magnificent trumpet blast, but it will be the "LAST" trumpet! Clearly, this implies that there will be many "trumpets" that will sound BEFORE this *last* trumpet call is signaled!

Jesus Christ Himself also described His second coming in these graphic words:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall SEE the Son of man coming IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY. And he shall send his angels with the GREAT SOUND OF A TRUMPET, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:30-31).

Isaiah wrote of this single, solitary trumpet peal. He declared:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the GREAT TRUMPET shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isa.27:12-13).

Clearly Christ will return at the sound of one final great trumpet blast! But the Feast of Trumpets is NOT the Feast of one great solitary trumpet blast -- it is the Feast of TRUMPETS -- *PLURAL!* What, therefore, does it really signify?

Just what is the significance of the blowing of trumpets -- plural -- anyway? Let's take another, closer look into this magnificent Holy Day of God, and see what it really pictures!

The Meaning of Trumpets

The "Feast of Trumpets," in Hebrew, is *Yom Teruah*, and literally means "Day of Blowing," or "Memorial of blowing of trumpets." We read in the book of Numbers, "And in the seventh month [Tishri], ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a *day of blowing the trumpets* unto you" (Num.29:1). In the Septuagint, translated in the Greek language about 250 years before the time of Christ, the phrase used is *hemera semasias*, which literally means "a day of signaling." Trumpets are blown to "signal" something. But to signal what, in this case, are these "trumpets" blown for?

In Leviticus, we also read: "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, *a memorial of blowing of trumpets*, an holy convocation" (Lev.23:24).

The Feast of Trumpets fell on the first day of the seventh month, which was the first day of the civil calendar. Thus it came to be called "Rosh Hashanah," the "Head of the year." Because it fell on a new moon, and is the only annual Holy Feast of God that does so, it is also called the "Feast of the New Moon."

Unger's Bible Dictionary tells us how this Feast was observed in ancient times:

"This day was observed as a feast day, in the strict sense, by resting from all work, and as a memorial of blowing of horns, by a holy convocation. In later times, while the drink offering of the sacrifice was being poured out, the priests and Levites chanted Psalm 81, while at the evening sacrifice they sang Psalm 29. *Throughout the day trumpets were blown at Jerusalem from morning to evening. In the temple it was done even on a Sabbath, but not outside its walls*" (p.350).

Notice carefully that trumpets were blown all day long, from morning to evening - many trumpets! Says *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, "Instead of the mere blowing of the trumpets of the temple at the time of the offering of the sacrifices, it was 'a day of blowing of trumpets'" (p.707).

Hastings Bible Dictionary informs us that the instrument used on the Feast of Trumpets was the traditional ram's horn, known as the *shofar*. It also informs us, "Mostly it was the *shofar* that was used *in war either as a signal either for assembly (Judges 3:27; II Sam.20:1), attack or retreat (II Sam.2:28)*" (volume 4, p.816, "Trumpet"). This authority continues, "The watchman blew the *shofar* to raise an alarm or to indicate impending danger (Amos 3:6, Jer.6:1, Ezek.33:6), and Moore (on Judges 6:34) renders *shofar* by 'WAR HORN'" (*ibid.*).

The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible adds this fascinating insight into the *shofar*, blown on the Day of Blowing:

"The sound of the *shofar* was audible at a great distance (Exo.19:16, 19); and was well adapted to increase the noise of shouting (II Sam.6:15; Psalm 98:6), but was ill-suited to be played with harps and pipes in an orchestra. At the shout of the people and the blasts of the trumpets the walls of Jericho came tumbling down (Josh.6:1-20). **THE SHOFAR WAS USED IN WAR TO ASSEMBLE THE ARMY** (Judges 3:27; 6:34; I Sam.13:3), **TO SOUND THE ATTACK** (Job 39:24-25), **TO SIGNAL THE CESSATION OF THE PURSUIT** (II Sam.2:28; 18:16), and to announce the disbanding of the army (II Sam.20:1, 22). **WATCHMEN BLEW IT TO SOUND THE ALARM** (Jer.6:1; Amos 3:6). Its blast proclaimed the *accession of the king* (II Sam.15:10; I Kings 1:34; II Kings 9:13), and the commencement of the year of jubilee (Lev.25:9). The 1st day of the 7th month was celebrated by solemn rest from ordinary labor, a holy convocation, and the offering of special burnt offerings (Lev.23:24; Num.29:1-6), because the day marked a recurring seventh portion of time. It was a day or memorial of blowing of trumpets, *designed to bring the people into remembrance before the Lord*. The Jewish tradition is doubtless correct which states that the trumpet used was the *shofar*

(cf. Lev.25:9)" (Trumpet, p.959).

Notice that the *shofar* as an instrument is defined in the Bible as an instrument of WARNING and of ASSEMBLY, especially for a nation or its army. It was used to assemble a nation's armed forces for defense or war; it was blown to sound the "attack" call, much as the Cavalry's bugle in more recent times; and notice that it was used to SOUND THE ALARM, when a city or nation was threatened by an invading army or disaster of some kind.

What does this have to do with the trumpets that are blown on the "Day of Blowing," the Feast of Trumpets? Before addressing that question, let us notice what the Jews have to say about the Festival of Rosh Hashanah.

The Jewish View of Rosh Hashanah

We read in *Judaism* by Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, concerning this high holy day:

"Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, is the beginning of the annual cycle of the Jewish religious year. It falls on the first of the lunar month Tishri, when usually occurs in September. The TEN DAYS from Rosh Hashanah (literally, the 'head of the year') through Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) are known as the 'TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE.' *These are the most solemn days of the year, for this is the period in which, in the image of the tradition, ALL THE WORLD IS JUDGED BEFORE GOD'S HEAVENLY THRONE. Nonetheless, solemn and serious as Rosh Hashanah is, it is not somber. It is the SEASON OF REPENTANCE -- and of the faith that God forgives the contrite heart*" (p.190).

According to the Jewish understanding, the period of God's judgment of the world *begins* on Rosh Hashanah, and is finalized and *sealed* ten days later, on Yom Kippur, with the fates of the righteous and the wicked being decided. Judgment begins on Rosh Hashanah, and the world enters into a period of judgment -- but the actual judgment is set and finished on Yom Kippur. Therefore, the ten days from Rosh Hashanah are known as the Ten Days of Repentance, for during this time mankind is encouraged to *repent, and get right with God, BEFORE the final "Judgment" is set!*

In *The Jewish Book of Why*, we read that the entire period of introspection and self-examination actually begins during the month of Elul, thirty days prior to Rosh Hashanah.

"Actually, the Days of Awe are much more than the ten day period from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. They commence a full month before Rosh Hashana with the beginning of the month of Elul.

"In the synagogue, every Sabbath before the coming of the New Moon is a special Sabbath. But the Sabbath before the New Moon of Elul is very special, for from that day on, at every weekday morning service, the blasts of the *shofar* reverberate in the synagogue, reminding Jews that the most awesome holidays in the Jewish calendar are approaching" (*The Jewish Book of Why*, Alfred J. Kolatch, p.221).

Thus the "count-down" really begins 30 days prior to Rosh Hashanah, which is

ten days before Yom Kippur -- a total period of 40 days (symbolizing a "time of trial"). Israel's spies took forty days to spy out Canaan, and then returned with an "evil report" of the fearful forces lurking in wait to destroy the Israelites, causing the people to lose heart and faith (Num.13-14). Because of their disobedience, God punished them *forty years*, a year for a day (Num.14:34).

Could this annual re-enactment of God's Plan through the high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur constitute a prophetic indication that the final forty years of this "age" will be years when God calls His people to repentance, years of growing peril and worldwide tribulation and agony? Could not the final "ten days" -- the "Days of Awe" -- between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur represent the FINAL TEN YEARS OF WARNING that God will give His people, before the final JUDGMENT takes place - which will occur at the coming of the Messiah?

In other words, the judgment takes place on Yom Kippur -- but the final WARNING of that coming day of final judgment is symbolized by the "blowing of trumpets" of alarm and calling the people to repentance, on Rosh Hashanah!

Similar to this theme, *The Jewish Book of Why* states:

"Rosh Hashanah, in its lengthy morning services (from two to seven hours, depending on the congregation), stresses the concept of 'return to God,' who in His mercy is willing to receive the penitent, forgive his sins, and offer him an opportunity to begin the New Year with a clean slate. According to Jewish tradition, God's decision is not made in haste.

"The gates of repentance remain open until the Day of Atonement, at which time the FINAL DECREE is established: 'Who will live and who will die; who will be serene and who will be disturbed; who will be poor and who will be rich; who will be humbled and who will be exalted.'

"Yom Kippur is popularly considered the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar . . . Its five services, beginning with the *Kol Nidre* service and ending twenty-four hours later with the *Neila* service, bring to an end the Days of Awe. After the *Neila* ('the closing of the gates') service, the *shofar* is sounded and the congregation leaves to face another year" (p.222).

Of course the day of Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, is considered as the "most sacred day in the Jewish calendar." Why is this? Although modern Jewish people do not understand it, this day represents the day of the coming of the Messiah -- Jesus Christ -- who will JUDGE the nations when He returns!

As the apostle Paul put it so plainly: ". . . the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, *in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall COME to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe* (because our testimony among you was believed) *in that day*" (II Thess.1:7-10).

The blowing of the *shofar* is an intimate part of this period picturing preparation to meet God, and to undergo His judgment. Its most important uses, described in the Bible, were "to intimidate the enemy, to declare war, and to call the populace to assembly" (*Jewish Book of Why*, p.225). Originally, the *shofar* was blown a short blast every New Moon, marking the beginning of a new month. But on the New Moon of the seventh month, Tishri 1, the "Feast of Trumpets," prolonged alarm blasts were sounded. Obviously, these were to herald a warning to the people, that the time has come to **PREPARE TO BE JUDGED BY THE KING MESSIAH!**

These long alarm blasts on the *shofar* marked the beginning of a special period of time -- the Ten Days of Awe -- which culminate in the final judgment of Yom Kippur, which occurs at the return of Christ the Messiah!

The *shofar* is blown every morning of every day of the month of Elul, preceding Rosh Hashanah. This is followed by 100 blasts upon the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah itself! At this point, the urgency of the final judgment looms menacingly near, ominously close at hand -- and there is no longer any time left to "fool around." It is time to "get serious"!

Says Rabbi Irving Greenberg, in *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*,

"The liturgical highlight of Rosh Hashanah is the shofar blowing. The shofar is sounded repeatedly throughout the service, a total of ONE HUNDRED BLASTS in the traditional synagogue" (p.194).

The theme of the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur is "repentance."
Says Rabbi Greenberg,

""Seek God when God is readily found," these are the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur.' In Kabbalistic terms, this Talmudic teaching means that God is somehow closer during the High Holy Days. More rationalistically, it means that people are more apt to turn to God thanks to the mood of this period. In the face of death and trial, many self-deceptions fall away" (p.202).

Repentance is the major theme, beginning with Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Blowing. The blowing of the trumpets is a fantastic, incredible call to each individual to repentance, self-examination, *regret* for sins committed, and a firm *rejection* of the sins committed, and finally a firm *resolution* or resolve not to continue committing those sins any longer.

This time of WARNING has begun! The apostle Paul thundered to the Athenians, "Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, *but now commandeth all men every where to REPENT: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will JUDGE the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained*" (Acts 17:29-31).

The "Crisis at the Close"

We are now living in the "crisis at the end" of this age of mankind (Dan.12:4, Moffatt translation). This is the time of the "crisis at the close" (verse 9). This is an age of awesome peril and frightening threats to the survival of mankind (II Tim.3:1).

In a detailed prophecy of the events which will occur on the earth, just prior to His Second Coming, Jesus Christ told His disciples, "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the BEGINNING of sorrows" (Matt.24:7-8). These things have already begun to happen, and on a stepped up scale!

Jesus Christ foretold incredible upsets of the weather and the natural order. He declared: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth *distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring: Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth:* for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:25-27).

These things have already begun to come to pass, with increasing frequency and crescendoing severity.

Following on the heels of these natural disasters, Jesus foretold widespread religious deception, apostasy, and persecution upon the true followers of Christ (Matt.24:9-11). Many false prophets and religious leaders would rise up, deceiving the many -- charismatic leaders, religious Neanderthals, and autocratic leaders impressed with their own vanity and ego. This has happened. Jesus added, "And because iniquity shall abound" -- wickedness, lawlessness, pornography, obscenity, cursing, gang violence, immorality, humanism -- "the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the END, the same shall be saved" (Matt.24:11-13).

The apostle Paul also spoke of this horrible, mind-bending, spine-twisting time of sheer terror coming upon the earth. He wrote, "This know also, that in the LAST DAYS *PERILOUS TIMES* shall come upon the earth. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, *proud*, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, *false accusers*, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, *traitors, heady*, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: Having a FORM of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away [have nothing to do with them!]" (II Tim.3:1-5).

Coming: GREAT TRIBULATION

Jesus went on to say, in His famous Mount Olivet prophecy, "For then shall be GREAT TRIBULATION [distress, suffering, travail, WAR], *such as was not since the beginning* of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should NO FLESH BE SAVED [alive]: but for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened" (Matt.24:21-22).

The gospel of Mark warns: "For in those days shall be AFFLICTION, *such as was not from the beginning* of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be" (Mark 13:19). Luke records: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with ARMIES, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them which are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the DAYS OF VENGEANCE, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be GREAT DISTRESS in the land, and WRATH upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-24).

Moffatt, in his translation, calls this period of time "the CRISIS at the CLOSE" (Daniel 12:4, 9). Daniel prophesied, "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a TIME OF TROUBLE, *such as never was since there was a nation* even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan.12:1).

Looking into the future, into our day, the prophet Jeremiah foretold of this same indescribable, unique, incredible time! He wrote: "Alas! for that day is great, *so that none is like it*: it is even the time of JACOB'S TROUBLE; but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer.30:7).

"The Day of the LORD"

The prophet Haggai was inspired of God to write, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will SHAKE THE HEAVENS, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will *shake all nations*, and the desire of all nations [the much-awaited Messiah!] shall come: and I will fill this house [the end-time Temple of God, which the Jews are even now prepared to rebuild in Jerusalem!] with glory, saith the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:6-7).

The prophet Joel declares, "BLOW ye the TRUMPET in Zion, *SOUND AN ALARM* in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the *day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand*" (Joel 2:1). Joel goes on to describe the firestorms of nuclear war (verses 2-10) erupting on the earth. He then calls out to God's people, "For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the LORD, *TURN YE EVEN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and TURN unto the LORD your God*: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him . . . *BLOW THE TRUMPET in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly . . .*" (Joel 2:11-15).

Friends, *we are LIVING IN the end-time "Days of Awe"!* We are living in the very days depicted by the "Ten Days of Repentance"!

Have you yet come to real, genuine, heartfelt repentance?

Notice! The prophet Joel says of this coming "Day of the Lord" -- "Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a DESTRUCTION from the Almighty shall it come" (Joel 1:15).

The prophet Zephaniah also prophesies of this coming "Day of the LORD":

"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a DAY OF WRATH, A DAY OF TROUBLE AND DISTRESS, A DAY OF WASTENESS AND DESOLATION, A DAY OF DARKNESS AND GLOOMINESS, A DAY OF CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS. *A day of the TRUMPET and alarm* against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the DAY OF THE LORD'S WRATH; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

The awesome events soon to come upon this earth scientists and astronomers will be at a loss to explain. It will stretch, break, and overwhelm all their most cherished theories.

The prophet Joel goes on:

"And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turn into darkness, and the moon into blood, BEFORE the great and the terrible DAY OF THE LORD come" ((Joel 2:30-31).

During this final "day" -- or year -- of man's rule of planet earth, which will end with the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ, to rule the nations, awesome events are predicted and projected in the prophecies of the Scriptures. They are symbolized or referred to as "angelic TRUMPET plagues"! Notice!

The Blowing of SEVEN Awesome "Trumpets"

According to the book of Revelation, the soon-coming "Day of the LORD" will be divided up into "seven trumpets" -- seven angels will blow seven trumpet blasts, and these will introduce seven calamitous plagues that God will send on the earth. The apostle John writes:

"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given SEVEN TRUMPETS . . . And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound" (Rev.8:1-6).

These trumpet blasts of the heavenly "shofar" are WARNINGS FROM GOD to the inhabitants of the earth, that the time has come to REPENT of their sins and iniquities -- or suffer the dire consequences! Notice! The first four of these angelic trumpet blasts will be followed by physical calamities, or incredible, intense catastrophes of "nature" gone amok. Notice these first four plagues of "nature":

"The **first angel sounded**, and there followed hail [meteor showers] and fire [burning, sizzling meteorites] mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

"And the **second angel sounded**, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of ships were destroyed" (Rev.8:7-9).

"And the **third angel sounded**, and there FELL A GREAT STAR FROM HEAVEN, burning as it were a LAMP [a fiery asteroid from outer space, or a giant comet!], and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood ["bitterness"; *Chernobyl*, in Russian, meaning "bitterness"]; and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter [polluted and poisonous].

"And the **fourth angel sounded**, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise" (Rev.8:10-12).

Here, in graphic description, is a prophecy of natural disasters prophesied to overwhelm the earth in the year immediately preceding the coming of the Messiah, at the end of 6,000 years of man's misrule of planet earth! Mankind will be punished with natural disasters, because he has polluted, spoiled, desecrated, and destroyed much of the pristine natural environment which God created him to rule over and nourish and protect (Gen.1:26-28; Isaiah 45:18; 24:4-6, 16). Because of these grievous sins against the environment, and the natural world, God will "destroy them which destroy the earth" (Rev.11:18).

When Will It All Happen?

When will these awesome plagues be poured out on our hapless planet and its rebellious inhabitants? When will a massive asteroid such as science calls a "Doomsday Asteroid" strike our planet? When will these incredible prophecies be fulfilled?

Although we cannot state with absolute certainty, the indication from Biblical prophecy and Biblical evidence, is that the 6,000 years from Adam and Eve should be counted from the time they sinned, and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. That's when the countdown began. The book of Jubilees tells us that this occurred seven years after their original creation in 4004 B.C. Thus we have:

4004 B.C.	6000 years	2003 A.D.
<u>-7</u>	<u>-3997 B.C.</u>	<u>+1</u>
3997 B.C.	2003 A.D.	2004 A.D.

Since there is no year "zero," we must make an adjustment when counting from B.C. to A.D. dating or vice versa. When we normally count years, we count inclusively, but when we subtract one number from another, it is like exclusive counting. Therefore, we must add "1" year to our computation to arrive at the correct year. It is strange that even so-called "academics" don't seem to be aware of this problem, or how it works, and therefore get confused and mislead the public when they go from B.C. to A.D. dating!

This information strongly suggests that the end of 6,000 years is 2004 A.D. At this point, Daniel's 70th week (Dan.9:27) – a final period of seven years – could begin, counting down to the coming of the Messiah! Or, that final "countdown" could be TEN YEARS – from 2004 to 2014 – represented by the ten "days" from the Feast of Trumpets till Yom Kippur – counting a symbolical "day" for a year in actual fulfillment! Or, we could count simply an additional 3 years from 2004 till 2007-8, if the 6,000 years represents the year of Messiah's return, and if we have to "add in" the 3 years of Christ's ministry, when He represented the 'Kingdom of God' while He was on earth!

When, then, will all these things happen? No one knows the day or the hour – only God the Father! (Matthew 24:36).

The Final Three "Woes"

The last three of these trumpet plagues -- numbers 5, 6, and 7 -- are also known as the "three woes" (Rev.8:13). These represent the final three rounds of WORLD WAR, culminating in the return of Christ to settle the issue of who will rule the earth once and for all!

Notice! In Revelation 9, the "*fifth angel sounded,*" and the first "woe" followed -- "locusts" which utilize chemical warfare, "tormenting mankind" for five months" (Rev.9:1-11). The head of this World Empire is Satan the devil, working through the "Beast" (v.11). "Locusts," in the Bible, are a type of Assyrian and Babylonian soldiers (see Nahum 3:17-18). God compares the soldiers -- the military -- of this final World Government to "locusts," therefore. But these are peculiar locusts -- they use chemical and biological weapons to "torment" mankind. In appearance, these soldiers are described as "women" (Nahum 3:13; Rev.9:8-10).

This world power will inflict awesome calamities everywhere -- it is the "king of the north" (compare Daniel 11:40-45).

Following hard on the heels of this "trumpet plague," John writes, "*the sixth angel sounded,*" followed by the "second woe" (Rev.9:13). Notice! This woe will consist of a massive army from the EAST which will number *200,000,000 men!* (Rev.9:12-21). This huge army will undoubtedly consist of millions of soldiers from China and possibly India, and surrounding regions, including the Persians and Russians. This tremendous army, like the terrible hordes of Genghis Khan, will march westward, into Europe and the Middle East. These hordes come from "beyond Euphrates" (Rev.9:14-15; 16:12). They

will slay the *third part* of men -- about 2 billion human beings will die in the horrendous world war to follow (v.15).

It is a fascinating fact, today, that the nation of China has an excess of men over women in the younger generation. Men outnumber women in that age group by *9 to 1 -- with an excess of almost 150,000,000 men!* This fact is due to the Chinese governmental policy of limiting each family to having only one child. Since most Chinese families, by culture and tradition, desire to have a male offspring, someone who can take care of them in their old age, young girls babies are often aborted, or killed shortly after childbirth. Growing up lonely, frustrated, and miserable, these young men will become part of that huge army that will attack towards the West!

The "Third Woe" - ARMAGEDDON!

At this point, after billions have already died in natural disasters and worldwide wars, the devil and his demons will bring all the armies of the earth together, for one final "battle" -- to fight against Jesus Christ at His return! John writes: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, TO GATHER THEM TO THE BATTLE OF THAT GREAT DAY OF GOD ALMIGHTY. . . .

"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, ARMAGEDDON . . ." (Rev.16:13-16).

Armageddon! Finally, it will happen. The battle of the ages -- the final conflict -- the final awesome battle between good and evil! We read about the assembling of the armies of the world, in a final rallying cry for mankind to oppose the rule of God, in the book of Revelation:

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall MAKE WAR with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev.17:12-14).

These "ten kings" represent ten regions of the earth. They will give their power to the "Beast" for just "ONE HOUR" -- prophetically speaking. Jesus Christ said that there are "twelve hours in a day" (John 11:9), and there are 12 months in a year, so "one hour" evidently equals ONE MONTH in being fulfilled!

Thus this final "alliance" refers to a final union of the world -- a final form of the "New World Order" -- which will, apparently under the auspices of the United Nations, FIGHT AGAINST CHRIST! All the world will be gathered together to resist Him. All nations will fight against Him, thinking that He is an "invader from outer space," some "alien intelligence" seeking to overthrow the earth!

"Aliens Attack," the world's headlines will shriek. "Alien Monsters from the Cosmos Launch Campaign to Subdue the Earth," news reports will cry out on worldwide television and in the mass media!

Is it any wonder, then, that the DAY OF JUDGMENT is soon coming?

Despite these severe warnings, and massive judgment strokes, however, the vast majority of people will not repent of their sins (see Rev.9:20-21 and Rev.16:11, 21).

Six powerful angelic trumpets of Revelation will be blown, calling the nations to repent. They will refuse. They will gather at Armageddon -- Har Megiddo -- to fight the Messiah when He returns from heaven!

At that moment, the *seventh angel* will sound His trumpet -- a final call to repentance. The great shofar will be blown on the great Jubilee on the Day of Atonement -- and the final judgment will take place.

"And the **SEVENTH ANGEL SOUNDED**; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever . . . And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth" (Rev.11:15-18).

When Christ returns, the final Judgment will take place. All the "preliminaries" will be finished. John declares: "But in the days of the voice of the *seventh angel*, when he shall begin to sound, **THE MYSTERY OF GOD SHOULD BE FINISHED**, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (Rev.10:7).

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse: and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth JUDGE and make WAR. His eyes were a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev.19:11-16).

This is the awesome judgment pictured by the final shofar -- the great trumpet -- blown on the Day of Atonement, which finishes the "Days of Awe" and completes the "High Holy Days."

The REAL MEANING of the "Feast of TRUMPETS"

The "Feast of Trumpets" pictures the many TRUMPETS that will be blown in the "DAY OF THE LORD," and the accompanying plagues and judgments which a loving

God will send upon a rebellious and stubborn mankind! However, it also pictures the warnings God is giving His people today, as He begins pouring out His plagues and wrath upon a disobedient and rebellious planet!

The "Feast of Trumpets" or "Yom Teruah" -- the "Day of Blowing" -- pictures in graphic, detailed symbols, this very time in which we are living! This holy day of God pictures this "time of the end" -- this period Moffatt calls "the crisis at the close." It pictures vividly God's beginning PUNISHMENTS and JUDGMENTS that are now falling on this evil, sin-sick world! It pictures this final ten year span leading up to Yom Kippur and the Final Judgment which will occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ!

We are living in this TIME OF AWE -- this season of REPENTANCE -- this time of divine WARNING, symbolized by the trumpet's blast, the shrill cry of the *shofar*! And the call of God goes out to everyone who has an ear to hear:

"For the time is come that **JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD:** and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Pet.4:17-18).

Almighty God says to this present generation:

"I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: **BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION**" (II Cor.6:2).

Today, as in 30 A.D., when the Church first began, when Peter cried out to the Jews, so I cry out to the modern day descendants of Israel, and Judah, and the world population:

"REPENT ye therefore, and BE CONVERTED, that your SINS may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). **"SAVE YOURSELVES** from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: REPENT YE, and BELIEVE the gospel"** (Mark 1:15).

"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:12).

Chapter 13

The *New Truth* about YOM KIPPUR!

What is the real meaning of the Day of Atonement -- or Yom Kippur? Should Christians also celebrate this awesome Day of God's Holy Day Calendar? What does it have to do with Judgment -- whose judgment? What is the strange "Azazel" goat which is sent into the wilderness? What does all this have to do with the soon coming of the Messiah and the judgment of this world? Here, for the first time, is NEW TRUTH about the Day of Atonement!

We read in the book of Leviticus, concerning the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur: "The Lord said to Moses, 'The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a LASTING ORDINANCE for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath' (Leviticus 23:26-32, NIV).

The Day of Atonement -- or "Yom Kippur" in the Hebrew -- is the fifth Holy Day of the year according to God's Holy Day Calendar. But what does this day represent? Why does God command its observance as an everlasting ordinance? What does it have to do with salvation and the Plan of God?

God's Holy Day Calendar begins with Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread in the spring of the year, during the time of the beginning of the spring harvest. Passover represents not only the escape of ancient Israel out of Egypt during the time of Moses, but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the true "Passover Lamb" of the entire world,

who gave His precious life for all our sins (I Cor.5:7). The Days of Unleavened Bread picture our coming out of sin, eating the "hardtack" and flat bread that has no "leaven." Leaven pictures "sin" -- or corrupting influences -- during this season (I Cor.5:6-8).

Beginning the day after the first annual holy day of Unleavened Bread, or Passover, we are commanded to "count the omer" -- that is, to number off the days, until the "Fiftieth Day" -- which is Pentecost, or "Shavuot" -- the "Feast of Weeks" (Lev.23:15-16). This period of time, during which the Israelites came out of Egypt and enduring the "wilderness" journey to Mount Sinai, pictures our coming out of sin, and the trials and experiences of the Christian life -- a life to be spent in overcoming, enduring the "wilderness" of this evil world, and being brought to "perfection" so that we can be in God's Kingdom at the return of Christ.

Fifty days after the First Day of Unleavened Bread comes the annual festival of Pentecost, "Weeks," or "Firstfruits." This Holy Day is the day when God delivered the Ten Commandments to Israel on Mount Sinai, thus confirming the covenant which He began to make with them when He drew them out of slavery in Egypt. At Sinai God "married" Israel, and entered into a holy relationship with them as His people, and with Him as their true God. But even further, Pentecost is the very Day on which God sent the Holy Spirit to the New Testament Church, imbuing His people with internal spiritual power and resources thereby (Acts 2:1-4), and pictures the time when Christ will return and confirm the "New Covenant" with His bride, the Church, and enter into the New Covenant with "Israel." Thus in antitype, Pentecost portrays the coming of the Bridegroom for the Bride, and the marriage ceremony of the Bride and the Lamb of God (Rev.19:7-9).

As we see, the spring holy days therefore picture the plan of God -- from conversion to the Kingdom! But what about the Fall holy days?

The High Holy Days

In the fall of the year, the High Holy Days begin. The first day of the seventh month is called "Rosh Hashanah," which means, literally, "the Head of the year." It is the first day of the first month of the Civil Calendar. It is also called the Festival of Trumpets, or "Blowing of Trumpets" (Lev.23:23-25). The shofar, or ram's horn, was blown to commemorate and inaugurate the day.

The Feast of Trumpets has a special relation to the coming "Day of the Lord" in Bible prophecy. The "Day of the Lord," mentioned in many prophecies in the Old Testament, is the time when God will begin to intervene in world affairs, and to bring warnings and plagues upon the earth, because of the sins of mankind.

During the "Day of the Lord" -- a "day" equals a "year" in fulfillment, so this "Day of the Lord" will most likely last about one literal year -- God Himself will begin to "judge" the nations and send plagues upon the earth. These plagues will be introduced by seven trumpets which will be blown by angels, introducing seven plagues

which will be poured out on the world (see Rev.8-9). Notice -- there are many trumpets blown -- each one being a "call to repentance," as it were -- and a warning that God is sending another plague upon the earth! There are six trumpet plagues announced. These are pictured by the "TRUMPETS" -- PLURAL -- which are blown on the Feast of Trumpets!

The Feast of Trumpets, therefore, pictures God's final WARNING to this evil world to repent -- or suffer the consequences! *It does not picture the "RETURN of Christ" as many have been taught for decades -- rather, it pictures the LAST WARNING which God will give this world, and its inhabitants, calling them to REPENTANCE!*

The angelic "trumpets" blown on the "Day of the Lord" are the spine-tingling fulfillment of the "trumpets" which are blown on Rosh Hashanah -- the Jewish "new year" -- also called "Yom Teruah" -- the Day of Blowing," meaning the blowing of the shofar. These trumpets are warnings from God to REPENT -- for His final Judgment Day is at hand!

These trumpets do NOT picture the return of Christ! At His return only ONE GREAT TRUMPET will be blown -- not multiple successive trumpets! Thus the "Feast of Trumpets" pictures the prelude -- the call to repentance -- the time of preparation -- for the final return of the Messiah to judge the nations, and His people!

As the Jewish people have been taught for millennia, and they have it right, this day pictures God's call to His people to REPENTANCE -- and begins the "Days of Awe," leading up to the "Day of Atonement" -- or "Yom Kippur." These days are days of self-examination, and introspection -- days of reviewing our acts, works, deeds, thoughts, and words, of the past year -- and preparing ourselves, through repentance and confession of our sins, to meet God and to be judged by Him!

Let's understand!

The Jewish View of Yom Kippur

Writes Arthur Hertzberg in *Judaism*:

"One day a year Jews attempt to serve God as if they were angels, not mortals. Angels neither eat nor drink; their sole daily task is to praise God. So on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) the Jew neither eats nor drinks anything at all, observing the strictest of fasts, spending every waking hour in prayer and introspection. On that day, the *conclusion of the Ten Days of Repentance, the fate of each human being for the year to come is finally decided*" (p.194).

Says *The Jewish Book of Why* concerning the Day of Atonement:

"The penitential period in the Jewish calendar actually starts at the beginning of Elul (one month before Rosh Hashanah). However, the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have special significance because in Jewish tradition,

as the liturgy of the High Holidays states, *during this period God passes judgment over every individual, but RESERVES FINAL JUDGMENT UNTIL YOM KIPPUR.*

"The Ten Days of Penitence are regarded as man's LAST CHANCE, through his actions, to influence God to reconsider an unfavorable decision (Rosh Hashanah 16b). For this reason, the holiday greeting which until Yom Kippur was leshana tova tikatevu, 'May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for good,' is changed, as Yom Kippur approaches, to g'mar chatima tova, 'May you be sealed in the Book of Life for good'" (p. 238).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg in *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, points out how the theme of judgment permeates the entire period from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. He writes:

"On Rosh Hashanah the trials opens, the Judge enters and takes his bench. The evidence is reviewed. Individual Jews hasten forward to plead their cases. The liturgy attempts to capture this mood. On Rosh Hashanah, God as Creator and Ruler is the central focus of the prayer. The divine qualities of awesomeness and judgment stand out in the human mind. By the time of Yom Kippur the primary liturgical focus shifts to the TRIAL ITSELF and to God's mercy, which more than anything else sustains people in the process of the judgment" (*The Jewish Way*, p.191-192).

Greenberg goes on, in a later passage, saying:

"Yom Kippur is liberation day: It brings FREEDOM from the crushing isolation of guilt. . . . This is the day of atonement, which means RESTORATION to the wholeness of community and roots. It means a NEW RECONCILIATION and a new unification of impulses and values, of individual and community, and of God and the human.

"Yom Kippur is a day of dazzling paradoxes. Israel stands before God, united as a community of sinners, publicly admitting the universal evil in all yet expecting and experiencing forgiveness and the purging of guilt through confession and mutual acceptance" (p.207).

These Jewish insights into the meaning and significance of the Day of Atonement are valuable and assist us in ascertaining a deeper and more profound understanding of the Day. However, when we put the New Testament record together with the Old Testament, we come to see even clearer and more radiantly the full meaning and significance of this vital Holy Day.

The Real Meaning of the Day of Atonement

At the conclusion of the "Days of Awe," following the Feast of Trumpets, which depicts the WARNING BLASTS that God sends to warn the nations to repent and confess their sins, and to change their ways, comes the "Day of Atonement." Notice, now, what happens on this day!

When the final trumpet blows, when the SEVENTH and "last" trumpet sounds, the Messiah Himself -- Jesus Christ -- will return to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth (Rev.11:15-18). On what day is THIS particular trumpet blown?

Notice a remarkable prophecy in the 25th chapter of Leviticus. We read: "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the TRUMPET OF THE JUBILEE TO SOUND *on the TENTH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH, in the DAY OF ATONEMENT shall ye MAKE THE TRUMPET SOUND THROUGHOUT ALL YOUR LAND. And ye shall HALLOW the fiftieth year, and PROCLAIM LIBERTY throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof*" (Lev.25:8-10).

The "Jubilee year" pictures the time of "restitution" of all things (Lev.25:10-17). This "restitution" will occur at the return of the Messiah! The apostle Peter proclaimed, at the beginning of the New Testament Church, to the Jewish nation gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the TIMES OF REFRESHING shall come from the presence of the Lord: and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the *TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-20).

Now notice when the Jubilee year officially begins -- it is not on Rosh Hashanah, or the Feast of Trumpets, as the normal new year begins in the fall. Rather, it is on the tenth day of the seventh month -- or on YOM KIPPUR -- THE DAY OF ATONEMENT!

Notice also -- on that day a very special TRUMPET BLAST IS MADE THROUGHOUT THE LAND -- ONE TRUMPET BLAST -- THE TRUMPET SOUNDING THE JUBILEE YEAR OF RELEASE, FREEDOM, AND LIBERTY! (Lev.25:9-10).

This trumpet is the final culminating blast which sounds the return of Christ to JUDGE the nations. That judgment is pictured by none other than the DAY OF JUDGMENT -- the DAY OF ATONEMENT -- the day of YOM KIPPUR!

The day of judgment is NOT the "Feast of Trumpets" at all! The day of "Judgment" is YOM KIPPUR -- which literally means "day of cleansing." In other words, the Hebrew word "yom" means "day," and "kippur" is the Hebrew word *kaphar* which means, "to cover," or "to expiate or condone," "to placate or cancel," "make an atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge away, make reconciliation" (see *Strong's Concordance*, #3722).

This great trumpet of the Jubilee year, blown on Yom Kippur only, is the same as the SEVENTH -- or final -- trumpet of the book of Revelation, which introduces the Messiah and His divine Judgment of the nations! Notice this carefully!

"And the SEVENTH ANGEL SOUNDED; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever . . . And the

nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, *and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward* unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (Rev.11:15-18).

When the seventh angel sounds, Christ will return to JUDGE the world, and to raise the righteous dead! This event is pictured by the Day of Atonement! The trumpet blast blown on this great day -- is the Jubilee Trumpet! This great trumpet -- the *final or LAST trumpet* -- is mentioned in other passages that relate directly to the second coming of the Messiah.

Notice!

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the TRUMPET OF GOD: *and the dead in Christ shall rise first*: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess.4:16-17).

Notice! This verse does not say we are going to follow Him back to heaven, when we meet Him in the air, in some sort of "rapture" -- rather, it simply says that when He returns, there will be a loud NOISE -- the voice of the archangel -- and a SHOUT -- and also the loud TRUMPET BLAST! This will not be some quiet, off-in-a-corner, secret, clandestine, silent affair which the world doesn't even notice! There will be FIREWORKS!

The apostle Paul writes:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **AT THE LAST TRUMPET: for the TRUMPET SHALL SOUND, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE SHALL BE CHANGED . . .**" (I Cor.15:52).

Jesus Christ Himself described His second coming in these graphic words:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall SEE the Son of man coming IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY. **And he shall send his angels with the GREAT SOUND OF A TRUMPET**, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:30-31).

These "elect" who are gathered to meet Him are all the TRUE, genuine, truly-converted CHRISTIANS on the earth! No other people are qualified to be called "the elect." The term "elect" in the New Testament always refers to true, genuine Christians -- and to nobody else! (see Matt.24:24; Luke 18:7; Rom.8:33; Col.3:12; Titus 1:1; I Pet.1:2; II John 1, 13).

Clearly, all these Scriptures are speaking of the SAME EVENT -- the TIME OF CHRIST'S RETURN -- and the TIME OF JUDGMENT which occurs at that very day, and not several days "later" in God's Plan!

The idea that Christ will return "part way" into the heavens, and the saints will meet Him and then return with Him to heaven for 3 1/2 or 7 years, depending on the teaching of many different ministers today, is absolutely FRAUDULENT, and nothing but a childish FABLE! Christ warns us to BEWARE of all false teachers and preachers (Matt.24:4-5, 11-12, 23-27).

Rather than return to heaven, the Messiah is coming *straight down to earth*, when He returns! When He came down to Mount Sinai, in the days of Moses -- which was a TYPE of His second coming -- He didn't stop half way, and return to heaven, and then come back 3 1/2 or 7 years later. And when He ascended to heaven, in the sight of all the disciples, in 30 A.D., He didn't stop half way, come back, and then ascend again! Notice:

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, *he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight*. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, **SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN**" (see Acts 1:9-11).

How did Jesus ascend into heaven? He did so visibly, in the clouds! He ascended straight into heaven! Did He stop half-way, turn around, and come back to earth? No! Did He take His disciples up to heaven for 3 1/2 years, or 7 years? No, He did not!

How will He return? The very same way He left! That is what the angels told the disciples! When He ascended to heaven, He was not "raptured," nor were the saints -- and there will be no "secret rapture" of the saints 3 1/2 or 7 years before His final coming to earth, either!

Does the Bible clearly tell us how and where the Messiah is going to return, the very day that He returns? Yes it does! Notice! He will return in the very same manner in which He left the earth, and He will return to the very same place that He ascended from -- the Mount of Olives! Notice the plain answer in the words of the prophet Zechariah!

"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather ALL NATIONS against Jerusalem to battle . . . Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. **AND HIS FEET SHALL STAND IN THAT DAY ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, which is before Jerusalem . . .**" (Zech.14:1-4).

The "Day of Atonement," therefore, pictures the RETURN OF THE MESSIAH -- WHO IS PROVED TO BE JESUS CHRIST -- TO SIT IN JUDGMENT OF THE EARTH AND ITS INHABITANTS!

Ten days after the Feast of *Trumpets* -- which symbolizes God's call to the nations

of the world to repent of their sins -- and the *trumpet* plagues of the Day of the Lord, picturing God's beginning judgments of the nations -- comes the Day of Atonement -- the Day of final Judgment!

The Jubilee trumpet sounds on this very day. It is the most abstemious, painful, afflictive day of the whole year. It is the day the Jewish people recite the prayer (at the evening or beginning of the Day of Atonement) of the "Kol Nidre" -- a moving prayer in which the people together recite a long litany of sins of every kind, and beg God for forgiveness. The entire service is one of confessing sins, singing hymns of repentance and contrition, and seeking God to "wipe the slate clean" for the coming year. It is an impressive, solemn, and can be a very emotional and moving spiritual experience.

The Day of Atonement is a day of fasting, affliction of the flesh, doing without food and water. We should spend much time meditating on our lives, confessing our sins, and repenting and looking to the sacrifice of Christ as atonement for us, that we might be truly reconciled to God.

But the Day of Atonement does not just picture our personal and individual repentance, remorse, and contrition, and confessing of sin. It pictures the Day the sins of the ENTIRE NATION -- and, by extension, THE ENTIRE WORLD -- are going to be "put away," and "covered over," wiped away, and "atoned for," at the coming of Messiah! It pictures the time the Messiah will RETURN to *JUDGE* the entire world, beginning with His servants, the prophets and the saints of God! Notice!

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: **And before him shall be gathered ALL NATIONS:** and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats . . ." (Matthew 25:31-32, see also verses 33-46).

The rituals of the Day of Atonement picture this Judgment very clearly. Not only will mankind be judged on this day of the Messiah's return, but even Satan and his demon hordes also will be judged. Notice the amazing picture as it is portrayed in the 16th chapter of the book of Leviticus.

The Day of Atonement Rituals

What is the full symbolism of the Day of Atonement? To understand it in full, we must study the Day as it was observed anciently, while the Tabernacle of God still stood. The Scriptural account giving the regulations for the nation of Israel during this day, and the Aaronic priesthood, is found in Leviticus 16. Notice!

"The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord [when they offered "strange fire" which God had not commanded]. The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

"This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

"Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. Then he is to take the TWO GOATS and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats -- one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat ["Azazel" goat]. Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and SACRIFICE it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by SENDING IT INTO THE DESERT as a scapegoat [Azazel]" (Lev.16:1-10).

The First Goat

The first of these two goats represents Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as a divine sacrifice for our sins. As Paul wrote, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us [that is, our sin offering], so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor.5:21).

The apostle Peter wrote of Christ's offering for our sins: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (I Pet.2:23-25).

The apostle Paul writes about the services of the Day of Atonement, saying: "It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year [on Atonement] with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared ONCE FOR ALL at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb.9:23-28).

The offering of the goat "for the LORD" on the Day of Atonement, then, was a figure of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins! The goat that was sacrificed for a sin

offering of the people represented Christ, who shed His blood for us.

The Sin Offering

"He [Aaron] shall then slaughter the *goat for the sin offering* for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel" (Lev.16:15-17).

The blood of this goat, representing Christ, not only atoned for the sins of the people, and their spiritual uncleanness and rebellion, but also cleansed all those physical things that came in contact with human beings -- the physical Tabernacle, Tent of Meeting, and the Holy Place itself! To use an analogy, it is as if sin is like "radiation." Whatever it touches also becomes "irradiated." If a man working in a nuclear facility comes in contact with radiating nuclear rods, and then goes outside, he would very likely be contaminated by radiation -- too much of a dose could even be lethal! A Geiger counter could detect the radiation emitting from his own body or clothing. He would have to be stripped, cleansed, bathed, and the clothed burned or properly disposed of, depending on its level of contamination.

Even so, since man sins, everything he comes in contact with is contaminated by his sin, rebellion, evil thoughts and deeds. Therefore, EVERYTHING -- even the most holy things of the Sanctuary and Temple -- had to be "purified" and "cleansed" by the blood of the goat, symbolizing the blood of Christ. Sin contaminates like "radiation" -- but the blood of Christ can purify and cleanse ALL sin and spiritual contamination!

God continued in His instructions to Moses: "Then he [Aaron, or the high priest descended from him] shall come out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns of the altar. He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times [the number of "perfection" or "completion"] to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites" (Lev.16:18-19).

But there was another goat involved in the Day of Atonement ritual. What does it represent? Notice!

The "Azazel" Goat

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the LIVE GOAT. He is 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; and the man shall release it in the desert" (Lev.16:20-22).

What does this "live goat" represent? We have already seen that the sacrificed goat represented Christ Himself. But this goat was NOT "sacrificed." Yet the "sins" of the people were confessed over it, and put on its head. That is, it was made to be RESPONSIBLE for the people's sins -- it was to carry the BLAME! What person, or individual, does this goat represent, who is made to bear responsibility for the sins of the people -- sins that are NOT atoned for, or washed away and cleansed by the blood of Christ?

Who is the original "Author" of sin, anyway? Who was the first liar, murderer, and lawless individual, who has deceived the whole world and led it into SIN?

Satan the devil, of course!

Jesus Christ said to the Pharisees of His time, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.* When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a LIAR and the *father of lies*" (John 8:42-44).

The apostle John wrote, "We know that we are children of God, and that the WHOLE WORLD is under the control of *the evil one*" (I John 5:19). Satan the devil is "in charge" of this present evil world. He told Christ he would even give Him rulership over the whole world if He would fall down and worship the devil (Matt.4:8-10). He could offer this power and rulership, because at this time it is still his to give.

The apostle Paul wrote of the devil, "The *god of this age* has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (II Cor.4:4). He wrote to the Ephesians, telling them, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the *RULER of the kingdom of the air, the SPIRIT who is now at work in those who are disobedient*" (Eph.2:1-2). That deceptive, powerful evil spirit is Satan the devil!

The apostle John makes it perfectly plain. He wrote, in the book of Revelation, "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down -- *that ancient serpent called the DEVIL, or SATAN, who LEADS THE WHOLE WORLD ASTRAY.* He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Rev.12:7-9).

Satan the devil is the arch rebel who is directly responsible for the world's sins -- for leading mankind into rebellion against the laws of God. He uses his power to delude, to deceive, to entice and entrap, to seduce and to tempt men into sin and evil. He appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride and arrogance of human nature. He is behind all the evil in the world. Ever since Adam and Eve in the garden, he has been seducing mankind and leading them astray, blinding them to the Truth of God!

The "live goat," who has the sins of the people put on his head, and who is then led into the desert, to a solitary place AWAY from all people, represents Satan the devil!

Notice! Philo, a leading Jewish historian and writer of the first century, who was a friend of the apostle Peter, wrote of the Azazel goat, "The one goat is given to 'the fugitive creature,' and the lot which it received is named in the prophesy 'sent away,' because it is persecuted, expelled, and driven far away by wisdom" (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, "Feasts and Fasts," p.862).

Hastings Dictionary of the Bible continues:

"Willis, '**Azazel, the name of a personal being, in opposition to Jehovah**, the personal name of God.' Schulz, '**Some powerful being to whom the animal is assigned**, and to whom it is sent with the now forgiven guilt of the reconciled people . . . This being must be conceived of as *strange and unholy*. . . An Aramaic name for an unclean and ungodlike power, which has its abode in the wilderness, in the accursed land outside the sacred bounds of the camp.' Watson in *Camb. Comp. of the Bible*, '**Azazel, the completely separate one, the EVIL SPIRIT** regarded as dwelling in the desert'" (*ibid.*).

Who could this wicked spirit being be but Satan the devil, the chief of all demons? Satan is the chief "personal being in OPPOSITION to God." His very name, Satan, means "Adversary."

In an article under "Azazel," the *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* explains even more about what is known and believed about this wicked and unclean being. We read:

"AZAZEL -- The name of the spirit (Lev.16:8,10,26) supposed to have its abode in the wilderness, to whom, on the Day of Atonement, the goat laden with the sins of the people was sent (vs.20-22). **Azazel is not mentioned elsewhere in OT; but the name occurs in the Book of Enoch (2nd cent. B.C.) as that of the LEADER OF THE EVIL ANGELS** who (Gen.6:2,4) formed unions with the daughters of men, and (as the legend is developed in the Book of Enoch) taught them various arts, and whose offspring, the giants, filled the earth with unrighteousness and blood. On account of the wickedness wrought by Azazel upon earth, the four archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael (9:1, Gr.)

are represented as impeaching him before the Almighty, who thereupon (ch.10) bids Raphael *bind him hand and foot*, and secure him, under 'rough and jagged rocks,' at a place in the desert called 'Dudael,' until on 'the great day of judgment' he is *cast into the fire. . .*" ("Azazel," *Hastings Dict. of the Bible*, p.207).

Who is the "leader of the evil angels"? Scripture tells us it is Satan the devil, the one who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden. In Revelation 12 we read of Satan: "Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth" (Rev.12:3-4). This dragon is the Devil (verse 9). The stars he swept out of the sky are the fallen angels who followed him into rebellion. These are the angels who left their first estate, given to them by God, and rebelled.

The apostle Jude writes of their rebellion: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home -- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6).

Peter also wrote of these rebellious angels, "For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" (II Pet.2:4).

Jesus Christ specifically spoke of "the devil *and his angels*" who will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire -- Gehenna fire -- and destroyed (Matt.25:41). The devil, or Beelzebub, was considered to be the "prince of the demons" by the Jews, and Jesus did not contradict them in this belief or correct them concerning it (Matt.12:24). He accepted it as a fact.

This wicked being, the leader of the evil angels, who is also responsible for the sins of mankind, is none other than Satan the devil, the arch enemy of mankind, the great, crafty deceiver! It is Satan himself who is the "Azazel" or one who is to be "completely removed," far away from any human habitation -- who is to be "cast out" and who will dwell in a "solitary place." How will God accomplish this? Notice the clear typology:

In the time of the Second Temple, the Azazel goat was actually led away to perish in the desert. Says *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*: "But whatever the precise attributes with which Azazel was invested at the time when the ritual of Lv.16 was framed, there can be little doubt that the ceremonial was intended as a symbolical declaration that the land and people are now PURGED FROM GUILT, their sins being handed over to the EVIL SPIRIT to whom they are held to belong, and whose home is in the desolate wilderness, remote from human habitations (v.22, 'into a land cut off')."

Says Hastings, "Azazel must have been such a spirit, sufficiently distinguished from the rest, in popular imagination, to receive a special name, and no doubt invested with attributes which, though unknown to us, were perfectly familiar to those for whom the ceremonial of Lev.16 was first designed."

The name "Azazel" in Hebrew is uncertain in meaning, but *Azala* in Arabic means "remove, place far apart." This is exactly what God is going to do with Satan the devil, shortly after Christ returns in His glory! Thus it is significant that the "Day of Atonement" carries this enactment of the "live goat" or Azazel goat representing Satan the devil, being bound in a wilderness area, "removed" from mankind, "far apart" from civilization.

On the Day of Judgment, pictured by Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when Jesus Christ returns to JUDGE and RULE the earth, Satan the devil -- also known as "Azazel" -- will be put in a "holding cell" so to speak, until his final "Judgment." That is, he will be put in "solitary confinement" -- in a "wilderness" region! Notice!

John writes in Revelation: "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the *key to the Abyss* and holding in his hand a great chain. He *seized the dragon*, that ancient serpent, WHO IS THE DEVIL, or SATAN, and *bound him for a thousand years*. He *threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him*, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time" (Rev.20:1-3).

Satan will be put in a "solitary place," "far removed" from mankind for one thousand years. After this, he will be released for a short time. "When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth -- Gog and Magog -- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They [Satan the devil and his demons] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev.20:7-10). This will be Satan's fate on the final day of his judgment! He will be thrown into a furious fiery lake and burned up until he is consumed in the flames, and perishes (see also Heb.2:14; Ezek.28:14-18). This Scripture does not mean Satan will literally be tormented for unending time, for all eternity -- for his suffering will only last so long as "day and night" exist. And there will be "no night" in the New Jerusalem. "There will be no more night" (Rev.22:5). Thus this punishment is only for as long as needed until the punishment is complete, and Satan is finally utterly destroyed. If you have not read it, be sure to write for our article "Satan's Fate: Will He Be Punished Forever?"

The Final Gehenna Fire

This Gehenna fire is going to be the final fate of ALL the incorrigible wicked -- not only Satan and his demons, but all the wicked among mankind as well who do not repent of their sins and have them covered by the blood of Christ! (Rev.20:11-15).

Matthew's gospel records, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal [*aion* or "age-lasting"] fire PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS . . ." (Matt.25:41).

Those whose sins are covered by the blood of Christ will inherit eternal life, by the grace and mercy of God, through Christ our mediator. But those who refuse the love of God, who refuse to obey God and keep His commandments, who refuse to repent of their sins, an awesome day of Judgment lies in store for them.

The Day of Atonement pictures God's forgiveness for all who come to Him. It pictures the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, and the coming day of Judgment and Salvation of God's people. As Paul wrote, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion, he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins' (Rom.11:25-27).

But those who refuse to repent of their sins, and to come to Christ for mercy and pardon, those who harden their hearts in iniquity and lawlessness, will suffer eternal condemnation -- death in the lake of fire. John writes, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:15). John went on, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the SECOND DEATH" (Rev.21:8).

There is one fate awaiting all the incorrigible wicked. The prophet Malachi declared:

"Surely the day is coming; it will *burn like a furnace*. All the arrogant, and every evildoer *will be stubble*, and that day that is coming will SET THEM ON FIRE, says the Lord Almighty. *Not a root or a branch will be left to them*. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. *Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ASHES under the soles of your feet* on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty" (Malachi 4:1-3).

The Anointed Cherub

Satan himself was not always a "rebel." There was a point in history where he chose to sin against God and go his own way. But originally, God created him to be a beautiful guardian angel -- one of the very cherubim surrounding the throne of God!

God says of him, "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were CREATED they were prepared. You were appointed as a GUARDIAN CHERUB, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.

"You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till WICKEDNESS WAS FOUND IN YOU. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you SINNED. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I EXPELLED you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became PROUD on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. " Because of the Devil's rebellion, God says, He will punish him severely. The prophecy goes on, foretelling Satan's fate:

"So I THREW YOU TO THE EARTH," God says. "I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. *So I made a FIRE come out from you, and it CONSUMED YOU, and I reduced you to ASHES on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be [exist] NO MORE*" (Ezek.28:12-19).

Even as men can convert matter to energy, or energy to matter (through Einstein's famous formula $E = MC^2$), even so God can convert a spirit being such as Satan to material substance or matter, or flesh, and then consume it in a fiery holocaust. There is nothing which God can create which He cannot also destroy. Human experience tells us that it is far easier to tear down something made than it is to construct or build something. It is easier to destroy a house than to build it. Even so, it will be far easier for God to destroy Satan, than it was to create Lucifer the cherub in the first place!

The prophet Isaiah writes of this same arch-enemy of mankind, and his original rebellion against God, and his dismal fate that is coming. The prophet declared,

"How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star,
son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations! You said in your
heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above
the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of
assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make
myself like the Most High.'

**"But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of
the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your
fate . . ."** (Isaiah 14:12-16).

The King James Version says that Satan's name originally was "Lucifer," or "light-bringer." However, when he rebelled, his light turned to gross and gloomy darkness. And his fate is to suffer the darkness of eternal blackness and night. The darkness of Death!

The Day of Judgment

The whole lesson of the Day of Atonement is twofold: First, judgment is coming. As the apostle Peter wrote, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (I Pet.4:17-19).

This great day of judgment will begin at the second coming of Christ! As John wrote in Revelation: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (Rev.14:14-16).

All will be judged, according to their works. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl.12:14).

But in that coming judgment, there is forgiveness and mercy and grace through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who died for us on the cross, who gave His life as a ransom for us! "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Rom.5:1-2).

Paul goes on, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Rom.5:9-11).

What about you? Where do you stand? The Day of Atonement represents forgiveness and pardon for some -- and wrath and eternal judgment for others! Do you stand with the righteous? Or with the wicked?

Are your sins covered by the blood of Christ, the Messiah and Redeemer?

Chapter 14

The Profound Meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles!

There is far more meaning and deep spiritual significance to the Feast of Tabernacles than many have ever realized! In this article we explore the deeper, hidden meanings to this Festival of God -- the Feast of Sukkoth -- also called the "Feast of Ingathering" -- and the little understood rituals, laws and commandments that were commanded for this annual Holy Festival -- *Ha Hag Adonai* -- "The Feast of the Lord"-- also called *Zeman Simchateinu* -- "the Season of our Joy"! What is "sukkot" all about? What about all the sacrifices? And what is the "lulav" and why is it important? Here is vital new spiritual TRUTH!

I have been observing the "Feast of Tabernacles" ever since I first proved that the annual holy days of God are still in operation and in force, in our "Christian" age -- since 1958 -- when I observed my first Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy, Texas, as a high school student. Since that time, I have observed well over 40 Feasts. I first learned of the Feast of Tabernacles from Herbert W. Armstrong, from reading his booklet entitled "God's Festivals or Pagan Holidays -- Which?"

In the many sermons I have heard since that time at and regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, the stress was always on the concept that this festival of God portrayed the millennial reign of Christ -- the "Kingdom of God" -- upon the earth. It was looked upon as the "fall harvest" also -- the great end-time harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom.11:26). The concept of why God's people were commanded to "dwell in booths" -- sukkoth -- temporary structures -- during the seven days of the Feast, was never explained, or what such "booths" had to do with the millennial reign of Christ! Nevertheless, we observed the Feast -- enjoyed a plethora of sermons, and feasting, eating in fancy restaurants, travel to exotic locations, and glorious fellowship with God's people. It was always a most enjoyable and enriching experience, something looked forward to every year.

However, in the past few years, as I have studied the festivals of God more

closely, I have discovered that the old ideas, concepts, and explanations of the Worldwide Church of God, and its many off-shoots, today, have left much to be desired concerning the meaning, symbolism, and rituals connected with this important Festival of God. Let us go back to the original commandment concerning this festival, and see what has been missed, completely ignored and totally overlooked!

Leviticus 23 -- The Feast

We read in Leviticus 23 concerning the Feast of Tabernacles, the following statements: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the *feast of tabernacles* for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev.23:33-36).

Additional instruction in observing God's festival is given in verses 39-43 of this chapter -- verses which have generally been ignored and overlooked, and never explained. Notice what these verses add to the festival commandment! "Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. *And ye shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall REJOICE before the LORD your God seven days.* And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a *STATUTE FOR EVER in your generations*: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. *Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelite born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD thy God"* (Lev.23:39-43).

In the 30 years I observed the Feast of Tabernacles in the Worldwide Church of God, from 1958 to 1987, we were never told about the command to take boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook, and to use them in rejoicing before the LORD; nor were we told how the Feast of Tabernacles relates to the journey of the Israelites as they came out of Egypt, and dwelt in the wilderness for forty years, living in "booths" or temporary structures, or tent-like portable dwellings. This aspect of the Feast was totally overlooked!

Solomon and the Feast

The next mention of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Scriptures occurs when Solomon dedicated the newly-constructed Temple of God during his reign. The Temple was dedicated in 1004 B.C., exactly 1000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the true living "Temple of God" (John 2:19-21; Eph.2:21-22; 4:15-16). "And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the *feast* in the month Ethanim, which is the

seventh month" (I Kings 8:2). "And at that time Solomon held a *feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation*, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, *seven days and seven days, even fourteen days*. On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people" (I Kings 8:65-66).

Notice! They enjoyed the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of the seventh month, so much that they kept it for double the commanded time -- fourteen days, instead of just seven! The chronicler explains, "for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the FEAST seven days. And on the three and twentieth day (the day after the "eighth day") of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people" (II Chron.7:8-10).

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Feast

The Feast was also kept in the days of king Hezekiah (II Chron.31:3). Finally, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, we read, "They kept also the Feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (Ezra 3:4).

This observance occurred after the return of many Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Ezra, a righteous scribe of God, gathered the people and read to them from the law of God (Nehemiah 8:1-8) on the first day of Tishri, or the Feast of Trumpets (Ezra 8:2). On the next day, as the people were gathered to learn more of the laws of God, "they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: *for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so*. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the manner" (Neh.8:14-18).

Here again the Feast of Tabernacles is described -- and the statement is made that the festival had not been observed in this manner, with the construction of booths, since the days of Joshua himself! Truly, in the days of Ezra, there was a turning back to observe the laws of God among the people, and much more attention was given to proper and correct observance.

Nevertheless, many of these features of the Feast, as observed in modern times, have also been neglected by thousands of God's people. How many literally build "booths" to sit in, to discuss matters within, to fellowship in? How many use the branches of various kinds of trees to do so? How many take various branches, and wave them before the LORD, in rejoicing and worshipping Him? How important are these things? What do they add to our over-all understanding? How much have we missed, by not observing these things circumspectly, and thoroughly?

Let's begin to understand! Let's begin to get it right!

History and Tradition

Too many people try to look at God's Word, and His commandments, in "isolation" -- without considering at all the historical setting, and the observances and practices of God's people -- the Jews -- and how they have historically and traditionally observed the annual holy days. Many have dismissed anything and everything "Jewish" simply because the Jews rejected the Messiah and did not accept Christ as the Saviour.

Yet, Jesus Himself plainly said, "Salvation is of the JEWS" (John 4:22). The apostle Paul explained in simple terms, and clear language, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that *unto THEM were committed the ORACLES of God*. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid" (Rom.3:1-4).

The Jews as a people, even though most of them have never recognized Jesus Christ as the Messiah -- nevertheless, they have preserved not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also many important historical writings, commentaries, and religious works, relating to the Bible, and its observances and ordinances -- such as the *Midrash*, the *Mishnah*, and the *Talmud*. Therefore, when it comes to gaining insight and understanding of the Festivals of God, who better to turn to than the Jews, who have been observing them for centuries -- and millennia? Here is a vital storehouse of knowledge which the vast majority of Christians, including festival observers, have totally ignored!

The apostle Paul was himself a Jew. Did he disparage and denigrate the knowledge of the Jews, when it came to the laws of God? Not at all! In fact, Paul himself declared of the Jews, "Who are Israelites; to who pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom.9:4). Paul himself even "boasted" -- and claimed, under divine inspiration of God -- "I am a man verily which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of *Gamaliel*, and taught according to the perfect manner of the LAW of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3). Paul had high respect for the Jewish laws and knowledge of God. He did not reject all the teachings and ramifications of Judaism -- not at all.

In fact, Paul even boasted, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcized the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the

tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; *as touching the law, a Pharisee . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, BLAMELESS*" (Phil.3:4-6).

Clearly, there is much we can learn from our Jewish brethren -- even those who are at this moment still estranged from Christ!

What do Jewish sources tell us relating to the Feast of Tabernacles? Let's take a careful and probative look, and examine the subject. In ignoring Jewish sources, we have missed out on many profound truths about this Feast, and its Christian interpretation and significance!

A New Look at Sukkoth

The Feast of Tabernacles came to be so important in the ancient Jewish community, that it was known as "the feast of the Lord," and was even called "*the* feast." The Hebrew word *hag* translated "feast" literally means "to dance or to be joyous," and comes from a root meaning "to dance in a circle, i.e., to march in a sacred procession, to observe a festival, by implication, *to be giddy*: celebrate, dance . . . reel to and fro" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, #2287).

This final harvest celebration, coming on the heels of the fall harvest, was a special time of joy for the Israelites. The rabbis gave it the name, *Zeman Simhatenu*, which means "the season of our joy." It was a high point in the year for all the people of Israel. That is why it was called "*the* feast!"

Say Mitch and Zhava Glaser in *The Fall Feasts of Israel*,

"If the theme of Rosh Hashana is repentance, and the theme of Yom Kippur is redemption, then most naturally the theme of Sukkot is rejoicing in God's forgiveness. The gathering of the year's final harvest was a confirmation of God's blessing upon the Jewish people for their obedience to His law. Salvation and obedience to God always leads to joy" (p.162).

In the book *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*, we read:

"*Khag HaAsif* (Festival of Ingathering) was to take place once the produce of the vineyards and product of the threshing rooms was collected (Exo.23:14-17; 34:22). Beginning on the fifteenth of the seventh month, this *Khag Adonai* (Festival of God) would last seven days, the first a sacred occasion when no work was to be done. The Israelites were to take the 'product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook' (later called the four species) and rejoice with them before God.

"Then another dimension was added as a 'law for all time.' For the duration of the festival the Israelites were to live in booths (*sukkot*) 'so that future generations will know that I made the Israelite people live in *sukkot* when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 23:39-43)" (*Celebrate!*, by Lesli Koppelman Ross, p.211).

This source continues, defining the Festival:

"The specifics of the Jewish harvest festival were designed to protect the Israelites from the pagan influences they would encounter once they entered Canaan. While heathens worshipped nature itself, the Jews were to worship the Creator and Renewer of nature. While the pagans celebrated with excess and debauchery, the Israelite pilgrims were to focus on the moral significance of the festivities.

"The purpose of rejoicing was not sensual abandon but to honor and thank God for His blessings, spread good fortune, and act with sensitivity" (p.212).

During the time of the second Temple, festival goers would gather in Jerusalem, which was festive in garlands of olive, palm, and willow branches, fragrant with fruits and flowers. The people would participate in public prayers, sing hymns, and watch or join in with religious processions at the Temple. At this time, the "four species" of foliage, specified in Leviticus 23, would be used to celebrate and rejoice before the Lord. We read:

"The four species (definitively identified through Oral Tradition as palm, willow, and myrtle bound together into a *lulav*, and an *etrog* [citron]) were now part of the ritual. Each day of sukkot, the priests, holding the *lulav* and *etrog* in hand, marched around the altar, which had been adorned with freshly cut willow branches. As they circled, they recited a psalm asking God to 'please save us' (*Hoshiah na*)" (p.213).

Why are these "four species" used to celebrate Sukkot? Says *The Jewish Book of Why* by Alfred J. Kolatch:

"The use of four species of plants is PRESCRIBED IN LEVITICUS 23:40: 'And you shall take on the first day [of the holiday] the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees,

and boughs of thick trees [myrtle branches], and willows of the brook, *and you shall rejoice* before the LORD your God seven days.' The Bible does not specify precisely which trees and fruits are to be taken.

"Jewish authorities have interpreted the 'fruit of goodly trees' to mean the *etrog* [the citron], and the 'branches of [date] palms' to mean the *lulav*. The 'boughs of thick trees' refers to the myrtle (called *hadasim* in Hebrew), and 'willows of the brook' are the familiar willow trees (called *aravot* in Hebrew). These four species were to be held in the hand and blessed each day of the Sukkot holiday" (p.250).

In all the years I celebrated the Feast of Sukkot, or Tabernacles, with the Worldwide Church of God, we NEVER paid any attention to this *DIRECT COMMANDMENT OF GOD!* No one, it seemed, read the passage in Leviticus 23:40, or gave it any special thought! Although God's Word very plainly says we are to take these items, and "rejoice before the LORD," apparently this was felt to be too "physical," and too "ritualistic." Nevertheless, it is plainly a part of the commanded observances of the Festival of Sukkot!

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the Sadducees disputed with the Pharisees over this issue. As Alfred Edersheim writes in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*:

"As usual, we are met at the outset by a controversy between the Pharisees and the

Sadducees. The law had it: 'Ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook,' which the Sadducees understood (as do the modern Karaite Jews) to refer to the materials whence the booths were to be constructed, while the Pharisees applied it to what the worshippers were to carry in their hands. *The latter interpretation is, in all likelihood, the correct one; it seems borne out by the account of the festival at the time of Nehemiah, when the booths were constructed of BRANCHES OF OTHER TREES than those mentioned in Leviticus 23; and it was UNIVERSALLY ADOPTED IN PRACTICE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST"* (p.273).

Always roiling the pot, the Sadducees were the original gain-sayers -- the original "contrarians" who had their own ideas about everything! The New Testament points out that they were even disbelievers in a resurrection, did not admit to the existence of angels or demons, and were, all in all, "ignorant of the Scriptures" (see Acts 23:6-8; Matt.22:23, 29-31).

The Most Joyous Feast

Alfred Edersheim writes in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, that the Feast of Tabernacles was the joyous high point of the year in ancient Israel. He declares:

"The most joyous of all festive seasons in Israel was that of the 'Feast of Tabernacles.' It fell on a time of year when the hearts of the people would naturally be full of thankfulness, gladness, and expectancy. All the crops had been long stored; and now all fruits were also gathered, the vintage past, and the land only awaited the softening and refreshment of the 'latter rain,' to prepare it for a new crop. . . . If the beginning of the harvest had pointed back to the birth of Israel in their Exodus from Egypt, and forward to the true Passover-sacrifice in the future; if the corn harvest was connected to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai in the past, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; the harvest-thanksgiving of the Feast of Tabernacles reminded Israel, on the one hand, of their dwelling in booths in the wilderness, while, on the other hand, it pointed to the FINAL HARVEST when Israel's mission should be completed, and ALL NATIONS GATHERED UNTO THE LORD" (p.268-269).

This great Feast, Edersheim points out, has a dual meaning: It both reflects back on the miraculous passage of Israel out of Egypt, and through the wilderness, as they lived in rickety "booths" open to the heavens, and it depicts in a very powerful manner the FINAL HARVEST OF ALL THE WORLD to the true paths of God -- the time when all nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship the Eternal, the Lord of hosts (Isa.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4).

Isaiah the prophet speaks of this great "fall harvest" in this manner:

"And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for ALL PEOPLE a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the VEIL that is spread over *all nations*. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:6-8, NKJV).

During that coming age, Isaiah says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my

holy mountain, for the *earth shall be FULL of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:9).

Edersheim adds that this Feast, in particular, was designed by God to illustrate the great harvest of all nations to the Kingdom of God in the latter days. This is evident, he says, "not only from the language of the prophets and the peculiar services of the feast, but also from its position in the Calendar, and even from the names by which it is designated in Scripture." He continues:

"Thus in its reference to the harvest it is called 'the feast of ingathering' [Exo.23:16; 34:22]; in that to the history of Israel in the past, 'the Feast of Tabernacles' [Lev. 23:34, and specifically verse 43; Deut.16:13, 16; 31:10; II Chron.8:13; Ezra 3:4]; while its symbolic bearing on the future is brought out in its designation as emphatically 'the feast' [I Kings 8:2; II Chron.5:3; 7:8,9]; and 'the Feast of Jehovah' [so literally in Lev.23:39]. In this sense also Josephus, Philo, and the Rabbis (in many passages of the *Mishnah*) single it out from all the other feasts" (p.269-270).

The Feast of Sukkot in Ancient Times

The Feast of Tabernacles was considered the most joyous season of the entire year. With all the electric anticipation along the caravan trails, the stirring religious ceremonies, the inspiring singing of hymns, and the Levitical choir and orchestra playing at the Temple, with lively singing, dancing, and feasting, the joy literally ran over the brim. Each day of the Feast, a vital celebration took place called *Simkhat Beit Hashoavah*, that is, "The Rejoicing at the Place of the Water-Drawing."

"Each morning of Sukkot, the priests went to the pool of Siloah (Silwan) near Jerusalem to fill a golden flask. *Shofar* blasts greeted their arrival at the Temple's Water Gate. They then ascended and poured the water so that it flowed over the altar simultaneously with wine from another bowl. When the priest was about to pour the water, the people shouted 'Raise your hand!' because of an incident that occurred in a previous year: The high priest Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.) showed contempt for the rite by spilling the water at his feet, a transgression for which worshippers threw their citrons at him.

"The pelted priest had demonstrated his alliance with the Sadducees, who literally followed Torah and only what was specifically in Torah. (Explained as an oral instruction given to Moses at Sinai, this water rite was not mentioned in The Five Books.) The deliriously happy celebration connected with the water drawing developed when the Pharisees (who believed in the Oral Tradition and interpretation of Torah and gave us the rabbinic Judaism we know today) triumphed over them in the first century.

"Based on Isaiah's promise 'With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation' (12:3), rejoicing began at the end of the first day and took place every night except Shabbat. Talmud recorded that 'one who had never witnessed the Rejoicing of the Place of the Water Drawing has never seen true joy in his life.' (Although the celebration was for the *libation* that would be made the next morning, it was named for the preparation for the ritual -- the water drawing -- which the rabbis said showed that getting ready was sometimes of greater merit than the *mitzvah* itself because of its positive effect on the person doing it.)" (p.213-214).

For this fascinating ceremony, four immense candelabrum were set in the Temple courtyard for the Feast of Sukkot, 75 feet in height. Each candelabra had four golden bowls, and was reached by four ladders. Each bowl was capable of holding many gallons of oil. Four youths of priestly descent each held a pitcher of oil, which they used to fill the bowls. Wicks were made from the old, cast-off priestly garments and rags from worn-out vestments. When the candelabrum were lit, they generated such intense and brilliant light, that not a courtyard in the whole city of Jerusalem failed to be illuminated by the blazing light. As the mighty torches blazed in the night, we read:

"A Levite orchestra of flutes, trumpets, harps, and cymbals accompanied torchlight processions, and men who had earned the capacity for real spiritual joy through their purity, character and scholarship danced ecstatically to the hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and hymn-singing crowds.

"We do not imagine our distinguished sages as acrobats and tumblers, but they were often agile physically as well as mentally. Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel juggled eight lighted torches and raised himself into a handstand on two fingers, a gymnastic feat no one else could master. Others juggled eight knives, eight glasses of wine, or eight eggs before leaders and dignitaries" (p.214).

Why was this ceremony called "The Water-Drawing Ceremony"? Alfred Edersheim gives us the emphatic reason, as understood by the Rabbis. He writes:

"For though that ceremony was considered by the Rabbis as being a subordinate reference to the dispensation of the rain, the annual fall of which they they imagined was determined by God at that feast, its main and real application was to the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as predicted -- probably in allusion to this very rite -- by Isaiah the prophet. Thus the Talmud says distinctly: '*Why is the name of it called, The drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, according to what is said: 'With joy shall ye draw waters out of the well of salvation.'*' Hence, also, the feast and the peculiar joyousness of it, are alike designated as those of 'the drawing out of water'; for according to the same Rabbinical authorities, the Holy Spirit dwells in man only through *joy*" (*The Temple*, p.279-280).

The celebration of the Water-drawing was a highlight of the Feast. It was a happy, even ecstatic occasion, with a torchlight parade, including musicians, jugglers, and dancers, marching to the Temple, at night, as the whole city of Jerusalem was lit up by giant torches and the light of giant menorahs. As the lyres, drums, cymbals, trumpets, drums and horns played, the Rabbis entertained and clowned, adding to the joy. Not one day of Sukkot passed without joyous festivities that celebrated the happiness of the harvest, and the joy of community.

As the dawn of each day approached, the priests descended the steps to the Women's Court, with trumpets blaring, and marched in procession to the Eastern Gate of the Temple, and then turned their faces toward the Temple, to the west, and proclaimed, "Our fathers who were in this place stood with their backs to the Temple and their faces eastward and worshipped the sun, but our eyes are unto the Lord" (based on Ezekiel 8:16).

The Seventy Sacrifices

Each day of the Feast of Sukkot, the priestly procession would march around the altar one time, waving the lulav branches and shouting praises to God. But on the seventh day of the Feast, this circling procession was done *seven times* -- instead of just once! At the conclusion of the seventh circle, they struck the willows on the ground around the altar.

During the Feast, a total of seventy sacrifices of animals were performed -- understood to represent the seventy nations of the entire world that came from the family of Noah.

The Feast of *Sukkot* has a distinctive feature of universalism, and reaches out to all the nations of the world. This concept is expressed in the order of sacrifices enjoined during this festival period. On the first day of the Feast, 13 bulls were offered, and each successive day the number offered was decreased by one. Therefore, during the 7 days of the Feast, the bulls were offered as follows: $13 + 12 + 11 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 = 70$ (see Numbers 29:12-34). The seventy bulls correspond to the seventy original nations that were descended from Noah and his sons and who were the ancestors of all the nations of the world.

Mitch and Zhara Glaser go even further concerning the numbers of sacrifices. They point out:

"The order of sacrifices on Sukkot is spelled out in minute detail in the book of Numbers. Never before had so many sacrifices been required of Israel on any one day. The vast number of sacrifices were commensurate with Israel's depth of thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.

"A fascinating and mysterious pattern emerges from the seemingly endless list of sacrifices. No matter how the offerings are grouped or counted, their number always remains divisible by the number seven. During the week are offered 70 bullocks, 14 rams and 98 lambs -- altogether 182 sacrifices (26×7), to which must be added 336 (48×7) tenths of ephahs of flour for the meal offering. . . .

"It was no coincidence that this seven-day holiday, which took place in the height of the seventh month, had the perfect number, seven, imprinted on its sacrifices. It was by divine design that the final holiday . . . bore on its sacrifices the seal of God's perfect approval" (p.163).

Therefore, the Feast of Tabernacles was a time of celebration and rejoicing in the Lord for ALL NATIONS, to whom salvation will be extended. Says the book *Celebrate!*

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"The sacrifices made throughout the week -- a total of seventy -- were understood to represent the seventy nations that then existed in the world. Their well-being, like Israel's, depended on whether or not they would receive the rain needed for food supplies. Blessings like rain were understood as rewards for proper behavior (Deut. 11:13-15) (In his vision of messianic times, Zechariah presents lack of rain as punishment for the nations that fail to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem on

Sukkot to worship God, which would show that they accept His sovereignty [14:16]. This prophecy, and those of Isaiah and Micah calling on all nations to show their acceptance of God's sovereignty by going to His Temple -- combined with the connection between Sukkot and fulfillment, the ultimate being messianic redemption -- encouraged many proselytes to join the pilgrims in Jerusalem)" (p.214).

The connection of all nations with the Feast of Tabernacles is clearly pointed out in the prophecy of Zechariah. We read that during the millennial reign of the Messiah, after He has established the Kingdom of God in the earth, that all nations will come up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles! Notice this amazing prophecy!

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, *and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles*. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles*" (Zech.14:16-19, NKJV).

The Last Great Day of the Feast -- Hoshana Rabbah

The seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles is not an annual Sabbath day -- yet it has special meaning and significance of its own. In ancient times it was known as the "great day of the feast." Being the seventh and last day of the Feast -- and the culmination of the Feast -- it represented in a unique way the FINAL DAY OF HARVEST! Therefore, it also pictured the FINAL DAY of JUDGMENT! It pictured the celebration of the gathering in of the final great harvest of souls in God's plan. We read in the book *Celebrate!* --

"Therefore, the *final day of the festival*, when the last sacrifices were offered on behalf of the other nations, was identified as the occasion *when the earth is JUDGED* regarding replenishment of water, and consequently, *when mankind's FATE, collectively and individually, IS SEALED*. (Rabbinic literature identifies this *Yom Darvata*, Day of the Willow, as *Yom Hakhitum*, Day of Sealing, an *extension of Yom Kippur*.) Striking the willows then had the added connotation of casting away of sin or symbolizing the thrashings one would receive in punishment for sin" (p.214).

The seventh day of the Feast is called "Hoshanah Rabbah," meaning "the many *hoshanahs*." This is a contraction of *hoshiah na* -- or "The Great Salvation." During the Middle Ages, customs associated with Yom Kippur -- such as dressing the Torah in white vestments, and the cantor's wearing of a *kittel* -- were adopted for Hoshanah Rabbah, looked upon as "the *final day of judgment*."

Says Avraham Finkel in *Essence of the Holy Days*,

"*Hoshana Rabbah*, the seventh day of Sukkot, has a solemn undertone, it is closely linked to Yom Kippur, for it is on this day that the FINAL SEAL is placed on the verdict that was pronounced on Yom Kippur. . .

"On *Hoshana Rabbah* we are mindful of the fact that during Sukkot, judgment is rendered concerning the rainfall for the entire world (*Rosh Hashana* 16a). The economic fortunes of the world depend on abundant rainfall, so our prayers for rain are of crucial importance for the global economy as a whole and for *Eretz Yisrael* in particular.

"This is evident in the special prayers of *Hoshana Rabbah*. During the *Shacharit* (morning) service of the first six days of Sukkot, the entire congregation makes one circuit around the *bimah* with *lulav* and *etrog* in hand while the *chazzan* leads the recitation of the *hoshana* prayer that is punctuated by the congregation's saying aloud, *Hoshana*, 'Please save!' On the seventh day of Sukkot -- *Hoshana Rabbah* -- seven circuits are made, hence the name *Hoshana Rabbah*, which means 'many *hoshanas*.'

"In the *hoshana* prayers we ask for rain, 'to give life to the forsaken wastes, to sustain with trees, to enhance with sweet fruits, to rain on the sproutings, to elevate the thirsty earth.' After the seven processions around the *bimah*, additional prayers are said, after which the *lulav* and *etrog* are laid aside and the *hoshana* bundle, consisting of five willow branches, is picked up. The *hoshana* bundle is beaten on the ground five times in accordance with an ancient custom that was instituted by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (c. 350 B.C.E.)" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.94).

This final day of celebrating the Harvest, and Ingathering, therefore, pictures the final stage of God's plan of salvation -- the "Last Great Day," or the "Great White Throne Judgment"! It literally pictures the final day of "judgment" and sealing those who will receive eternal life (compare Rev.20:11-15), as opposed to those who will suffer the second and final death penalty (v.14-15).

This final day of "harvest celebration" pictures the vast second resurrection -- the resurrection of all people who ever lived, who did not qualify to be in the first resurrection, at the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Rev.20:1-4). All these others will rise up, to human life, after the 1,000 year period (Rev.20:5-6). They will be judged at that time -- the time of the "Great Salvation," or "Many *Hoshanas*."

Mitch and Zhava Glaser tell us concerning this day of Hoshana Rabbah:

"The seventh and last day of Sukkot, known as Hoshana Rabbah, 'The Great Hoshana,' is somewhat a festival in itself. On other days of the feast, when the family goes to synagogue, one procession is made around the sanctuary with *lulav* and *etrog* while the congregation sings, '*Hoshianah*, save us.' This particular tradition is believed to date back to the time of the Maccabees, around 165 B.C.

"On the final day, the entire congregation marches around *seven times*, carrying even more willow leaves with them. These seven times, a memorial of the circuits made by the ancient priests around the Temple altar during worship, remind us of God's goodness in destroying Jericho once Israel had circled it seven times.

"After the seventh time around the synagogue, the willow branches are beaten until their leaves fall off -- a symbol of beating off our sins and a prayer for plenteous water for next year's willows. . .

"In contrast to the festive days of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah is observed solemnly,

as an extension of the Day of Atonement. On this day, the rabbis tell us, the GATES OF JUDGMENT FINALLY CLOSE and the decrees pronounced by God *on the Day of Atonement take effect*" (*The Fall Feasts of Israel*, p.198-199).

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, tells us more about Hoshana Rabbah:

"The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshana Rabbah. On this day, the ritual of *Hoshanot* [marching around the synagogue or room] involves seven circlings of the synagogue with the four species. At the end of this ritual, willow branches are beaten against the ground. Hoshana Rabbah is viewed as the *END of the cycle which began on the first day of Elul*" (p.235).

In other words, Hoshana Rabbah is the culmination of the holy day season that begins with the month of Elul, which is the preparation month for the great feasts of the month of Tishri. Thus the process begins with self-examination and repentance, enjoined on us during Elul, heightened with Rosh Hoshana, and the trumpet warnings sounded on that day to "repent" and draw close to God. This "Feast of Trumpets" is followed by the Days of Awe, leading up to "Yom Kippur" or the "Day of Atonement," picturing judgment and cleansing -- forgiveness to the deserving and judgment upon the wicked. This is followed by the joyousness of the Feast of Sukkot, but this time is terminated by the FINAL "judgment" of Hoshana Rabbah!

In reality, then, we have the following scenario:

- 1) Month of Elul -- 30 days -- warning to examine ourselves and come to deeper repentance
- 2) Rosh Hashanah -- Day of Blowing -- pictures final warnings of God symbolized by trumpets of Revelation, call to repentance
- 3) Days of Awe -- final warnings to prepare to meet the Messiah
- 4) Yom Kippur -- Messiah returns, and judges the world, and marries His bride
- 5) Feast of Sukkot -- seven days of joyous exuberance and feasting -- symbolizing Millennial Kingdom of Messiah, and "wedding feast" of Marriage and Lamb
- 6) Hoshana Rabbah -- last great day of Sukkot -- symbolizes "Great White Throne Judgment, when all who ever lived receive opportunity for salvation

We read in the gospel of John that Jesus Christ went up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:1-9). Then, about the middle of the Feast, He went up to the Temple, and taught the people (v.14-30). We then read this amazing truth:

"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, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

The "last day," the "great day of the Feast," was Hoshana Rabbah! It was the seventh or last day of the Feast of Tabernacles! Jesus therefore made this statement, about the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, on the last day of the Feast of Sukkot -- picturing the Day of Final Salvation, the Day of Great Salvation, and the Great White Throne Judgment!

For more information on this, be sure to read the article "The Annual Holy Days Reveal the Awesome Plan of God," and the article entitled, "How Many Resurrections? The Mystery of the Resurrection of the Dead!"

***Spiritual Lessons from the Feast --
the Lesson of FAITH***

God's Word specifically links the Feast of Tabernacles, or "Booths," with the harvest ("Ingathering"), and with the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt, when they traveled in "temporary shelters" or "booths." These "booths" themselves are also linked with the harvest. In *Celebrate the Feasts*, Martha Zimmerman points out that "Sukkot" was the name of a city or town -- and was the first "stopping off" place for the Israelites as they left the land of Egypt (Exo.12:37).

We also read of a place named "Sukkoth" in Canaan. This was the city where, we read, "And Jacob journeyed to Succoth; and built for himself a house, and made booths [*sukkot*] for his livestock, therefore the place is named Sukkoth" (Gen.33:17).

Why does God command that we build make-shift, fragile, temporary "booths" or "huts" during the Feast? What is the lesson in this? There is a very special, deep, and profoundly meaningful lesson in the *sukkah*. Notice!

"While the Israelites were wandering the desert with nothing -- not even the ability to provide for their own basic needs -- they had to recognize and rely on God as the means of their survival. He provided manna for food (Exo.16:4-16), clouds for shelter (Exodus 33:4-17; Numbers 9:15-23), water to drink (Exodus 15:22-25; 17:5-7; Num.20:7-12), and conditions to prevent their clothing from deteriorating (Deut.29:5). His *sukkot* -- protection -- inspired in them the faith that they would reach the designated Land, as promised.

"Once they arrived, they planted and harvested foodstuffs, built houses, dug wells, and wove and sewed garments. But they were not to then feel that they were self-sufficient. All they created and enjoyed, while developed through their own efforts, was no less provided by God than the desert sustenance had been. Though much more obvious in times of want, the booths they lived in for a week each year were reminders of how they began, and that regardless of their state, whatever they had came from the Supreme Provider and Protector. As Torah warned when this was readily recognized, 'When you later have prosperity, be careful that you do not say to yourself, "It was my own strength and personal power that brought me all this." You must remember that it is God your Lord Who gives you the power to become prosperous' (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)" (*Celebrate the Feasts*, p.216).

The lesson of the "sukkah" is that God is our true eternal shelter. His protection and providence is a daily need for each one of us. He is the canopy over our heads, and

our true protection from the vicissitudes of life. True protection does not come from four walls, whether they are concrete or wood, or steel-reinforced. The solid walls of the homes of the Jews in Germany or the Warsaw ghetto did not protect them from the ravages of Nazi persecution and Hitler's death camps. In one moment, fire, flood, hurricane, or tornado can rip apart a solidly built construction, and deal death to its inhabitants. True security comes only from God in heaven.

Therefore, the sukkah built during the Feast of Tabernacles is to remind us of the true "sukkah" of God's protection, and our dependence and reliance upon Him for safety and survival. God delivered His people from Egypt in fragile, flimsy, sukkahs, built of branches of trees and leafy boughs -- teaching us and reminding us of the transitory fragility of human life, and how utterly dependent we truly are upon the living God.

Mitch and Zhava Glaser in *The Fall Feasts of Israel* declare:

"The impermanent, vulnerable, leafy shelters were to remind the Israelites of God's faithfulness during their forty years of wandering in the desert. The booths symbolized man's need to depend on God for His provision of food, water and shelter. . .

"In ancient Israel, booths were in common use throughout the land. The Hebrew word *sukkah* originally meant 'woven.' Temporary shelters were woven together from branches and leaves to protect livestock (Gen.33:17), to provide resting places for warriors during battle (II Samuel 11:11), to shelter watchers in the vineyard (Isaiah 1:8), and to protect the people from the incessant heat of the merciless Middle-Eastern sun. During harvest time, Israelite fields were dotted with such booths, woven hastily together as temporary homes for the harvesters" (p.157).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg declares in his fascinating book *The Jewish Way*:

"The *sukkah*, the booth, is the central symbol of the ancient Israelites' trust and hope for forty years in the desert. The Hebrews left the protection of man-made thick walls to place themselves under the protection of God. Exposed to dangerous natural conditions and hostile roving bands, they placed their confidence in the divine concern, which is the only true source of security. . . .

"The halachic requirements for the construction of a sukkah attempt to capture the fragility and openness of the booths. . . By deliberately giving up solid construction, Jews admit their vulnerability and testify that the ultimate trust is in the DIVINE shelter [that is, in God Himself]" (p.99).

Avraham Vaakov Finkel in *The Essence of the Holy Days: Insights from the Jewish Sages*, tells us more about the *sukkah* experience. He relates --

"The *sukkah* is a reminder of the huts in which God made the children of Israel live during their forty-year journey through the wilderness and of the Clouds of Glory that protected them on their wanderings. As a Jew sits in the *sukkah*, under the shelter of the *s'chach* [roof], surrounded by family and friends, he cannot help but feel God's sheltering Hand enveloping him. His spirit soars as he realizes that true happiness is found only in the eternal values of Torah and *mitzvot*, that material possessions offer no security, and that THE SHIELD OF FAITH is the only protection he can rely on. He is aware that, like his stay in the *sukkah*, life on earth is unstable and transitory. Gazing at the stars shimmering through the greenery of the *s'chach*,

he experiences a closeness to God that is almost palpable. This nearness to God is the source of his *simchah*, the exhilarating gladness that is the hallmark of Sukkot" (p.80).

The *sukkah* is referred to as the "SHELTER OF FAITH" in the *Ohel Torah*. Finkel quotes the Kotzker rabbi:

"The *sukkah* is called *tzila dimehemenu*, the shelter of faith. It teaches you to leave behind all your worldly concerns and to dedicate yourself to God with total self-effacing faith in His mercy and compassion. If you have attained this level of self-negating faith, you feel no pain or discomfort. That is why a person who feels discomfort is exempt from the *mitzvah* of eating in the *sukkah*. Feeling discomfort proves that he has not reached the point of total self-nullification.

"Because he has not grasped the meaning of the *sukkah*, any further stay there is of no benefit to him. Therefore, he is exempt from the obligation" (p.83).

Rabbi Chanoch of Alexander, in the *Zohar*, points out that the *sukkah* is also looked upon as the "*shade of faith*." This is because the walls and roof of the *sukkah* are so fragile and impermanent and unstable and precarious, that it expresses our complete and total dependence on God, and our boundless trust in His protection.

Joel Ziff in *Mirrors in Time*, describes the "sukkah" in terms of "change" in our lives. He shows how the experience of the "sukkah" leads to our changing, and transformation, as human beings. He asserts:

"For the Israelites in the desert, the *sukkah* provided a new home after they left slavery in Egypt. The *sukkah* links us to that arche-typal experience of CHANGE. In this spirit, we begin to build the *sukkah* immediately after the end of Yom Kippur. We move out of the permanent shelter which we habitually regard as home. We move into a new home and establish it as a center for the activities of daily life . . . We set aside a full week for prayer, celebration, and community.

"In some respects, the image of the *sukkah* evokes the wandering in the desert associated with the counting of the *omer*. However, there are significant differences. After Pesach, we are thrust into an alien environment; we are confused and dependent. . . On Sukkot, we experience our competence, autonomy, and power as we build our own shelter. Our joy is built on a solid foundation as we celebrate our achievements. The image of the *sukkah* as a symbol of CHANGE helps us become aware of how we have been TRANSFORMED as a result of the process of self-reflection which has just been completed" (p.236).

Says Joel Ziff, "We not only change, but we also *enjoy the change*. The rituals [of Sukkot] emphasize sensual pleasure and enjoyment. They are performed with a focus on joy and celebration. We are encouraged to select a *lulav* and *etrog* which are especially beautiful so as to enhance our pleasure" (*ibid.*).

Ziff goes on, showing how the Feast of Sukkot relates to "change":

"The experience of joy and celebration on Sukkot helps us discover and express our own positive feelings. In the process of self-development, it is important not only that we change; we must also experience those changes as positive, pleasurable, and satisfying. As we change our coping responses, we also experience a change in the results.

We are better able to resolve the problem that previously overwhelmed or frustrated us. Our self-confidence and self-esteem is enhanced because we feel more power and competence as well as the satisfaction of being able to make changes and take more control of our lives. The pleasure and satisfaction we feel reinforces our commitment to the process and enhances our motivation and our energy. This joy is more mature and dependable than the joy we experience at the time of liberation from slavery or the giving of the Torah because it is grounded in the reality of human failure and the capacity to learn from our mistakes" (p.237)..

Thus, the Feast of Sukkot pictures our moving from faithlessness to believing, from joyless to being joy-filled, from spiritual shakiness to spiritual strength, solid confidence and security. The Feast of Sukkot is a time to solidify and strengthen the spiritual CHANGES that God is working in our nature -- putting on the New Man in Christ, and putting off the Old Man with the lusts and sins of the flesh!

The Lesson of Sheer JOY

Concerning the Feast of *Sukkot*, the Bible states, *vehayita ach same'ach* -- that is, "and you shall remain ONLY JOYFUL" (Deut.16:14, 15). In the King James Version, we read in verse 14, "thou shalt rejoice," and in verse 15, "thou shalt surely rejoice." The Jewish Tanakh has this passage, however, as follows:

"After the INGATHERING from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall REJOICE in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold festival for the LORD your God seven days, in the place that the LORD will choose: for the LORD your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and *you shall have NOTHING BUT JOY*" (Tanakh).

The command "you shall rejoice" is literally "you shall *remain* joyful." This turns the attitude of rejoicing into the permanent trait of joyfulness in your personality. The words "nothing but joy" means that this joyfulness in your character and personality must persist, even under the most dire of circumstances or duress of trials and disappointments in life.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch expounds this passage in this way:

"The command 'you shall remain joyful' turns your rejoicing into a permanent trait of your personality, and the words 'only joyful' mean that this joyfulness in your character will persist even under circumstances that would otherwise tend to cast a cloud over it. You will remain joyful in spite of everything, 'only' joyful. *Simchah*, rejoicing, is the most sublime flower and fruit to open on the tree of life planted by the Law of God. In the same spirit, the joyfulness to which the present verse refers is not restricted to festivals and festive gatherings but extends beyond the festive seasons and accompanies us back into everyday life, from the exuberance of the festive assemblies into the quiet privacy of our homes, and remains with us through all the vicissitudes of life . . . to be joyful in spite of everything, whatever life may bring: *vehayita ach same'ach*" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.88).

This sublime and supreme joyousness was expressed at the Feast in a special way during the "Water-Drawing Ceremony," every evening and night of the Feast. Isaiah wrote, "JOYFULLY shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa.12:3). This was the theme behind the daily water-drawing ceremony at the Temple. As happy throngs filled the Temple, and the Levitical orchestra played on, with giant lamps lighting up Jerusalem, the priests drew water from the pool of Siloam, and carried it in a procession to the Temple, where it was poured upon the altar, with huge blazing candelabra casting their magnificent light over the proceedings.

Says the *Mishnah*, expressing the euphoria and rapture of the event, "If you have not seen the rejoicing of *Bet Hasho'evah* you have not witnessed joy in all your life" (*Sukkah* 53a).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg tells us of the joy of Sukkot, pointing out that it reflects a "mature joy." He writes:

"One fundamental criterion of a life well lived is love of life. It is terribly important, therefore, to enjoy life as it goes along. *Joy cannot be postponed. Life as is* is of infinite value.

"There is another dimension to the focus on joy on this holiday. Those who serve out of obligation, such as those who are in servitude, do not find joy in their work. *The joy of sukkot reflects maturity.* It is the happiness of the free person who chooses to live this way, who prefers this mission to all other alternatives. There is an *inner joy* even in the struggle against obstacles, the joy of choice and of anticipation of the goal" (*The Jewish Way*, p.114).

Greenberg adds:

"Constant renewal of joy makes life on the Exodus road worthwhile in itself. Thence comes the strength to persist. The suffering self is, at some level, at war with itself and its biological -- if not spiritual -- need for satisfaction. The joyous self, properly fulfilled, can be UNIFIED in body and soul, and love God and humanity with the whole heart" (p.115).

The Talmud tells us, "The Shekinah (Divine Presence of God) comes upon us neither out of sadness nor out of raucous laughter . . . but out of the *joy* of mitzvah."

This lesson of joyfulness teaches us that as Christians we ought to be joyful and filled with overflowing joy all the year around, because of the steadfast hope we have in Christ. As James wrote, "My brethren, count it all JOY when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Peter pointed out that we are "begotten to a living hope" (I Pet.1:3) through Christ "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away . . . In this you *greatly rejoice*, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (v.4-6). Peter says that these trials test the genuineness of our faith, "though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you *rejoice with JOY INEXPRESSIBLE and full of glory*" (I Pet.1:7-8).

The apostle Paul tells us that one of the chief fruits of God's Holy Spirit is real joy: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, faith, meekness, self control" (Gal.5:22-23). Ezra told the people assembled to observe God's Festivals, in his day, "For the *JOY* of the LORD is your strength" (Neh.8ss:10).

The Feast of Tabernacles teaches us to express and shower forth this exuberant joy!

The Third Lesson -- Love and The Four Species

The four species of plants waved before the Lord, in celebrating the Festival of Sukkot, are called *Arba Minim* in Hebrew. Jewish rabbis have several explanations for the meaning of these fruits and boughs. Symbolically, the four species represent the four kinds of people that make up a congregation or community. The *etrog* or citron, a tasty fruit which also has a pleasant aroma, represents the righteous people who have both Torah (Bible) knowledge *and* good deeds (or works). The *lulav*, or branch of a date palm, produces a sweet fruit, but has no aroma or fragrance. This represents the person who has Torah knowledge (such as a scholar), but is lacking in good deeds. He is deficient in good works. Then the *hassidim*, or sweet-smelling myrtle, is the person who has good deeds, but may not have much technical knowledge -- this person does good works, but is deficient in knowledge or scholarship. The majority of people may fall into this category. Finally, there is the willow, or *aravot*. This species grows near the water, and needs water, but is odorless and tasteless -- representing the person lacking in both knowledge and good deeds.

All four types of people can be found in a typical community or congregation. Says Finkel:

"Thus the *lulav* bundle symbolizes the totality of the Jewish people, all extending a helping hand to one another, all striving toward the same goals: Fulfillment of Torah to the best of their abilities and thereby proclamation to all humankind that God is the Creator and Maker of the universe" (p.80).

In the book *Celebrate!* we read of the profound significance of the waving of the *lulav* to the six directions:

"The qualities of the four species are likened to those of four categories of Jews. The *etrog*, possessing both taste and aroma, stands for Jews who have knowledge of Torah and do good deeds. The palm's fruit (date) with taste but no aroma, represents people with Torah knowledge. The myrtle, with no taste but aroma, represents the opposite, and willow, with neither aroma or taste, stands for those self-concerned and ignorant of Torah.

"We serve God with all four elements held together, the spiritually lofty with the mundane, the scholar, aristocrat, merchant, and laborer. *In society, all elements must likewise hold together, so that the wise and righteous can influence those less so, and because each contributes its part to society's functioning and progress when they UNITE for COMMON WELFARE.* As our sages put it, 'As one does not fulfill his duty on Sukkot unless all four species are bound together, *so some will not*

be redeemed unless all Jews hold together.' A strong message about the need for UNITY among our diverse segments" (p.222).

Another analogy of the "lulav" is to compare the palm branch to the backbone in the human body -- which gives strength and uprightness -- righteousness. The myrtle then is compared to the eyes, with which we see. The etrog is comparable to the heart, with which we understand, have compassion, and empathize with others. And the willow is comparable to the mouth, which speaks words and communicates (or fails to do so). In this picture, then, we must use ALL FOUR SPECIES -- backbone, heart, eyes, and mouth -- to serve God and our fellow man, to do the Work of God, and to fulfill the purpose for which God placed us on this earth -- to be His Partners in Creation!

A Spanish Rabbi, Aaron Halevi, at the end of the thirteenth century, in a book called *Sefer HaHinukh* ("The Book of Education") illustrated this basic, underlying principle in these words:

" . . . Since the rejoicing [of the holiday of Sukkot] might cause us to forget the fear of God, He, praised be He, has commanded us to hold in our hands at that time certain objects which should remind us that all the joy of our hearts is for Him and His glory. It was His will that the reminder be the four species. . . for they are all a delight to behold. In addition, the four species can be compared to four valuable parts of the body. The *etrog* [citron] is like the heart, which is the temple of the intellect, thus alluding that man should serve his Creator with his intellect. The *lulav* is like the spinal cord [or backbone], which is essential for the body, alluding that one should direct one's entire body to His service, praised be He. The myrtle is like the eyes, alluding that one should not be led astray after his eyes on a day when his heart rejoices. The willow branch is like the lips. We complete our actions through speech, and thus the willow branch alludes to the fact that we should control our mouth and the words that issue from it, fearing God, praised be He, even at a time of rejoicing."

Learning to use all our resources and senses to serve God is no easy task. Worshiping God with all our being requires diligent effort and focus. Solomon wrote, "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward *mouth*, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine *eyes* look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (Prov.4:23-27).

As the apostle Paul writes: "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor.6:20). Also, Paul wrote: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor.10:31). Paul adds, "And *whatsoever ye do*, in word or deed, *do all* in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). This is a full-time commission -- a full-time job!!!

Out-going and Extended Love

During the Feast of Sukkot, the people of the congregation take the Four Species - the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hassidim*, and *aravot* -- and hold the *etrog* or citron in their left hand,

with the *pitam* facing down, and the bundle of the palm branch, myrtle, and willow in the right hand. After reciting the blessing, the etrog is turned over, with the *pitam* pointed upward, and the bundle of the lulav in the right hand is waved in front of the person, then in back, to the right side, then to the left, upward and then downward -- the six directions -- as they parade or march around the room, as our forefathers marched around the altar at the Temple, singing praises and shouting hoshanahs to God, "Save us," "Help us," "Deliver us," "Blessed by Thy Name," "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," and so forth.

What does this picture for us? Marching around the room, or altar in Temple times, pictures our faith in God, calling to Him to save us. On the final day of *Hoshana Rabbah*, as we march around the room seven times, this reminds us of the Israelites, who marched around the city of Jericho *seven times* -- and then they shouted, *Hoshana Rabbah*, "Save us!" and God smote the walls of Jericho and caused them to fall flat in a mighty earthquake! Performing this together, as one body, pictures *SPIRITUAL UNITY!*

The fact that we do this *together*, as a congregation, even as Israel marched around Jericho as a congregation, reminds us that *we are in this spiritual struggle and fight together -- we need each other -- and we must help one another!* When ancient Israel marched into the Promised Land, so long as they were united, as one, and obedient, God gave them miraculous victories over powerful nations. But when *disunity* occurred, and some disobeyed, then even the smallest city, like tiny Ai, could overwhelm and defeat the Israelite armies!

When we are united in truth, then we are powerful by the Spirit of God flowing through us and out from us. Therefore, Paul wrote, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that you all speak the same thing*, and that there be no DIVISIONS among you, but that you be PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER *IN THE SAME MIND and in the same judgment*" (I Cor.1:10).

As David wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to *dwell together* in UNITY! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion: For there the LORD commanded the *blessing -- Life forevermore*" (Psalm 133:1-3).

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time*, tells us how the experience of the Feast of Sukkot teaches us the lesson of community, sharing, and loving one another. He writes:

"We do not limit ourselves to the symbols of support and nurturance; the *sukkah* ritual encourages us to the actual experience as we feed one another. We invite guests into our *sukkah* and accept invitations [or we dine out together, and enjoy the fellowship of one another] from our neighbors. Difficulty in coping successfully with our stresses is often exacerbated by isolation and alienation. When we regard our problems as too overwhelming or difficult, we tend to expect others to be disinterested or unable to help.

"As a result of the changes we have made during the Days of Awe, we are more open, honest, and responsive. Others who have similarly worked to change

themselves are also more open, honest, and responsive. *On this Holy-Day, we strengthen the BONDS WITH OTHERS, feeling the ability to GIVE TO OTHERS and to receive from them" (p.239).*

Ziff continues this theme, showing how the Feast of Sukkot focuses our attention away from selves and outward to others, teaching us the lessons of giving and sharing. He writes:

"In contrast to the inward turning quality of the Days of Awe, on Sukkot, our energies **EXTEND OUT**. In the ritual of the four species, we make the blessing and then point the *lulav* to each of the SIX DIRECTIONS -- south, west, north, east, upward, and downward. In the *Hoshanot* and in the *Hakafot*, we circumnabulate the synagogue in a PARADE. We emphasize prayers for peace and prosperity, for water for our crops, not only for ourselves as a people but for ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD. *We extend OUTWARD towards others as well. We SHARE our meals* in the sukkah, and *we join hands and voices as we celebrate* with singing, dancing, and merry-making. The ritual thereby helps us turn our energies outward as well. As we experience changes in ourselves, we begin to translate those changes into our activity in the world. *We are energized by our experience and move naturally outward" (p.239).*

Joel Ziff concludes this theme, saying, "Sukkot serves as a BRIDGE by helping us translate our experience of Essence on Yom Kippur so that we can apply and integrate what we have learned into everyday life activity" (*ibid.*).

In other words, Sukkot teaches us to express love, which is out-going, and which is the very nature and fundamental character of God Himself.

As the apostle John wrote: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born [begotten] of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, *we also ought to love one another*

"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (I John 4:7-16).

As Jesus said so plainly, we must learn to really "love one another" (John 13:34). He added, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have LOVE for one another" (v.35). He added, "This is My commandment, that you *love one another* as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:12-13).

Jesus prayed to the Father that His Church would truly be unified, even as He and the Father are in total unified agreement (John 17:11). He prayed that true Christians "all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be *one in Us*, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given

them, that they may be ONE just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; *that they may be made perfect in one . . .*" (John 17:21-23).

Peter put it plainly: "And above all things, have FERVENT CHARITY [LOVE] among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). And as Paul wrote: "And above all these things put on CHARITY [LOVE], which is the bond of perfectness" (Col.3:14).

True brotherly love creates perfect unity. The strong help to uphold the weak, the rich help to support the poor, and everybody adds his particular strength and gift and talent to the pool, so that all may be nourished and strengthened in faith, hope, and love.

The apostle Paul sums it up nicely. He wrote: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own; is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . . ."

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love" (I Cor.13:4-13).

The "booths" of the Feast remind us of our need for FAITH. The command to "rejoice" reminds us of our eternal HOPE, our calling and destiny in life, by the grace of God and His goodness. The "lulav" reminds us of our need to develop LOVE for others in our heart and soul -- true godly compassion and *chesed* -- which is translated "loving-kindness."

The Feast of Sukkot -- an Awesome New Vitality

There is far more meaning and significance to the Feast of Sukkot than most of us, if not all of us, have begun to imagine in our wildest dreams. Even the "lulav" ceremony itself -- something which most Christians are totally ignorant of -- contains tremendous depth of meaning and spiritual significance -- more than any of us have even begun to remotely imagine!

In summation, the Feast of Tabernacles comprises three powerful spiritual lessons: It is "The Feast of Faith," and "The Feast of Joy," and "The Feast of Love." It contains vital elements expressing all of these major themes.

Chapter 15

Building Your Own Sukkah

God's Word declares that we should make a *sukkah* to properly celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Where and how should we do this? Just what IS a "sukkah" or "booth"? How sturdy should it be made? How big? With what materials? And WHY should we do this? Here, in this article, we present some useful and valuable tips on creating your own personal "booth," "tabernacle" or "sukkah" for God's Feast of Sukkot, to help you worship and celebrate it with the joy and exhilaration that God wants!

Many of God's people have never built a sukka, or "booth," for the Feast of Tabernacles, because they did not understand how important this is in God's sight!

Yet God commands:

"Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. *And ye shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall REJOICE before the LORD your God seven days.* And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a *STATUTE FOR EVER in your generations*: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. *Ye shall DWELL IN BOOTHS SEVEN DAYS*; all that are Israelite born shall **dwelt in booths**: *That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD thy God"* (Lev.23:39-43).

Notice that this commandment to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot, and to "dwell" in temporary "booths" -- fragile huts built for use during the Festival -- was "A STATUTE FOR EVER in your generations"!

How, then, can we do this?

In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, we read, "They kept also the Feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (Ezra 3:4).

This observance occurred after the return of many Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Ezra, a righteous scribe of God, gathered the people and

read to them from the law of God (Nehemiah 8:1-8) on the first day of Tishri, or the Feast of Trumpets (Nehemiah 8:2). On the next day, as the people were gathered to learn more of the laws of God,

"they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, *Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.* So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the *roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.* And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, *and sat under the booths:* for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the manner" (Neh.8:14-18).

Here is clear instruction in the Bible on how we should build our sukkot (booths). It should be big enough for our self, our family, and to entertain guests, if possible.

The "where" is also shown here. Most of us can make one in our own back yard. Some people who have flat roofs, can make one on their roof. In some cases, we can make one in a park, or camping ground. Once made, we should spend some time in it -- "dwell" in it -- during the Feast of Tabernacles. Having built a *sukkah* in one's back yard, and fellowshiping and entertaining friends and family in and around it, with beverages, wine, fruit juice, snacks, and food, is a most enjoyable pastime during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Sukkah Insights

Writes Rabbi Irving Greenberg:

"Building can involve the whole family. Over the years people have shown great imagination in both construction and decoration of the sukkah. For those less handy, there are reasonable and attractive pre-fabricated models with easy directions for putting them together. Many prefabs come complete with bamboo stick s'chach [this is the name for the roof materials that cover the top of the sukkah hut itself]. If there is no forest in your area, evergreen or perishable s'chach can be purchased from a nursery or landscape contractor. An evergreen roof will add welcome fragrance to the sukkah. When gathering s'chach from local forest or riverbank areas, one must be sure not to destroy public property and not to take s'chach belonging to a private person without permission. Jewish law rules that a mitzvah is not validly performed if goods used in its performance are stolen" (*The Jewish Way*, p.104).

Sukkah building can be great fun, and should involve the entire family! If your church or local fellowship group can make a sukkah for your group, that would be

wonderful! It is a experience you will never forget -- a true spiritual "high" can be experienced when we obey God's simplest commandments!

More insight into the basic rules of sukkah building are provided by Leslie Koppelman Ross in the book, *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holiday Handbook*:

"Although there are regulations regarding the minimum size, maximum height, and acceptable dimensions for its walls, the element that makes a *sukkah* more than an agricultural shed is its 'roof': a canopy made from stalks or branches arranged to provide more shade than sunlight and allow you to see the stars through it. In other words, it is something that originally grew from the earth through which we can look up and see heaven. In fact, the word *sukkah* is derived from the word for the roof -- *s'khakh*, meaning 'covering' -- indicating the most important element of the structure. It's a reminder that during the Israelites' forty years of wandering, God 'covered' all their needs. . . .

"It is a *mitzvah* for every Jew to participate in building and decorating a *sukkah*. (A sukkah decorating party for the immediate family, or for an extended group including friends, is a great way to get into the spirit of the holiday" (p.221).

Mitch and Zhava Glaser in their book *The Fall Feasts of Israel* tell us sukkot building was a highlight of the Feast of Tabernacles. They point out:

"The building of a booth is one of the most exciting parts of the celebration of Sukkot, especially for the children. Older youths are assigned the heavy labor of gathering the materials and sawing, nailing, and constructing the frame of the booth, while the adults supervise. They need to insure that the booth will be high enough for a tall man to comfortably stand and wide enough for the family table with room for guests to sit in comfort. The sukkah is built outdoors, in the yard, or possibly even on the roof if no yard space is available . . ." (page 187).

Building the Sukkah

How can you make a *sukkah* for your own home? Here's the answer! Just *do it!* Don't worry about whether it is "perfect" or not. We should do the best we can, and realize that God does not expect everyone's sukkah to be the same. There is allowance for much creativity, diversity, and imagination.

Here's what you need to do. First, draw out a schematic diagram or "blueprint," as it were, of what you want your sukkah to look like. As you practice and gain experience, you will become better at it. Estimate the number of boards or plastic (PVC) pipes (the stronger kind, about ¾" or 1" in diameter, or larger if you wish), or wood planks or other structural materials, you will need for construction. This is for the basic FRAMEWORK of the sukkah.

Then assemble them as your plans indicate . I would suggest a sukkah about seven pt eight feet high, maybe 5-8 feet wide and 7-12 feet long, for a couple or small family. One entrance (open doorway) would be sufficient. Nail your boards together to make the framework (or stick your PVC pipes together, using the appropriate connecting pieces (elbows, angles, four-way crosses, as needed). (The sukkah can also be attached to the outside of a house, garage, or other building, saving you the need to construct one

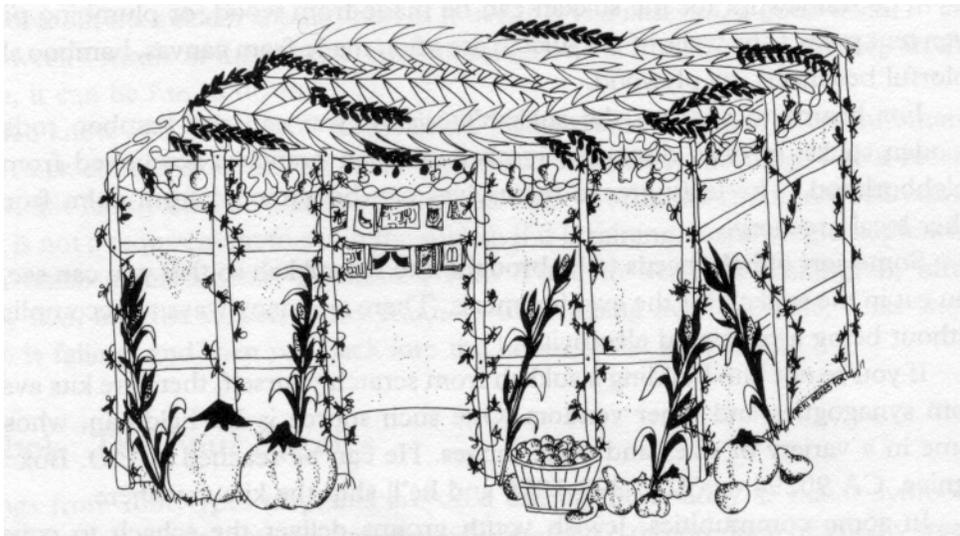
of the walls.)

One of the best materials you can use nowadays for a sukkah, in many locations, is PVC plastic pipe. Solid $\frac{3}{4}$ " or 1" inch is good, with proper fittings, which can be obtained at a local plumbing store, Home Depot, or similar store. Once you put the framework together, using enough PVC to make three and one half sides (leaving room for an entrance in one side), you can cover the walls with white sheets, drapes, rugs, tapestries, and then decorate them with balloons, crafts, pictures drawn of the harvest season, and any number of ideas.

Once you have put the framework of the sukkah where you want it, you will need to "cover" the walls. You can use bed sheets to do this, or carpets, or other decorative "wall" items; it can be flexible, of course. You can attach bed sheets with safety pins or other fasteners.

The Roof of the Sukkah

The "roof" of the sukkah, of course, is of great importance. You should have enough wooden slats or thin boards laid across the top of the sukkah to give support for the foliage, leaves, tree branches, and boughs, that you will need to use to create the "roof" – made of vegetation. Banana leaves, palm leaves, or broad leaves of various plants can help make a good "roof"! Remember, the roof should allow the nighttime sky to shine through so you can see the stars – about one third of the "roof" should be "open" enough so you can see through the branches and leaves. Gather together enough building materials, rope, twine, safety pins, branches from trees, palm trees, banana trees, and leafy plants from your own back yard, or from other locations (with all necessary permissions obtained, of course).



The sukkah-booth for the Feast of Tabernacles need to be festive, fun, and decorated.

Decorating the Sukkah

The “walls,” once put around the sukkah, can then be DECORATED with all kinds of imaginative decorations! This should, if possible, be a FAMILY project (or several families together!) Children can draw pictures of Biblical themes, fruit, harvest produce, or pictures of the Holy Land collected from magazines (or hand drawn art), can all be attached to the sukkah’s walls (the sheets or whatever you use). What a “trip” it is decorating your sukkah!

Mitch and Zhava Glaser tell us:

“Once the sukkah is erected, it is time for the smaller children to join the project. They are excited to do their part of fulfilling the tradition of beautifying the sukkah. For if there is one thing the Jewish people agree on regarding the festival of Sukkah, It is that the mere building of the sukkah booth is never considered enough. The Sukkah must be made as beautiful as it can be. . . .

“. . . it is customary in many nations to suspend from the roof the seven species of the land of Israel mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8 – wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey – in gratitude for the Lord’s bounty” (page 188-189, *The Fall Festivals*).

Leslie Koppelman Ross adds:

"You can use just about any materials to make the walls: cinder blocks, scrap lumber, old doors, bamboo shades, canvass or nylon sheeting attached to a frame of wood or metal piping [as I said earlier, try PVC pipe -- it is easy to use!] with nails or grommets and rope.

"Beams can be placed across the top to support the *s'khakh*. In Israel, authorities trim the palm trees in time for the holiday and leave the branches in piles on the streets for people to take home. In this country, parks departments often oblige with the by-products of fall pruning. If you cannot obtain leafy branches, bamboo, straw, reeds, and thin boards may be used.

"Our enjoyment of the *mitzvah* is enhanced when we consider its aesthetics, so it is appropriate to make the *sukkah* as beautiful as possible. Gourds, fruits, birds made from hollowed egg shells, cranberry garlands, popcorn strands and paper chains, pictures and wall tapestries, along with representations of the seven species that grow in Israel (wheat, barley, grape, fig, date, pomegranate, olive), are all traditional. . . .

"Pre-fab *sukkot* are available through Jewish book stores and sometimes synagogues. . . ." (p.220-221).

“Dwelling” in the Sukkah

Once your sukkah is created, you will need to tend to the inside. You may place a small table inside, a few chairs, depending on room, and then place a dish of fruits, apples, oranges, pumpkins, grapes, raisins, and cookies, for entertaining guests and friends, on the table. Remember, one of the purposes of constructing the sukkah is to “dwell” in it – spend time in it – entertaining friends and neighbors, showing forth hospitality. It is to be a sort of “hospitality hut,” where you welcome family members, church members, friends and strangers, as Abraham did.

You may also put your sleeping bag in the sukkah, for sleeping at night (don't forget a ground cloth to keep moisture from making your sleeping bag wet from the dew at night). For families experienced in camping out, spending an overnight in the sukkah together is a real treat! And it can be for novices in the camping experience, as well.

It is a real blessing to spend private time also in your sukkah, studying the Bible, meditating on Scriptures, and special time in deep, profound, earnest, thankful, and devotional prayer.

Blessing of the Sukkah

When you enter the sukkah the first time each day, you should recite the "Blessing of the Sukkah," which goes like this:

"Baruch Attah Adonai, Melek Ha Olam,
Asher Kidshanu B'Mitzvotav,
V'tzivanu Leisheiv Basukkah.

*"Blessed Are You, O Lord, King of the Universe,
Who Has Sanctified Us by His Commandments,
and Commanded Us to Dwell in the Sukkah."*

After we recite the "blessing" of the Sukkah -- and then enter the Sukkah and begin to commune with God, our Father, in a special way, and with Yeshua our Messiah, it would be good to reflect on the tremendous and deep meaning of the wonderful Feast of Tabernacles, which God has given to us as a precious spiritual gift – and bless and thank Him for its wonderful meaning and teaching qualities – and the divine peace and faith and shelter which it portrays. It is good to bless God as we sit in peace, and happiness, in our sukkah, under God's divine protection, and in His divine Presence.

Entertaining in the Sukkah

According to tradition, the sukkah commemorates the booth Abraham built when he greeted and entertained the three heavenly visitors (Gen.18; Numbers Rabbah 14). Jewish sources also tell us:

"The children of Israel were divinely protected in the wilderness by the shelter of the tabernacles solely because the Patriarch Abraham had given shelter to three strangers beneath the tree on his property" (Genesis Rabbah 48:10).

Thus the sukkah goes back to Abraham, father of the faithful. Hospitality was his outstanding trait. From this concept, Jewish tradition suggests that each night, during Sukkot, "heavenly guests" visit the sukkah or booth, with Abraham being the first guest, the next night, Isaac, the third night Jacob, then Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and finally, King David.

Of course, these men are really dead and in their graves, waiting for the resurrection (see Acts 2:29-32; Heb.11:39-40). However, these were seven of the greatest saints of God, and their lives are valuable study guides for all of us! They were noted for outstanding spiritual qualities, and it would be good to meditate on them, and the lessons their lives afford for us, during our days spent in the sukkah!

This coming Feast of Tabernacles, I hope you will really enjoy your "sukkah" experience, as you spend seven days in unique and wonderful fellowship with Almighty God, and His Son, Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah, and with others in the faith of Yeshua, as you are able!



Sukkah built by South African brethren at Feast of Tabernacles 1999.

The Feast of Booths in the Millennium

The day is soon coming when the entire world --all nations -- will observe the Feast of Tabernacles, or booths, as God commanded. They will come up to Jerusalem, and make fragile, flimsy booths, and dwell in them for seven days, during the Feast. The prophet Zechariah foretells that after the return of the Messiah, to put down all rebellion around the world, and to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on the earth, a startling thing will happen. Notice!

"And every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, AND TO KEEP THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES OR BOOTHS. And it shall be, that

whoso of the families of the earth shall not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, upon them there shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt do not go up to Jerusalem and present themselves, upon them there shall be no *rain*, but there shall be the plague with which the Lord will smite the nations that go not up to KEEP THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. This shall be the consequent punishment of the sin of Egypt, and the consequent punishment of the sin of all the nations that do not go up to *keep the feast of Tabernacles*" (Zech.14:16-19, *Amplified Bible*).

Obviously, as the prophet points out, the Feast of Tabernacles will be a TEST -- a test upon ALL NATIONS -- when the Messiah returns! But is it also a TEST for God's people, *NOW*? Consider this well!

Michael Strassfeld, in *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary*, tells us about the Messianic character of this Festival. He declares:

"An important and underlying theme of Sukkot is its *messianic and universalist character*. Coming at the end of the agricultural year and the end of the pilgrimage cycle, Sukkot marks the *end of a passage of time*. It thereby anticipates the MESSIANIC END OF DAYS for all people. During Sukkot a total of seventy sacrifices were brought into the temple, corresponding to the tradition's count of the number of nations in the world

"This vision of universal brotherhood is reflected in the sukkah, whose door and roof are open to all. The sukkah, in turn, evokes a vision of God's sukkah as a house of prayer for all nations. In that future, God will spread a *sukkah shalom* -- a sheltering cover made of peace and harmony. Even as we remember the desert period of old, having reached the end of time, we *eagerly await the redemption*, the crossing over into the promised land" (p.146-147).

But as the prophecy of Zechariah, shows, the passage from this age of strife and wickedness into the new world of peace and utopia will not be an easy one. At first, the nations will not be willing to come up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and to dwell in *sukkot*, worshipping the King, the Lord of hosts. They will rebel. Some, like Egypt, will be hard to convince. God will have to use the threat of drought, and even plagues, to bring some of the nations to their senses!

For the nations of the world, the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles will be a divine *test!*

But is God *now* beginning to give this "test" to His end-time people, today? As the apostle Peter wrote: "For the time is come when judgment must *begin* at the house of God: and if it first *begin at us*, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Pet.4:17-18).

A New TEST Upon God's People!

The "Feast of Booths" is commanded to be observed by ***BUILDING OR CONSTRUCTING BOOTHS -- JUST AS THE "NAME" OF THE FEAST IMPLIES!*** Those nations who will not do this, during the Millennial reign of the Messiah, will suffer

PUNISHMENT! No rain will fall, drought, and consequent famine, will erupt! And if that doesn't bring them around, then disease epidemics, and the *plague!*

For those who desire to obey and please God, building a sukkah is very important during the Feast of Tabernacles. Observant Israeli soldiers even built one during the Yom Kippur War in the Golan Heights, the scene of horrendous battles with the Syrian army.

How important is sukkah building and Sukkot observance to God?

The ENTIRE WORLD will be enjoined to observe this Festival of God properly during the Reign of the Messiah!



Israeli soldiers build sukkah with old box crates in Golan Heights during Yom Kippur War.

Says Avraham Yaakov Finkel, in *The Essence of the Holy Days*,

"Sukkot is a TEST of man's attachment to God, and the nations will observe Sukkot to prove their newfound loyalty to Him"
(emphasis mine, p.89).

Will you observe Sukkot *properly* this coming year, as God intended, and as He commanded? Will YOU dwell in your "temporary dwelling" -- your make-shift, rickety, fragile, homemade BOOTH that you have constructed wherever you keep the Feast? Whether in a camp ground, park, or festival gathering -- or in your own back yard, or balcony, or roof-top?

If you have never done it, it is a real JOY – and a wondrous family experience as well!

Isn't it time therefore that we *really, with all our heart, began to OBEY God and follow His instructions and commands?*

Isn't it time we get our bearings straight, and begin to "live by *EVERY* word of God"? (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4; Deut.8:3).

Isn't it time we perform and obey God's Law, in its entirety, with JOY unbounded and running over?

Isn't it time we celebrate His Festival in the manner in which HE commands, with tremendous JOY, and total commitment, and 100% obedience?

Says Leslie Koppelman Ross, further:

"For joy reflects a feeling of optimism about the future, and no matter what the immediate situation, a Jew [that is, a true Jew, or true believer in the Messiah -- see Romans 2:26-29] believes in the promise of redemption: 'I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry, daily I will wait for his coming' (Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith).

"It is an attitude that, along with the teachings of Torah, sustained the Jewish people. The rabbis said that *in the world to come, we will be REWARDED FOR THE JOY we felt in performing mitzvot* [the commandments], *rather than for the actual observance of the commandments*. In other words, indication of *motivation is seen as more important* than going through the motions" (p.218).

So let's put on a real "happy face" -- and at the Feast of Tabernacles, serve and worship God with JOY bubbling over and irrepressible and exploding forth in dazzling radiance and brilliance! Let's *REJOICE* during this Feast, as we have never rejoiced before, as we BUILD OUR BOOTHS, and celebrate the Feast, in sheer ecstatic worship of the One True God!

Says Ross:

"Since the *sukkah* is a memorial to God's protection, it is meant to enhance the joy of the festival. If you do not feel joy, you cannot appropriately fulfill the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *sukkah*" p.226).

So let's serve our God with GREAT delirious JOY and REJOICING at the Feast this year! Let's REJOICE in the "season of our joy" inside our own wonderful SUKKKAH!

Let's radiate cheerfulness, joyfulness, and sublime happiness, and be thankful for every one of God's wonderful divine commandments -- including the commandment to build and dwell in a "sukkah" during the Feast of Tabernacles – just as its name says!

As Jesus Christ declared, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law, until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18). “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (vs.19).

How much we have missed out on true, vital spiritual understanding, in the years gone by, because we did not literally fulfill this plain Scriptural commandment! It is as if we had only come "part way" out of sin -- but still remained with one foot in the world! We have sinned, as Malachi says: "But ye are departed out of the [true] way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law . . . as ye have not kept my ways, but have been PARTIAL in the law" (Malachi 2:8-9).

Praise God for this deeper and awesome understanding of the meaning and significance of His holy Feast of Tabernacles! Praise God for revealing to us the wonderful TRUTH about the “sukkah”! Thank God for His mercy and loving-kindness!

We are commanded to build a temporary Sukkot -- this teaches us the lesson of FAITH.

We are commanded to "rejoice" -- teaching us the lesson of JOY, related to our HOPE.

We are commanded to rejoice with "lulav" branches, waving them in the six directions, out and away from ourselves -- teaching us the lesson of out-going concern for others -- true LOVE.

What an *awesome* Feast! Isn't it time we begin to really celebrate this Festival of God -- this Hag HaAdonai -- with the depth and emotion and joy and understanding that God intends for us to have?

Blessed be the Name of the LORD!

Baruch Attah Adonai, Yavenu, Elohenu, Avenu, Melchenu, Melek ha Olam!

Chapter 16

The “Great Day of the Feast”

The Awesome Mystery of Hoshana Rabbah!

Many are confused about the “great day of the Feast” when Jesus stoop up and said for people to come to Him, and He would give them living water. What day was that? What does it picture? is it the “Eighth Day”? Or is it the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles? What is the real truth behind the mystery of this “Great Day of the Feast”? What does it picture in God’s Plan?

In John, chapter 7, we find that Yeshua went down to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. In verse 37 we read, “On the *last day of the festival, the GREAT DAY*, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39, NRSV).

What is the “last day” of the Feast? Why is it called, “the Great Day”?

Many have assumed, and taught, that this refers to the concluding festival which follows right after the Feast of Tabernacles, called “The Eighth Day.” In Hebrew it is called *Shemini Atzeret*, which simply means, “Eighth Day.”

However, a strict interpretation of this verse would suggest that it is discussing a festival itself which has more than one day, and the day in question is the LAST day of that particular Feast! Now the Feast of Tabernacles is just such a Feast. It has “seven days” (Lev.23:39-42). On these seven days the people of God are to take palm branches, and other branches, and rejoice before the Lord (v.40). During these seven days they are to dwell in booths, or temporary dwellings, called *sukkah* in Hebrew (verse 42).

After this festival, on the eighth day, comes an entirely NEW festival, called Shemini Atzeret! It also is an annual Sabbath day – a day of solemn assembly (Lev.23:39; Numbers 29:35).

During the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish people celebrated at the Temple of God in Jerusalem a special ceremony, daily, called the “pouring out of the water offering.” But on the day of Shemini Atzeret, the people no longer dwelt in booths; they no longer waved the palm branches and other foliage. And they no longer offered the daily water libation at the Temple!

Therefore, it seems most clear that the “last day of the Feast,” when Jesus spoke words about “living water,” He was connecting this with the pouring out in the Temple of the water offering on the last or seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles!

What is the special significance of this day? What does Jewish history tell us?

The Last Day of the Feast -- Hoshana Rabbah

The seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles is not an annual Sabbath day -- yet it has special meaning and significance of its own. In ancient times it was known as the “great day of the feast.” The entire Feast of Tabernacles pictured, in a spectacular way, the great fall harvest, and it was called “The Festival of the Harvest.” But the seventh and last day of the Feast -- and the culmination of the Feast – had a special meaning of itself. It represented in a unique way the *FINAL DAY OF HARVEST!* Therefore, it also pictured the *FINAL DAY OF JUDGMENT!* It pictured the celebration of the gathering in of the final great harvest of souls in God’s plan.

We read in the book *Celebrate!* --

“Therefore, the *final day of the festival*, when the last sacrifices were offered on behalf of the other nations, was identified as the occasion *when the earth is JUDGED* regarding replenishment of water, and consequently, *when mankind’s FATE, collectively and individually, IS SEALED.* (Rabbinic literature identifies this *Yom Darvata*, Day of the Willow, as *Yom Hakhitum*, Day of Sealing, an *extension of Yom Kippur.*) Striking the willows then had the added connotation of casting away of sin or symbolizing the thrashings one would receive in punishment for sin” (p.214).

The seventh day of the Feast is called “Hoshanah Rabbah,” meaning “the many *hoshanahs.*” This is a contraction of *hoshiah na* -- or “The Great Salvation.” During the Middle Ages, customs associated with Yom Kippur -- such as dressing the Torah in white vestments, and the cantor’s wearing of a *kittel* -- were adopted for Hoshanah Rabbah, looked upon as “the *final day of judgment.*”

Says Avraham Finkel in *Essence of the Holy Days*,

“*Hoshana Rabbah*, the seventh day of Sukkot, has a solemn undertone, it is closely linked to Yom Kippur, for it is on this day that the *FINAL SEAL* is placed on the verdict that was pronounced on Yom Kippur. . .

“On *Hoshana Rabbah* we are mindful of the fact that during Sukkot, judgment is rendered concerning the rainfall for the entire world (*Rosh Hashana* 16a). The economic fortunes of the world depend on abundant rainfall, so our prayers for rain are of crucial importance for the global economy as a whole and for *Eretz Yisrael* in particular.

“This is evident in the special prayers of *Hoshana Rabbah*. During the *Shacharit* (morning) service of the first six days of Sukkot, the entire congregation makes one circuit around the *bimah* with *lulav* and *etrog* in hand while the *chazzan* leads the recitation of the *hoshana* prayer that is punctuated by the congregation’s saying aloud, *Hoshana*, ‘Please save!’ On the seventh day of Sukkot -- *Hoshana Rabbah* -- seven circuits are made, hence the name *Hoshana Rabbah*, which means ‘many *hoshanas*.’

“In the *hoshana* prayers we ask for rain, ‘to give life to the forsaken wastes, to sustain with trees, to enhance with sweet fruits, to rain on the sproutings, to elevate the thirsty earth.’ After the seven processions around the *bimah*, additional prayers are said, after which the *lulav* and *etrog* are laid aside and the *hoshana* bundle, consisting of five willow branches, is picked up. The *hoshana* bundle is beaten on the ground five times in accordance with an ancient custom that was instituted by the prophets *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi* (c. 350 B.C.E.)” (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.94).

Notice that although this custom of shaking the bundle of willow branches is not found in the Torah, Jewish history tells us it was added by God’s prophets, *Haggai*, *Zechariah* and *Malachi*.

What does this final day of celebrating the Harvest, and Ingathering, therefore, picture?

As most of us know, the Feast of Tabernacles as a whole, pictures the Millennial Reign of the Messiah, *Yeshua*, over the nations of the world for one thousand years. But what about this “last day” of the Feast?

During the Millennium, all the nations will be taught the ways of the Lord. “In days to come the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For our of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:1-3, NRSV).

Isaiah says further, of that time, “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa.11:9).

That’s all very good. But in the book of Revelation, we read of what is to happen after the millennial reign of Christ. The apostle John declares that the righteous dead will be resurrected to reign with Christ during the millennium (Rev.20:1-4). But, he adds, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (v.5). This encompasses all the millions and billions who ever lived, who will not be in the “first resurrection” which occurs at the coming of the Messiah!

John goes on, “Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before the throne, and BOOKS were OPENED. Also another book was opened, THE BOOK OF LIFE. And the dead were judged ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS, as recorded in the BOOKS*” (Rev.20:11-12).

Here is depicted the resurrection of all who ever lived, from Adam to the End Times – all who lived, died, and did not come up in the first resurrection. Notice that they will NOT all be condemned to death and destruction, but that they will all be JUDGED according to their WORKS while they were alive!

This great time of judgment is also pictured in Matthew, chapter 25. We read of the Son of Man, after He comes: “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’” (Matt.25:32-40).

Notice! This is resurrection to LIFE, for many people who lived, because they will be judged according to their righteous deeds in their lives – the GOOD that they did! There are many “good” people in the world, and they will be judged accordingly, at that time.

However, there are also people who have been predominately wicked in their lives. They have rejected the good and turned to selfish evil and wickedness. The Messiah will condemn these “goats,” because they did NOT do the righteous, loving, caring deeds which the righteous did! He will say to them, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (v.41-46). John says of these, in Revelation, “And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and ALL were judged according to WHAT THEY HAD DONE. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; *and anyone whose name was NOT found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire*” (Rev.20:13-15).

On the other hand, there will also be many people who were neither very good or very bad. There will be many who are “in between.” There will be many who died as babies, or who were born without a mind to understand, deficient in mental ability, and

many who just never had real understanding. What about them? And what about aborted babies, or those who were miscarried in the womb? Will they be resurrected and be given a chance for salvation?

Yes, they too will come up in this “second resurrection,” to receive their own opportunity to learn God’s way and receive eternal life! God says of that time, “No more shall there be in it [Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God] an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person that does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth” (Isa.65:20). Those who never really understood or had a chance will be given a chance to live out full lives, and to repent of their sins and to receive their chance for salvation!

This “second resurrection,” this final stage of God’s plan of salvation – this is the Seventh Day of the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the “Last Great Day.” In Judaism, it is called ‘Hoshana Rabbah’ – the “Great Salvation” – because that is the time when BILLIONS will be judged and enter the Kingdom of God! It is the time period called the “Great White Throne Judgment” in Revelation, chapter 20! It literally pictures the final day of “judgment” and sealing those who will receive eternal life (compare Rev.20:11-15), as opposed to those who will suffer the second and final death penalty (v.14-15).

This final day of harvest celebration pictures the vast second resurrection – the resurrection of all people who ever lived, who did not qualify to be in the first resurrection, at the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Rev.20:1-4). All these others will rise up, to human life, after the 1,000 year period (Rev.20:5-6). They will be judged at that time – the time of the “Great Salvation,” or “Many *Hoshanas*.”

Mitch and Zhava Glaser tell us concerning this day of Hoshana Rabbah:

“The seventh and last day of Sukkot, known as Hoshana Rabbah, ‘The Great Hoshana,’ is somewhat a festival in itself. On other days of the feast, when the family goes to synagogue, one procession is made around the sanctuary with lulav and etrog while the congregation sings, ‘*Hoshianah*, save us.’ This particular tradition is believed to date back to the time of the Maccabees, around 165 B.C.

“On the final day, the entire congregation marches around *seven times*, carrying even more willow leaves with them. These seven times, a memorial of the circuits made by the ancient priests around the Temple altar during worship, remind us of God’s goodness in destroying Jericho once Israel had circled it seven times.

“After the seventh time around the synagogue, the willow branches are beaten until their leaves fall off – a symbol of *beating off our sins* and a *prayer for plenteous water* for next year’s willows. . .

“In contrast to the festive days of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah is observed solemnly, as an extension of the Day of Atonement. On this day, the rabbis tell us, the GATES OF JUDGMENT FINALLY CLOSE and the decrees pronounced by God *on the Day of Atonement take effect*” (*The Fall Feasts of Israel*, p.198-199).

At this time the Spirit of God will be poured out on all these nations and people who come up in this resurrection, who never had a real opportunity for salvation, who died in ignorance of the ways and truth of God. They will “beat off their sins” and pray for God’s Holy Spirit, which is typified by “water,” and they will receive it abundantly (Joel 2:28-29).

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, tells us more about Hoshana Rabbah:

“The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshana Rabbah. On this day, the ritual of *Hoshanot* [marching around the synagogue or room] involves seven circlings of the synagogue with the four species. At the end of this ritual, willow branches are beaten against the ground. Hoshana Rabbah is viewed as the *END of the cycle which began on the first day of Elul*” (p.235).

In other words, Hoshana Rabbah is the culmination of the holy day season that begins with the month of Elul, which is the preparation month for the great feasts of the month of Tishri. Thus the process begins with self-examination and repentance, enjoined on us during Elul, heightened with Rosh Hoshana, and the trumpet warnings sounded on that day to repent and draw close to God. This Feast of Trumpets is followed by the Days of Awe, leading up to Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, picturing judgment and cleansing -- forgiveness to the deserving and judgment upon the wicked. This is followed by the joyousness of the Feast of Sukkot, but this time is terminated by the FINAL judgment of Hoshana Rabbah!

In reality, then, we have the following scenario:

- 1) Month of Elul -- 30 days -- warning to examine ourselves and come to deeper repentance
- 2) Rosh Hashanah -- Day of Blowing -- pictures final warnings of God symbolized by the seven trumpets of Revelation, picturing the final call to repentance
- 3) Days of Awe -- final “ten days” of warning to prepare to meet the Messiah
- 4) Yom Kippur -- Messiah returns, and judges the world, and marries His bride
- 5) Feast of Sukkot -- seven days of joyous exuberance and feasting – symbolizing Millennial Kingdom of Messiah, and the wedding feast and Marriage of the Lamb
- 6) Hoshana Rabbah -- last great day of the Feast of Sukkot -- symbolizes Great White Throne Judgment, when all who ever lived receive opportunity for salvation

After this comes Shemini Atzeret, the “Eighth Day,” which we will discuss later in this article.

The Water Pouring Ceremony

Each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a vital celebration took place called *Simkhat Beit Hashoavah*, that is, “The Rejoicing at the Place of the Water-Drawing.”

“Each morning of Sukkot, the priests went to the pool of Siloah (Silwan) near Jerusalem to fill a golden flask. *Shofar* blasts greeted their arrival at the Temple’s Water Gate. They then ascended and poured the water so that it flowed over the altar simultaneously with wine from another bowl. When the priest was about to pour the water, the people shouted ‘Raise your hand!’ because of an incident that occurred in a previous year: The high priest Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.) showed contempt for the rite by spilling the water at his feet, a transgression for which worshippers threw their citrons at him.

“The pelted priest had demonstrated his alliance with the Sadducees, who literally followed Torah and only what was specifically in Torah. (Explained as an oral instruction given to Moses at Sinai, this water rite was not mentioned in The Five Books.) The deliriously happy celebration connected with the water drawing developed when the Pharisees (who believed in the Oral Tradition and interpretation of Torah and gave us the rabbinic Judaism we know today) triumphed over them in the first century.

“Based on Isaiah’s promise ‘With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation’ (12:3), rejoicing began at the end of the first day and took place every night except Shabbat. Talmud recorded that ‘one who had never witnessed the Rejoicing of the Place of the Water Drawing has never seen true joy in his life.’ (Although the celebration was for the *libation* that would be made the next morning, it was named for the preparation for the ritual -- the water drawing -- which the rabbis said showed that getting ready was sometimes of greater merit than the *mitzvah* itself because of its positive effect on the person doing it.)” (p.213-214).

For this fascinating ceremony, four immense candelabrum were set in the Temple courtyard for the Feast of Sukkot, 75 feet in height. Each candelabra had four golden bowls, and was reached by four ladders. Each bowl was capable of holding many gallons of oil. Four youths of priestly descent each held a pitcher of oil, which they used to fill the bowls. Wicks were made from the old, cast-off priestly garments and rags from worn-out vestments. When the candelabrum were lit, they generated such intense and brilliant light, that not a courtyard in the whole city of Jerusalem failed to be illuminated by the blazing light. As the mighty torches blazed in the night, we read:

“A Levite orchestra of flutes, trumpets, harps, and cymbals accompanied torchlight processions, and men who had earned the capacity for real spiritual joy through their purity, character and scholarship danced ecstatically to the hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and hymn-singing crowds.

“We do not imagine our distinguished sages as acrobats and tumblers, but they were often agile physically as well as mentally. Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel juggled eight lighted torches and raised himself into a handstand on two fingers, a gymnastic feat no one else could master. Others juggled eight knives, eight glasses of wine, or eight eggs before leaders and dignitaries” (p.214).

Why was this ceremony called “The Water-Drawing Ceremony”? Alfred

Edersheim gives us the emphatic reason, as understood by the Rabbis. He writes:

“For though that ceremony was considered by the Rabbis as being a subordinate reference to the dispensation of the rain, the annual fall of which they imagined was determined by God at that feast, its main and real application was to the future *outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, as predicted -- probably in allusion to this very rite -- by Isaiah the prophet. Thus the Talmud says distinctly: ‘*Why is the name of it called, The drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit*, according to what is said: “With joy shall ye draw waters out of the well of salvation.” Hence, also, the feast and the peculiar joyousness of it, are alike designated as those of ‘the drawing out of water’; for according to the same Rabbinical authorities, *the Holy Spirit dwells in man only through joy*” (*The Temple*, p.279-280).

In the days of Nehemiah, at the return of the Jews from Babylon, when they celebrated God’s festivals once again, the people were told, “Do not sorrow, for the *joy of the LORD is your strength*” (Nehemiah 8:10, NRSV). “Joy” is a product of the Holy Spirit of God (Gal.5:22), coming right after “love.” The Rabbis said the Spirit of God “dwells in man only through joy,” and surely true JOY is proof of the Spirit of God! Those who don’t have it are missing out, and evidently don’t have God’s Spirit dwelling within them!

The celebration of the Water-drawing was a highlight of the Feast. It was a happy, even ecstatic occasion, with a torchlight parade, including musicians, jugglers, and dancers, marching to the Temple, at night, as the whole city of Jerusalem was lit up by giant torches and the light of giant menorahs. As the lyres, drums, cymbals, trumpets, drums and horns played, the Rabbis entertained and clowned, adding to the joy. Not one day of Sukkot passed without joyous festivities that celebrated the happiness of the harvest, and the joy of community.

As the dawn of each day approached, the priests descended the steps to the Women’s Court, with trumpets blaring, and marched in procession to the Eastern Gate of the Temple, and then turned their faces toward the Temple, to the west, and proclaimed, “Our fathers who were in this place stood with their backs to the Temple and their faces eastward and worshipped the sun, but our eyes are unto the Lord” (based on Ezekiel 8:16).

We read in the gospel of John that Jesus Christ went up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:1-9). Then, about the middle of the Feast, He went up to the Temple, and taught the people (v.14-30). We then read this amazing fact:

“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, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39, KJV).

The last day, the “great day of the Feast,” was clearly this day -- Hoshana Rabbah! It was the seventh or last day of the Feast of Tabernacles! Jesus therefore made this statement, about the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, on the last day of the Feast of

Sukkot -- picturing the Day of Final Salvation, the Day of Great Salvation, and the Great White Throne Judgment!

For more information on this, be sure to read the article “The Annual Holy Days Reveal the Awesome Plan of God,” and the article entitled “The Mystery of the Resurrection of the Dead!”

The Plan of Salvation

Notice how everything fits in perfectly and dove-tails with God’s Plan, His mercy, and provides a wonderful way of salvation for the *billions* who have lived and died, never having understood God’s Plan, and never having even heard the name of Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah!

Nineveh, Tyre and Sodom

Jesus alluded to the many wicked of past ages, who died in their wickedness, when He said to His disciples: “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south [queen of Sheba during Solomon’s day] shall *rise up in the judgment* with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:41-42).

Jesus went even further. He told His disciples that if a city rejected their message, “Verily I say unto you, It shall be *more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, than for that city” (Matt. 10:15). Notice also Matthew, chapter 11. We read: “Then began he [Jesus] to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in *Tyre and Sidon*, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be *more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment* than for you.

“And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee” (Matt. 11:20-24, KJV).

The time is coming when all these ancient cities, and their inhabitants, will be judged -- some more severely than others. This will occur on the FINAL day of salvation, pictured by Hoshana Rabbah – the day of “Great Salvation,” which is the concluding day of the Feast of Tabernacles!

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel prophecies of this same future time of salvation for the billions who have died. He says: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was *full of bones*, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry” (Ezek. 37:1-2). These dry bones symbolize the millions of people who lived and died long, long ago -- perhaps thousands of years ago in many cases. That is why they were “very dry.”

What happens to these bones?

“And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause *breath* to enter into you, *and ye shall live*, and I will lay *sinews* upon you, and will bring up *flesh* upon you, and cover you with *skin*, and put breath in you, AND YE SHALL LIVE: and ye shall know that I am the Lord” (verses 3-6).

Here a great resurrection to physical, mortal life is described! These people will be raised to physical life once again. They will be breathing creatures. They will have sinews, flesh, skin -- they will be physical human beings once again!

Ezekiel says: “So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.

“Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these *slain*, that they may live.

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, *and they lived, and stood up* upon their feet, AN EXCEEDING GREAT ARMY” (Ezek. 37:7-10).

Who are these people?

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, *these bones are THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL*: behold, they say, Our bones are died, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I WILL OPEN YOUR GRAVES, and cause you to come *up out of your graves*, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall *put my spirit in you*, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord” (verses 11-14).

When will this great resurrection to physical life occur? It will be at the same time God brings the peoples of ancient Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, and the Queen of Sheba, back to life, to stand before judgment!

The time frame of this stupendous event is given in the book of Revelation!

The Great White Throne Judgment

John writes: “And I saw a *great white throne*, and him that 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 [who are these?], stand before God; and the *books* were opened: and another book was opened, which is the *book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:11-12)

Here is the same time of resurrection that is described in Ezekiel 37, the “dry bones” chapter. These vast teeming millions, including the vast majority of mankind that ever lived -- billions of people -- will be resurrected to new physical life, and they will be “judged.” All those who never had a true opportunity for salvation will be given a time to qualify and to be tested, so that they can enter God’s Kingdom also. They will be flesh and blood, not immortal. These people will be the millions who were never called by God during this life; those millions who never understood the Plan of God, who never heard of Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven whereby men may be saved, or never understood the whole thing even if they did “hear” the name itself, because of the deception of false religion and false teachers (Acts 4:12). These millions will include the little babies who died in childbirth, the young children who died at a very young age, and others who died in simple ignorance.

Among them apparently will be all the babies who were aborted in their mother’s womb, and killed, through no fault of their own – and even children who died because of accident in the womb, such as miscarriages. These children died never having had a chance for salvation. They will be given that opportunity! Those who were blinded to God’s truth from Adam to the present day, and just never understood, will at that time be resurrected to mortal life, and given their first and only real opportunity for salvation (see Matthew 12:41-42).

Notice that the “book of life” will be opened. And that they will be judged according to their “works” (Rev. 20:12). These people will apparently live, build houses, and plant vineyards, and live a natural, normal life for perhaps one hundred years (Isa.65:20), during which time they will be tested and tried and receive their opportunity for salvation. They will be taught, for the first time in their existence, the real truth of God. They will be able to compare their previous life, under Satan’s way, with life and blessings under God’s way, in the Kingdom of God. And the vast majority will repent of their sins, accept Christ as Saviour, and be saved. As Paul wrote: “And so *all Israel shall be saved*” (Rom. 11:26). God is longsuffering and patient, not willing that any should die or perish (II Pet.3:9). Everyone who ever lived will have a complete and unhindered

chance to learn God's ways, and to be saved.

But what about those who are the incorrigibly wicked? What about those who refuse to repent, and to obey God, and who continue on in sin no matter what God says, and no matter how patiently He holds out His hand offering them forgiveness? What about those who REJECT the laws of God and give themselves over to sin and wickedness?

The Awesome Fate of the Wicked -- Total Destruction

As we already saw, the "goats" will be cast into eternal fire, where they will be burned up. As we read in Revelation, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death.* And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:13-15). Those who perish in the lake of fire will never again be resurrected. Their chances were wasted, and their punishment is final.

At the end of this great time of testing and trial, at the conclusion of this period of DIVINE JUDGMENT, all the incorrigible wicked will perish – they will be cast into a lake of fire, and consumed to nothing but smoke and ashes. Those who refuse to repent of their sins and blasphemies, who turn aside from God's way and trample on the shed blood of Christ, treating it as a little thing, those who *reject and refuse* God's way, will suffer the final judgment -- they will burn up in the lake of fire. And they will never live again. Their life will be extinguished, with finality. They will be put out of their misery. That is how God will banish all sin and punish the sinners who refuse to repent.

At that time, Peter says, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:10). At that time "sinners [shall] be consumed out of the earth" and "the wicked [shall] be no more" (Psalm 104:35). At that time God will "renew the face of the earth" (Psa. 104:30).

The prophet Malachi describes the scene this way: "For, behold, the day cometh, saith the LORD, that shall BURN as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be *ashes* under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1-3).

Hoshana Rabbah pictures that awesome day! It is the last, final day of judgment - the final opportunity for all mankind to be saved, and to enter into the eternal Kingdom of God as His sons. Those who reject God's mercy and plan, those who fail to make the grade, those who turn away from God and rebellion as Satan the devil did, will suffer the same fate as the devil. They will be destroyed -- forever! If you haven't read it, be sure to read my article, "Satan's Fate -- Will Satan Be Punished Forever?"

Yes, God *IS* supremely *FAIR!* He is perfectly just, righteous, and absolutely perfect in judgment! All will have a chance -- an opportunity -- for salvation. What they do with that opportunity, however, is up to them.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't God wonderful? Isn't the Plan of God marvelous, surpassing human wisdom and understanding?

Paul wrote: "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have *mercy upon all*. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:30-36).

This day, Hoshana Rabbah, pictures the LAST GREAT DAY of harvest -- the final great time or dispensation of SALVATION! After it, there is no more harvest -- the harvest is finished -- over.

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, then, represents the Great White Throne judgment, the time when the billions of people who have lived and died, never understanding God's Plan of Salvation, will be resurrected to mortal life, and will be given their first and only chance for salvation, as they, too, will be re-educated and taught the truths of God! It also pictures the awesome time of final judgment -- and the final judgment of God upon the wicked, the proud, and the ungodly, who refuse God's Laws and His way.

But there is still one Holy Festival left in God's sacred calendar. What about it? Many have confused it with the "Great White Throne Judgment." Many think it is the "final day of salvation." However, they have totally misunderstood its real, vital significance and spiritual meaning! It pictures something else entirely. It pictures *eternity!*

Shemini Atzeret -- the "Eighth Day"

The Plan of God now stands almost complete -- except for one final thing. And that final portion is pictured by the LAST of God's seven annual holy days! Notice!

Right after the Feast of Tabernacles comes the final "Feast" of the Lord -- the last "holy day" of the religious year. This is "Shemini Atzeret," that is, "the Eighth Day." What does it represent?

The eighth day itself is a special Holy Day and the concluding Feast of the Lord. During the feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of *Sukkot* in the Hebrew, the children of Israel dwelt in flimsy, quickly constructed booths, with thinly thatched roofs which were open to the sky, so the people could see the stars. This observance connected them with the “booths” which the harvesters used to dwell in, out in the fields, during the fall harvest. The “booths” also depicted the temporary shelters the children of Israel lived in as they journeyed through the desert, after leaving Egypt, before they settled in the Promised Land.

But on the final holy day of *Shemini Atzeret*, the people *no longer dwelt in the booths depicting the harvest*. On this day, they once again lived in their homes. *By this day, the HARVEST IS OVER!* What does it represent, then, in the overall Plan of God?

The key to understanding is in the name of the day -- the “eighth day.” The number “8” has awesome significance in Scripture! There were 8 people in the Ark of Noah, when his family was saved, to begin a NEW WORLD AGE.

There are seven days in the week, and the Sabbath Day depicts the Millennial reign of Christ and the Feast of Tabernacles. The day *after* the Sabbath is the “eighth day” -- and begins another week, another round of “time keeping” -- a NEW CYCLICAL WEEK. Since the “week” itself depicts God’s Plan, the beginning of a NEW week depicts the beginning of a NEW PHASE in the Plan of God -- it represents A NEW BEGINNING!

The NEW Heavens and NEW Earth

What comes after the final day or time period of universal Judgment, pictured by Hoshana Rabbah, and The Great White Throne Judgment?

Notice!

God says, “For, behold, I create *new heavens* and a *new earth*: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isa. 65:17). John describes it in the book of Revelation: “And I saw *a new heaven and a new earth*: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be *no more death*, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:1-4).

At this time, God says, “See, I am making ALL THINGS NEW” (Rev.21:5,

NRSV).

In that new heaven and earth, there will be NO MORE DEATH for those who have been given immortality! Everybody will live forever! The whole earth will be populated with SAVED CHILDREN OF GOD – IMMORTAL SONS OF GOD!

“And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, *I make all things new*. And he said unto me, *Write*: for these words are true and faithful.

“And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (vs. 5-7, KJV).

The new Jerusalem will sparkle like a diadem upon the earth (Rev. 21:9-21). It is the *bride* of Christ. Those who qualify to enter God’s Kingdom, to be born of God through the Holy Spirit, will be made immortal sons of God and *will dwell in the New Jerusalem, with Christ, and reign with Him on His throne, over the entire Universe, forever and ever!*

Jerusalem will be the headquarters for the Throne of God; from it God’s rule will extend throughout all the galaxies of space, to the uttermost bounds of the Universe, to the farthest reaches of all Creation itself! Yet, believe it or not, the Plan of God will CONTINUE!

In the new heavens and earth, there will be a NEW CYCLE of the PLAN OF GOD!

The Mystery of God

There are several “hints” to this ongoing Plan of God. It will enter into a new phase after the Millennium, during the “New Heavens and New Earth.”

In Genesis, during the time of Noah, God said, when He gave mankind the symbol of the “rainbow,” “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, *for PERPETUAL generations*” (Gen.9:12). What is meant by “perpetual generations”? The Hebrew word for “perpetual” is *olam* and means “everlasting,” “always,” “eternity,” “without end,” “to the vanishing point.”

Does this imply that God will begin again with new human life, and start a new cycle of His Great Plan?

Since the creation of Adam and Eve, about 6,000 years have passed. According to Scripture, there are 40 years in a Biblical generation (Num.14:34). So there have been about 150 generations since the time of Adam.

“A Thousand Generations”

Yet, God says in the Torah, speaking of God and His Covenant, “Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy FOR A THOUSAND GENERATIONS with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut.7:9).

You’d better rub your eyes, and take another, closer look at that promise. God speaks of A THOUSAND GENERATIONS! Simple arithmetic shows that 40 years to a generation multiplied by 1,000 generations equals *40,000 years!* Yet we are living in the 6000th year since the sin of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, in 3997 B.C. The year 2004 A.D. is 6,000 years from that ancient event.

But David also alluded to this promise of God. He wrote in the Psalms, “He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in the earth. He remembers His covenant FOREVER, *the word which He commanded for A THOUSAND GENERATIONS*” (Psalm 105:7-8).

In fact, when God revealed Himself to Moses, He revealed the “Thirteen Divine Attributes” of God to Him. “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy *for thousands*, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty’” (Exodus 34:6-7, NKJV).

In *The Book of Our Heritage*, Eliyahu Kitov explains the Thirteen Attributes of God’s Mercy. He writes:

“The following are the Thirteen Attributes:

1. *Lord -- I am He Who is compassionate before man sins, although I know that he will sin in the end.*
2. *Lord -- And I am He Who is compassionate after Man sins and repents.*
3. *God -- This too is an attribute of mercy, as it is said, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" And one cannot say to the attribute of stern justice: "Why have You forsaken me?"*
4. *Who is Merciful -- He has mercy upon the poor;*
5. *and Gracious -- He is gracious unto the wealthy;*
6. *Long-suffering -- He is patient and is not quick to exact retribution, in the hope that the guilty will repent;*
7. *Abundant in lovingkindness -- He acts with lovingkindness toward those who lack merit;*
8. *Truthful -- He rewards those who fulfill His will;*
9. *Guards lovingkindness unto the thousandth generation -- He guards the lovingkindness which a person does before Him, unto the thousandth, AND EVEN TWO THOUSANDTH, GENERATION;*
10. *Forbears transgression -- He is forbearing over transgressions which men commit willfully;*
11. *and Iniquity -- He bears the iniquities which a person commits*

in a spirit of rebelliousness;

12. *and Misdeeds -- He bears sins which are committed unintentionally;*

13. *and He will not hold clear of guilt -- He will clear those who repent, but will not clear those who fail to repent."*

The Hebrew for "thousands" here is *'eleph*, a form of *aleph*, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It denotes "thousands" – or , in this case, "thousands of generations." It also denotes "a family," as the Aleph is like an ox's head and is the first letter of the alphabet, and was eventually used as a numeral – it represents both 1, and 1,000, or thousands. *Alaph* is a primitive root, meaning "to *associate* with," hence, "to learn, teach, utter."

The Hebrew in Exodus 34:7 can refer to the thousandth or even two thousandth generation – which literally could be interpreted as 1,000 X 40 years or 40,000 years; or 2,000 X 40 years = 80,000 years. Or, literally, multiple "thousands" – stretching forward into virtual infinity/eternity.

"Eternal Increase Without End"

Isaiah the prophet also alludes to this mystery. He writes in chapter 9, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. *Of the INCREASE of His government and peace there will be NO END*, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice *from that time forward, EVEN FOREVER*. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7, NKJV).

That is, the Kingdom of God will grow and grow, multiply and expand – FOREVER – always INCREASING, with justice and peace, WITHOUT EVER ENDING THE INCREASING GROWTH AND EXPANSION! A growing Kingdom "with no end" – no limitation, no boundary, no termination point!

Is that exciting – or what? And we today have the opportunity to be, as it were, "on the ground floor"! We have the chance to jump on board just as the train is getting started out of the station! ALL ETERNITY stretches on before us, out in front of us, past the horizon, far as the eye can see, and beyond, forever!

John calls it the "New Heavens and New Earth."

John declared, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the *glory of God did* lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

"And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (Rev. 21:23-26). Says the NRSV, "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut

by day – and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev.21:24-26).

The King James Version uses the word “saved” but this can be understood as the nations which at that time are “being saved,” or which are then “in a saved condition.” It does not necessarily mean those who have already been made immortal!

Rather, they will be in the process of attaining salvation, serving the LORD, and obeying His commandments!

What a society that will be! What a glorious Kingdom! Can you imagine it?

The earth will be the headquarters of the entire Universe! The Plan of Salvation will be extended throughout eternity!

How marvelous! How majestic and wonderful! Truly, as Isaiah wrote, “From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him” (Isa.64:4, NKJV). As Paul the apostle wrote, “But as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, or ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (I Cor.2:9-10, NRSV).

Let us celebrate God’s wonderful Holy Days, including the Fall Festivals, The Feast of Trumpets, the Days of Awe, the Festival of Yom Kippur, the Feast of Tabernacles, and Hoshana Rabbah, and Shemini Atzeret with renewed understanding, greater conviction, tremendous joy and excitement, as we rejoice in and review the wonderful Plan of God for our salvation, and His incredible TRUTH which He has revealed to us about His Holy Days in these last days! Let’s celebrate the Festivals of God with JOY!

Chapter 17

The Mystery of Shemini Atzeret -- the "Eighth Day"

What is the real, true meaning of the one day festival that occurs at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles -- called *Shemini Atzeret* in Hebrew, or "the Eighth Day"? The awesome significance of this final festival day in God's Plan has gone unnoticed, misinterpreted, and misunderstood by millions! It does not picture the "Great White Throne" judgment at the close of the Millennium, as thousands have assumed -- but something far greater than that! Here the truth is made plain!

In the book of Leviticus we read a description of all the annual holy days of God, beginning with Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the seven day Feast of Tabernacles or "Ingathering" of the harvest (Lev.23:1-36). Then, at the close of the Feast of Sukkoth or Tabernacles, in the fall, we read:

" . . . on the *eighth day* shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a *solemn assembly*; and ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev.23:36).

This one-day festival occurs right at the end of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the Millennial Reign of Christ (Rev.20:4; Isa.11). The last or seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the FINAL DAY OF HARVEST or INGATHERING -- that is, the final time of spiritual harvest which is pictured by the Great White Throne judgment, when all those who ever lived are resurrected and "judged" according to their works (Rev.20:11-15). This "seventh day" of the Feast is also called "the great day of the feast" (John 7:37), and is the time when God's Spirit is poured out on all mankind (John 7:37-39). It pictures a truly "great day of salvation" when billions will be saved, and will come to know God!

Since the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles completes the "harvest festival" of the great fall harvest -- and therefore represents the FINAL DAY of "harvesting" and "ingathering" -- the COMPLETION of the salvation process, and God's Plan with mankind -- what is the meaning and purpose of the ONE-DAY festival that appears to be "tacked onto" the end of the Feast of Tabernacles?

What is the hidden, unrealized meaning of "Shemini Atzeret" -- or "the eighth day"?

Shemini Atzeret in Jewish Lore

Before seeing what the Scriptures tell us about this subject, let's review briefly the teachings and concepts which Rabbinical Judaism has put forth concerning this ancient festival. The Jews have been observing this day, along with all God's festivals, for the past 3,500 years, since the time of Moses. Therefore, their insights ought to be instructive and meaningful.

To understand the full meaning of this final holy day, it will help us to compare -- and to contrast -- it with the Festival that precedes it, the Feast of Tabernacles. As *The Jewish Book of Why* explains:

"Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah ["the rejoicing of the Law"] are holidays totally independent of the Sukkot holiday.

"In Israel, as dictated by the Bible, Sukkot is observed for seven days. The first day is a full holiday, on which one is to abstain from work. The next five days are Chol Hamoed, Intermediary Days, which are considered half-holidays. The seven and last day of Sukkot is Hoshana Rabba, also a half-holiday. *The day after Hoshana Rabba is a separate holiday called Shemini Atzeret.* Simchat Torah is not observed as a separate holiday. It is observed as part of Shemini Atzeret. . . .

"The seventh and last day of Sukkot was endowed with special sanctity by the last of the Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Coming at the beginning of the rainy season, it became known as a Day of Judgment for Rain. (A special service for rain became part of the Shemini Atzeret service held on the next day.)" (p.254-255).

This Jewish authority goes on to explain further:

"Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly, is often thought of as the eighth day of Sukkot. *Actually, it is an INDEPENDENT HOLIDAY.* The Rabbis refer to it as *regel bifnay atzmo*, a separate holiday, and required that the *Shehecheyanu* prayer be recited when the candles are lighted and when the *Kiddush* is recited. (This would *not* be required if Shemini Atzeret were *not* an independent holiday.)

"Shemini Atzeret is a ONE-DAY HOLIDAY *marking the conclusion of the festivities and observances of Sukkot, and NONE OF THE SUKKOT CEREMONIALS APPLY TO IT*" (p.256).

Further enlightenment concerning this holy day of God is provided in the book

The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays, by Rabbi Irving Greenberg. He relates:

"When the seven days of Sukkot end, the Bible decrees yet another holiday, the Eighth Day of Assembly. The Rabbis interpreted this as an encore. After the High Holy Days, after the intense seven days of Sukkot and pilgrimage, the Jewish people [or, we should say, more accurately, "God's people"] are about to leave, to scatter and return to their homes. God grows nostalgic, as it were, and pensive. The people of Israel will not come together again in such numbers until Passover six months hence. God will soon miss the sounds of music and pleasure and the unity of the people. The Torah decreed, therefore, an eighth day of assembly, a final feast/holy day. On this day Jews leave the *sukkah* to resume enjoying the comfort of solid, well built, well insulated homes. The lulav and etrog are put aside; this day, Shemini Atzeret, is a reprise of the celebration of Sukkot but *without any of the rituals*. The message is that all the rituals and symbolic language are important but ultimately they remain just symbols" (p.115).

Shemini Atzeret and the Prayer for Rain

In the book *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*, Lesli Koppelman Ross explains more about the "eighth day" or Shemini Atzeret. Not only is this feast distinctly different from Sukkot, but it includes a very special "Prayer for Rain." We read as follows:

"Just as Sukkot gives us a transitional period between the Days of Awe and our normal routines, the last day of the festival, Shemini Atzeret, or the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly, the day we are held back to extend the party with God, eases us out of the transience of the *sukkah*.

"As a separate holiday in its own right, also referred to as *Shemini Khag* (festival) *Ha'atzeret*, the eighth day is honored with the lighting of candles and reciting the festival *kiddush*...

"The distinct feature of the day is recitation of the prayer for rain so that the earth will be able to produce in the coming year. It is not said earlier during Sukkot, which marks the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, because we do not want rain to prevent us from dwelling in the sukka or to interfere with our enjoyment of doing so" (p.229).

Rain, of course, is made up of water, descending from the skies. It is a type of the Holy Spirit of God. Comparing God's Spirit to rain, the prophet Joel writes, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will *pour out my spirit upon all flesh*; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids *in those days will I pour out my spirit*" (Joel 2:28-29).

Water is itself a symbol of life, and is the foundation of all carbon-based life forms on earth. We could not live without it. In fact, water forms about 80% of our physical human bodies!

Water and the prayer for rain is a vital ingredient in the celebration of Shemini Atzeret. It represents God's Holy Spirit in a very special way. David prayed, "As the hart panteth after the water brook, so panteth my heart after thee, O God. My soul

thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2).

Isaiah the prophet wrote, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the *waters*, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa.55:1).

God also compares His Word to the rain that waters the earth. In the same chapter, He tells us, "For as the RAIN cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me VOID, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper* in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with JOY, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an *EVERLASTING SIGN that shall not [ever] be cut off*" (Isa.55:10-13).

The Messiah, Yeshua Ha Moshiach (or Jesus the Christ, in English), offers each one of us "living water" (John 4:10) -- the water that leads to eternal life. He said to the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar, in Samaria, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a *well of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John 4:14).

This is the very water that Isaiah the prophet foretold, when he declared, "Behold, God is my salvation [Hebrew, *Yeshua*]; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH [YAHVEH] is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [Yeshua]. Therefore with JOY shall ye draw WATER out of the wells of salvation [Yeshua]. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name [Yeshua], declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in ALL the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel [Yeshua] *in the MIDST of thee*" (Isa.12:2-6).

God also prophesied through Isaiah, His prophet: "For I will pour *water* upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will *pour MY SPIRIT upon thy seed [children], and MY BLESSING upon thy offspring*" (Isa.44:3).

Yeshua (Jesus Christ) put it this way: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow RIVERS OF LIVING WATER (but this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37-39).

The theme of water is intimately tied up with the final holy day of the year,

Shemini Atzeret. We will discuss this amazing feature later.

Essence of Shemini Atzeret

In the book *The Essence of the Holy Days: Insights from the Jewish Sages*, Avraham Yaakov Finkel tells us more about Shemini Atzeret:

"The seven days of Sukkot which end with *Hoshana Rabbah* are followed by another holiday, Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of Assembly. . . It is a festival in its own right, independent of Sukkot, and is observed one day in *Eretz Yisrael* . . . The fact that Shemini Atzeret is a separate *Yom Tov* is evident in the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* (Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season), which is recited by women when lighting the candles and by men when reciting the *Kiddush*.

"None of the special *mitzvot* associated with Sukkot are observed on Shemini Atzeret, and thus there is no requirement to take the *lulav* and *etrog*. . . .

"The word *atzeret* is derived from *atzar*, to collect, to store. The purpose of this festival is to recapitulate and to store in our memories everything we experienced and gained during the preceding *Yamim Tovim* [Good Days], so that we will carry out the resolutions we have made, will retain the spiritual elevation we have reached, and will not lose them in the everyday life to which we are about to return" (p.95-96).

The Rabbis recognized that this day, in itself, is a very special holy day. They saw that it is distinct from the Feast of Sukkot or Tabernacles. They understood that in a special sense, this day is connected to STORING UP and COLLECTING all the knowledge, spiritual food, and instruction that we have gained in the preceding holy days -- especially from Rosh Hashana (Feast of Trumpets) through the Feast of Sukkot -- all the spiritual lessons of repentance, forgiveness, character development, obedience, faith, joy, love -- the lessons of complete spiritual maturity -- that we have learned during the High Holy Day season through the Feast of Sukkot.

Spiritual Aspects of Shemini Atzeret

The Rabbis also contemplated why on this day -- Shemini Atzeret -- there is no living inside the sukkah required, and no waving of the *lulav*, two rituals which were prominent during the preceding seven-day festival of Sukkot. Finkel goes on to explain:

"Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi said, Shemini Atzeret is a *Yom Tov* that is not identified with any specific symbol or *mitzvah*. It is not celebrated with either *matzah*, *shofar*, or *lulav*. The reason is that on Shemini Atzeret *we reach a stage of TRUE AND PURE JOY, a state of happiness that requires no external symbolic stimuli. It is a joy that stems from the depth of man's inner self.* Sadness and depression are the marks of a person who is distant from his inner core. A person who 'is himself' and is in harmony with his inner core is *filled with pure joy*.

"This is what the sages meant when they postulated in the Talmud, 'Shemini Atzeret is a *Yom Tov* by itself,' it is a *celebration and rejoicing of the essential inner self*'" (p.96).

Seventy bullocks were sacrificed to God during the Feast of Tabernacles, picturing the "seventy" nations of mankind having their sins atone for, and becoming obedient to the truth of God and the commandments of the Lord (Isa.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). But on Shemini Atzeret, only one bull was offered. Why? Finkel explains:

"During the week of Sukkot, altogether seventy bulls were brought as *Mussaf* offerings on the altar in the *Bet Hamikdash*. However, on Shemini Atzeret, only one bull was sacrificed. Why? The seventy bulls represent the seventy nations of the world; the one bull of Shemini Atzeret represents the unique nation of Israel. You may compare it to a king who had held a festival for seven days and invited all of the country's inhabitants (the nations of the world) to the seven days of feasting. When the seven days of feasting were over, he said to his friend (Israel), 'Let us now have a small meal together, just you and I' (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21, *Sukkah* 55b)" (p.98).

Obviously, the picture of Shemini Atzeret is of a very intimate union and fellowship, which follows after the broad-based and universal Feast of Sukkot. It is a close family union, with much deeper and more pure insights and depth of meaning and spirituality. Finkel goes on:

"Rabbi Noach of Lechowitz expounded, The theme of Shemini Atzeret may be better understood if we think of it *in terms of a BRIDE AND GROOM*. During the wedding, they are both decked out in a wardrobe of exquisite, elegant clothes and jewelry. However, when they come together in their *private chamber*, they remove their garments and jewelry.

"It is the same with Shemini Atzeret. During the seven days of Sukkot, the Jewish people offered a profusion of seventy bulls, but on Shemini Atzeret -- *the moment they achieve COMPLETE UNIFICATION WITH GOD* -- they brought only one bull (Num.29:36)" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.98-99).

The fact that there are no outward rituals or symbols connected with Shemini Atzeret, unlike Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, Atonement, and Sukkot, speaks of the unique *spiritual quality* of this final Festival of God. It is as if we have transcended from the physical to the purely spiritual -- from the concrete and palpable to the sublime and untouchable -- from that which can be seen to that which cannot be seen. As the apostle Paul wrote, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal [temporary, transient, evanescent]: but *the things which are not seen are ETERNAL*" (II Cor.4:18).

We move from the threshold of the visible to the invisible -- from those things which can be shaken to the unshakable. As Paul also wrote, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the *removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may REMAIN*. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which CANNOT BE MOVED, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and

godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb.12:25-29).

Comparing the symbolism of this Holy Day with the imagery of a Bride and Bridegroom, and their intimate togetherness, by themselves, after all the guests and party-goers depart, gives us a special insight into the real spiritual implications of Shemini Atzeret. The picture reveals that after the Millennial "Feast" of Sukkot is finished, and the great "Fall Harvest" has been gathered in, the Bride -- the Church of God, spiritual Israel (Gal.6:16) -- and the Groom, Yeshua the Messiah -- will have a special "day" or time to themselves, in an even deeper expression of intimate love, sensitivity, and pure joy.

But there is even more.

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, gives us even greater insight and understanding into the deep spiritual meaning of Shemini Atzeret. He informs us:

". . . Sukkot is associated with the earth. There are two qualities of earth -- one implying humility and the other expansiveness. We pray for humility with the words, 'May I be like the dust of the earth before all of creation' . . . Paradoxically, the image of earth is also used to suggest expansiveness when God promises Abraham and Sara their progeny will be like the 'dust of the earth.' In this same manner, developing a sense of humility and an acceptance and appreciation of our vulnerability, we also connect to the source of our power and hope.

"On the eighth day, we collect the water we have accessed. It becomes a WELL from which we can nourish ourselves as we resume ordinary life. The connection of the well to *Shemini Atzeret* can be translated as assembly or collection. On this day, we assemble within ourselves the STOREHOUSE OF ENERGY which will fuel our efforts through the remainder of the year, as we bring *light into the darkness*. Just as we can store water in a cistern, *JOY energizes our continued efforts through the year*.

"We have been able to experience ourselves in a new way while under the protection of the *sukkah*. On the eighth day, we set aside the *external supports* which have helped us to respond in a new way. We no longer use the *lulav* and *etrog*. We return to our homes and say farewell to the *sukkah*. In some respects, the *props are no longer necessary* -- just as a plant which has grown from a seedling no longer needs special protection from the elements. We are now more able to support ourselves.

"However, we are not completely self-sufficient. The Israelites were more able to sustain themselves when they reached the land of Israel. They worked hard to plant and harvest crops rather than rely on the manna for food. However, they still required help from God in the form of RAIN. On *Shemini Atzeret*, the beginning of the planting season, a special prayer for rain is added to the daily service. In this same spirit, we are able to work hard to nurture our NEW BEGINNING, *but we still need nourishment to flow down to us from the heavens to HELP US GROW AND DEVELOP*" (p.241-242).

Shemini Atzeret, then, represents the completion of one cycle, and the beginning of another NEW cycle, according to God's Plan. It represents a NEW BEGINNING. This "new beginning" requires "rain" -- a type of the Spirit of God poured out in order to produce a new crop and a new harvest! Shemini Atzeret represents the beginning of a

new RAINY SEASON, during which the earth is nourished by rain from the heavens. Spiritually, then, it represents the pouring out anew of God's Holy Spirit and the continuation and expectation of a NEW HARVEST for the Kingdom of God!

Joel Ziff goes on, describing how this day integrates with the High Holy Day season, the Days of Awe, and the Feast of Sukkot. He writes:

"Shneur Zalman also describes the process at this time of year with the image of a PLANTING A SEED in the earth. The planting of the seed in the earth is a symbol of humility; when we plant a seed, we cover it with earth. We are like that seed in our process of self-evaluation during the Days of Awe. . . Eventually the seed sprouts and emerges into the light of day from inside the earth. Empowered by the work of self-reflection, the actions take place with a positive feeling. After doing the work of self-reflection on Yom Kippur, we are able to respond whole-heartedly on Sukkot. As we dig into the earth, we find a spring, a well of water that flows up to us from the depths. On *Shemini Atzeret*, we ACCESS THE 'LIVING WATERS' OF SALVATION which flow the quality of God's lovingkindness, *Chesed*" (p.242).

Thus the Festivals of God are intimately bound up with the cycles of the earth -- the seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter. They are connected closely and in depth to the AGRICULTURAL HARVESTS of the year -- both spring and fall. But there is a mighty, profound, rich spiritual lesson in all this. What is this lesson? What do the annual cycles of planting and harvest have to do with God's spiritual Plan?

Let's understand this!

The Meaning of the Number "Eight"

The very name of this festival, "Shemini Atzeret," literally means "The Eighth Assembly." It is the final holy day of God's Holy Day Plan. However, there is great significance in the number "eight" itself!

E. W. Bullinger, in his book *Number in Scripture*, explains about the meaning and symbolism of numbers, including the number "eight." He declares:

"In Hebrew the number eight is *Sh'moneh*, from the root *Shah'meyn*, 'to make fat,' 'cover with fat,' 'to super-abound.' As a participle it means 'one who abounds in strength,' etc. As a noun it is 'super-abundant fertility,' 'oil,' etc. *So that as a numeral it is the super-abundant number.* As *seven* was so called because the seventh day was the day of completion and rest, so *eight*, as the eighth day, was over and above this perfect completion, and was indeed the *FIRST of a new series*, as well as being the *eighth*. Thus it already represents two numbers in one, the *first and eighth*" (p.196).

Even as "seven" is God's number of perfection, or completion (as the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, which completes and perfects the week), so "eight" is the *same as the first day of the NEXT week*, but counting from the days of the previous week. Thus it represents clearly "A NEW BEGINNING."

An example of "eight" used in this connection in the Scriptures is the fact that as

Peter tells us, there were EIGHT souls in the Ark of Noah, who began the NEW WORLD after the Flood! We read of the time when "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, *eight souls were saved by water*" (I Peter 3:20).

Interestingly, in the future Temple of God described in Ezekiel, we find that there were *seven* steps that led into the outer court (Ezek.40:22, 26); however, there were *eight* steps that led from the outer court to the inner court (Ezek.40:31, 34, 37). The first seven led from labor to rest, but the eight led from rest to intimate fellowship with God and pure worship!

The consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests of God required seven days of being set apart (Lev.8:35), but it was on the "eighth day" that they were anointed as "priests," thus beginning a "new" ministry and office before God and the people.

David was the "eighth" son of Jesse, thus also beginning a "new dynasty" in Israel when he became king (I Sam.16:10-11; II Sam.7:12).

Bullinger adds concerning the significance of this number "8":

"It is 7 *plus* 1. Hence it is the number specially associated with *Resurrection* and *Regeneration*, and the BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA OR ORDER.

"When the whole earth was covered with a flood, it was Noah 'the eighth person' (II Pet.2:5) who stepped out on to a new earth to commence a new order of things. 'Eight souls' (I Pet.3:20) passed through it with him to the new or regenerated world.

"Hence, too, circumcision was to be performed on the EIGHTH DAY (Gen.17:12) . . . The first-born was to be given to Jehovah on the eighth day (Exo.22:29-30)."

The Holy City, New Jerusalem

Eight is the first "cubic" number -- it is $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$. Whereas "3" is the symbol of the first *plane* figure (a triangle with 3 sides), and "4" is the first square, so here in the first "cube" figure we see something of transcendent perfection, something in which length, breadth, and height are all equal! But what does this fact have to do with Shemini Atzeret, the "eighth" day?

E. W. Bullinger points out this salient fact:

"This significance of the *cube* is seen in the fact that the 'Holy of Holies,' both in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, were *cubes*. In the Tabernacle it was a *cube* of ten cubits. In the Temple it was a *cube* of twenty cubits. *IN REVELATION 20, THE NEW JERUSALEM IS TO BE A CUBE OF 144,000 FURLONGS*. Dr. Milo Mahan is inclined to believe that the Ark of Noah, too, had a kind of sacred Shechinah in 'the window finished in a cubit above' -- a cube of *one*. If so, we have the series of *cubes*: --

1 = The Ark
 $10^3 = 1,000$, The Tabernacle

$20^3 = 8,000$, The Temple
 $12,000^3 = 1,728,000,000,000$, The New Jerusalem" (*Number in Scripture*, Bullinger, p.201-212).

Bullinger points out that the number 1,728 (see above) is also a very unusual number. It is the product of 8^2 (Shemini – “a new beginning” squared), times 3^3 (the number of Decision, Finality, Judgment, cubed).

But what does all this have to do with the “Eighth Day of Assembly”?

The Plan of God Unveiled!

As we have already seen, in discussions of the previous holy days of God, the Fall Festivals picture the whole Plan of God. The Feast of Rosh Hoshana pictures the call to Repentance (the blowing of trumpets of warning), followed by the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, which pictures the Judgment Day when the Messiah returns to judge the world. This holy day is followed by the seven day Feast of Sukkot, or "Ingathering," which pictures the Millennial Reign of the Messiah, for 1,000 years (Rev.20:1-4). The last day of this feast, the seventh or final day, called Hoshanna Rabbah (The Great Hoshannas), pictures the final day of salvation or harvest -- the Great White Throne judgment, which occurs at the close of the Millennium (Rev.20:5-14).

But what happens AFTER this final period of JUDGMENT of the multiple billions of people on the earth, including all who never understood God's truth, the vast numbers of Gentiles, and those who were not called to be part of the "firstfruits" from the dead? What happens after they have been "harvested" and "in-gathered" into the Kingdom of God?

Notice!

“New Heavens and a New Earth”

The apostle John records: “And I saw a NEW HEAVEN and a NEW EARTH: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, NEW JERUSALEM, coming down from God out of heaven, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, *I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW*” (Revelation 21:1-5).

John then describes this magnificent “holy city,” the New Jerusalem, “descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal: and had a great wall and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which

are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel . . . And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth *foursquare*, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, *twelve thousand furlongs* [that is, approximately 1,500 miles to a side]. *The length and the breadth and the height of it are EQUAL*" (Rev.21:10-16).

Could this magnificent city be in the shape of the Holy of Holies of God's Temple -- a huge magnificent CUBE? It will represent the "Holy of Holies" in the earth, which will be the very Throne of God. Those who will be the "Bride" of Christ -- those who are in the first resurrection -- will dwell with God and Christ in this magnificent "Holy of Holies"! They will be part of the divine, celestial, eternal "Trinity" of God -- the Father, the Son, and the Bride (Israel)!

But notice further. Outside this city, in the magnificent New Earth, will dwell ALL THE NATIONS OF MANKIND that will be SAVED, and given immortality and eternal life!

John continues his description: "And the NATIONS *of them which are SAVED* shall walk in the light of it: and the *kings of the earth* do bring their glory into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the *glory and honor of the nations into it*. And there shall in no wise come into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev.20:24-27).

Here the rest of "saved" mankind is described -- those who will enter the Kingdom of God, during the Millennial reign of Messiah, and, those who are resurrected to mortal life to be given their chance for salvation after the Millennium, during the "Great White Throne" judgment period -- the "Great Day of Salvation" represented by Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh and final day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

However, the term "saved" also has a "present" connotation to it -- that is, the Greek word "saved" also means "those who are *in a saved condition*," or "those who are *in the process of being saved*" (see I Cor.1:18, 15:2, II Cor.2:15, II Tim.1:9). Therefore, this verse also has another incredible meaning and fantastic implication. Let's notice!

The Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah the prophet also describes this incredible scene of the new heavens and the new earth. He prophesied, in chapter 65, of God creating the new heavens and earth, as something to be rejoiced in FOREVER -- that is, for all eternity! But notice what *else* he says about this stupendous, fantastic time. Isaiah quotes God as saying:

"For, behold, I create NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But *be ye GLAD and REJOICE FOREVER* [Hebrew, *olam*, meaning forever, eternity, literally, "to the vanishing

Point” or “time out of sight”) in that which I CREATE: for, behold, I create JERUSALEM A REJOICING, and her people a joy.

“And I will rejoice in Jerusalem [God Himself will rejoice!!!], and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

“There shall be no more thence an INFANT OF DAYS, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; *but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed* [judged and condemned to the lake of fire].

“And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them . . . for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; FOR THEY ARE THE SEED [OFFSPRING, CHILDREN] OF THE BLESSED OF THE LORD, and their offspring with them The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN, saith the LORD” (Isa.65:17-25).

Notice! This passage is clearly dual in application. It describes the Messianic Kingdom of Jesus Christ, Yeshua, who is coming soon to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, as the fulfillment of hundreds of Messianic prophecies. But it also describes in a vivid and clear sense the “new heavens and new earth” (Isa.65:17). It clearly states that in that New Heavens and New Earth, *there will be CHILDREN BORN* -- that God's plan of pro-creation and multiplication of potential members of the Divine Family through human beings, will continue, throughout the ages, and perhaps even “beyond time”!

Is such a thing possible?

Is “Shemini Atzeret” in reality the “staging ground,” THE THRESHOLD, the NEW BEGINNING of the NEXT PHASE of God's Plan? Its very name identifies it as a “new beginning.” God will create a “new beginning” when He creates new heavens and a new earth. Jesus plainly told John, “I make *ALL THINGS NEW*” (Rev.21:5).

The apostle Peter writes of that coming awesome time: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we according to his promise, look for NEW HEAVENS and a NEW EARTH, *WHEREIN DWELLETH RIGHTEOUSNESS*” (II Peter 3:10-13).

God's Incredible Plan

In the book of Genesis, God said, at the original creation of mankind:

“And God said, Let US make man in OUR IMAGE, after OUR LIKENESS: And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over ALL THE EARTH, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

"So God CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, in the IMAGE OF GOD created he him: male and female created he them.

"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, BE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY, AND REPLENISH [*Hebrew, FILL UP*] THE EARTH, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen.1:26-28).

How much authority did God really intend to give mankind? David tells us in the Psalms, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put ALL THINGS [that is, ALL THE UNIVERSE!!!] under his feet . . .*" (Psalm 8:4-6).

The apostle Paul referred to this Scripture, when he wrote, "Thou hast put all things under his feet. For in that he put ALL in subjection under him [mankind], *HE LEFT NOTHING THAT IS NOT PUT UNDER HIM.* But now we see NOT YET all things put under him" (Heb.2:8).

God intends for mankind, after he repents of his sins and learns his lessons, and learns to obey God, and develops righteous, holy, godly character, to become GLORIFIED AS HIS OWN CHILDREN -- HIS DIVINE SONS -- whom He will give AUTHORITY to rule the entire Cosmos -- the UNIVERSE -- all the galaxies and star systems of space!

As Paul wrote to the Church in Rome, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we ARE the *children of God.* And if children, then *HEIRS; heirs of GOD, and JOINT-HEIRS with CHRIST:* if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also GLORIFIED TOGETHER" (Rom.8:16-17). Paul was so overwhelmed by the thought of our destiny, that he exclaimed, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the GLORY that shall be revealed in us" (Rom.8:18).

How awesome is the Plan of God!

Will God's Plan of reproducing Himself, expanding His divine Family, through human beings made in His express image and likeness, continue throughout eternity? There are many indications in the Scriptures that it is so. Consider!

Onward and Forward Forever!

Isaiah the prophet wrote, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the *government* shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. ***Of the***

INCREASE of his government shall be NO END, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice *from henceforth EVEN FOREVER*. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa.9:6-7).

The word "increase" in this passage is the Hebrew word *marbyth* and literally means, "multitude, offspring, greatness, *increase*." The word for "end" is the Hebrew word *quetz* and means "extremity, utmost, border, finite."

In other words, God is telling us here that the growing and multiplying and INCREASING of the SIZE AND SCOPE AND NUMBERS in God's Kingdom will have NO "limitation" or "border" or be in any sense "finite" or "limited." The increase will grow and continue like "compound interest," FOREVER AND EVER AND EVER -- throughout the future ages and aeons of time and space!

There is further evidence of this stupendous fact! In the book of Genesis, we read that after the Flood, when God began a "new world" order under Noah and his descendants: "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I will make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, **FOR PERPETUAL GENERATIONS**: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the *everlasting covenant* between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen.9:12-16).

In verse 12, here, the word for "generations" refers to human generations. The word for "perpetual" is the Hebrew word *olam* which literally means "forever, eternity, the vanishing point." The expression "PERPETUAL GENERATIONS" therefore implies that human reproduction will go on FOREVER -- ***IT IS THE PLAN OF GOD TO CONTINUE REPRODUCING BEINGS IN HIS VERY LIKENESS AND IMAGE -- HIS OWN SONS AND DAUGHTERS -- FOREVER!!!***

But for a final proof from Scripture, notice God's words in Deuteronomy 7. God tells His people Israel that He has chosen them as His special people, not because of their own greatness, or goodness (Deut.7:7-8), but He chose them because He loved them, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, their ancestors, to whom He had made wonderful promises, when He intends to keep.

God then said to Israel, "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments **TO A THOUSAND GENERATIONS**" (Deuteronomy 7:9). The Hebrew word for "generations" here is *dor* and literally means "ages," "generations," "revolutions."

In the Bible, one of the key definitions of a "generation" is found in Numbers 14. The generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt were faithless and disobedient, and feared to go into the Promised Land and fight the Canaanites (Num.13:21-33). They rebelled against Moses and against God (Num.14:1-10). God therefore decided to punish them, and cause that generation to wander in the wilderness, and die there, for a period of 40 years (Num.14:34).

If we use the number "40" as the length of a Biblical "generation," then God's statement in Deuteronomy 7:9 that He would bless the righteous "to a thousand generations" would compute to a time period of 40 years times 1,000 generations. In other words, $40 \times 1,000 = 40,000 \text{ years!!!}$

Since the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has been on this planet for only about 6,000 years. The Millennial Sabbath day, which is 1,000 years (Rev.20:4), will be the "final day" of God's "week" of seven days, picturing the 7,000 year plan of God, which encompasses the time from Adam and Eve till the end of the Millennium.

But what comes after that?

Clearly, when we put all these Scriptures together, *there will be human beings born in the new heavens and new earth! They also will be given an opportunity -- without any Devil or Satan or his demonic hordes to tempt or seduce them -- to qualify for salvation and eternal life!*

They will live in a wonderful Garden of Eden-like world, like Adam and Eve, only this time there won't be a Devil or his demons to deflect, sidetrack, deceive, or seduce them! But they will have billions of "sons of God," already in God's Kingdom, ready to help, instruct, guide and teach them, at a moment's notice! And when they have qualified, they, too, will become spirit beings -- literal "sons of God" in the ever-expanding KINGDOM OF GOD!

God's Great Plan will continue onward and forward -- for ALL ETERNITY, "to the vanishing point," that, is, throughout "all ages"!

Truly, there is far more meaning and significance to "The Eighth Day" -- Shemini Atzeret -- than mankind has even begun to imagine or entertain in his mind!

As the apostle Paul wrote, "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Cor.2:9).

Isn't this fantastic? Isn't this just absolutely "GrrrrrrrEEEE-AAA-TTT"?

Think of it! We, who are called now, have the opportunity to get in on the "ground floor," so to speak, of God's Kingdom -- to be a part of the BRIDE of Christ the Messiah, to be the "Israel of God" (Gal.6:16). The rest of the nations, mankind, including

our own children who are not called now, in this age, will become members of the God Kingdom at a later time, when their "calling" comes to fruition.

This great and awesome plan will stagger their imaginations, when they first learn about it, and see it being implemented *in us!*

And so, as the prophet declared, "And so ALL ISRAEL *shall be saved*: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. . . . For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have *MERCY UPON ALL*" (Romans 11:26-32).

Thinking on these marvelous things, Paul exclaimed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: *to whom be glory for ever. Amen*" (Rom.11:33-36). Absolutely, *Amen!*

Chapter 17

The Annual Holy Days *Reveal* the Awesome Plan of God!

Is Satan really stronger than God? It would seem that he must be, if the vast majority of Christians are right in their belief that the majority of mankind are "lost," and will die having missed out on salvation! What is the truth about salvation? Is God attempting to save the whole world now? Could millions or billions of people be doomed to hell, because they simply were born, lived and died, never having heard of the name of Jesus Christ? Is God really "fair"? Just what is the "Plan" God has in mind for human beings? And what do the ANNUAL HOLY DAYS of God, given to Israel, have to do with God's Great Plan? Let's take a new look at this most important subject!

Consider for a moment. The apostle Peter clearly said: *"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

This means that salvation can only come through Jesus Christ! He is the only Mediator between God and men (I Tim. 2:5). No one else!

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter exclaimed: " Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Salvation can only come through Jesus Christ! But think for a moment. Millions -- no, billions -- of people have lived and died, never having even heard of the name of Jesus Christ! Are they forever lost -- doomed for all eternity?

If this life is the only opportunity for salvation, then they must be lost forever! For salvation can only come through the name of Jesus Christ! That's what the Bible says!

What about the millions and billions of people in India, and China, in Indonesia, Africa, South America, Australia, the pygmies and the bushmen, the Hotentots and the Watusis, the Indians of the Brazilian rain forest? Are millions of them forever doomed because they never even heard, much less understood, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ?

What about it? And what about the inhabitants of ancient Egypt and Greece, the peoples of ancient Persia, ages before Christian era? Are they, too, forever lost, because they never heard the "only name under heaven" given whereby men may be saved? Does that make any sense?

Is God Fair?

The truth is God is not calling everybody to salvation during this age! **THIS IS NOT THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION!** The overwhelming, vast majority of mankind will receive their opportunity for salvation at a later time! Does that surprise you?

Jesus told His disciples: "*No man can come to me, EXCEPT the Father which hath sent me draw him*" (John 6:44). He added in verse 65: "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father"!

Only those whom God calls can truly understand His truth and His Plan, now! But the rest -- the vast majority -- are not yet called! This means that they will be given their chance for salvation later -- at another time! For those to whom God reveals His truth now, today IS the day of salvation (11 Corinthians 6:2). But the vast majority are now blinded. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "But if it is hid to them that are lost (not lost forever, but in a present condition of being lost, not yet having been called): In whom the god of this world hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not, *lest* the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (11 Cor. 4:4).

The apostle Paul explains: "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? **GOD FORBID!**" (Romans 11:1). Paul goes on: " God hath *not* cast away his people which he foreknew." He wrote, "Even so then at this present time also there is a *remnant according to the election of grace.*"

Paul continues, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but *the election* hath obtained it, **AND THE REST WERE BLINDED** (According as it is written, *God* hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should *not* hear;) **UNTO THIS DAY**" (Romans 11:2-8). How plain!

Why Jesus Spoke in Parables

You have probably heard, and assumed, that Jesus Christ spoke in parables to the multitudes, in order to be more understandable. Most people think that Christ spoke in

parables to make the meaning of His lessons and stories simple and easy to understand. But what if I were to tell you that such is not the case at all? What if I told you Jesus spoke in parables to obfuscate and to HIDE the truth, so that the masses of people would NOT understand Him?

Believe it or not, that is precisely the reason Jesus said He spoke in parables! Notice!

Jesus' very own disciples asked Him this very question. It seems they, too, were having a difficult time understanding Him and making sense out of His parables. We read in Matthew's gospel: "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?"

"He answered and said unto them, *Because it is given unto YOU to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but TO THEM IT IS NOT GIVEN*" (Matt.13:10-11).

What? Read that again! Jesus Christ said that to the multitudes, it was not given or offered for them to *understand!* In other words, He used parables to hide, to cloak, the meaning! Why did He do this? He goes on to explain: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more in abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." That is, they just don't get it! But why does Jesus hide the real meaning of His parables from them? He continues: "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; *LEST at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, AND SHOULD BE CONVERTED, and I should heal them*" (Matt.13:12-15).

Notice! Jesus said He did not want the people as a whole to understand, at that time, *LEST* they should be converted at that time, and should be spiritually HEALED! In other words, He was not at that time CALLING the vast majority of people to salvation! So He cloaked the meaning of His parables, so they would remain blinded to the truth. Why would He do this? As He said initially, those who are given understanding are HELD ACCOUNTABLE for it, and will be judged accordingly. Knowledge is a dangerous thing. Once we know the truth, we are responsible to OBEY it. If we don't, we heap condemnation upon our heads!

But why does God want most people to remain blinded, at this time? Why isn't He calling the whole world to salvation, at this time, as the Protestant evangelists all proclaim?

Haven't you heard men like Billy Graham, for example, say that this is THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION? Haven't you heard them preach hell-fire and brimstone sermons, saying that all who refused to "accept Jesus," were in danger of the torments of

Hell fire?

Yet Jesus said He plainly WITHHELD true understanding from the people, and deliberately spoke in parables and riddles to hide and to obscure the truth!

The plain truth is, my friends, that God is working out a PURPOSE here below, and very few people really understand what it is! The so-called Christian evangelists haven't got a clue!

Let's understand this mystery!

Who Are the "Elect"?

God has revealed His truth only to "the election." Who are they? They are the "elect of God" (see I Peter 1:2, Col. 3:12, Titus 1:1, I Peter 2:6) -- that is, *true* Christians! I must use the word "true," here, because the vast majority of professing "Christians" are themselves IGNORANT of God's true plan of salvation, and are no more converted than a jack-rabbit or an African chimpanzee! Those who are *true Christians*, however, are being given their chance for salvation today, at this time -- "For the time is come that judgment must *begin* at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17).

Those being called out of this world now, to understand and obey God's truth, are being judged now; but the vast majority of mankind God has allowed to be blinded, and are disobedient, "whereunto also they were appointed" (I Pet.2:8). What will happen to them?

They are not lost forever. God Himself will open their eyes, and show them His truth, at a later time, as we shall see.

Let's understand. God has predestined NO ONE to be lost or to be doomed! Not at all! Predestination has to do with *when* one is called, and *when* a person has God's truth revealed to him -- not whether he is going to be saved or lost!

Those called to understand God's truth now have a special blessing. As Paul wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath *chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having PREDESTINATED US *unto the adoption* [or, *sonship*, in the Greek] *of children* by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will . . . in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made *known unto us* the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the *fulness of time* he might gather together in one *all things in Christ*, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being PREDESTINATED according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the

counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, *who FIRST TRUSTED IN CHRIST*" (Epesians 1:3-12).

Notice! We are those who have "*first* trusted in Christ!" This means there are others who will be called later to trust in Christ! They are the VAST MAJORITY!

We in God's Church today are compared to "*firstfruits*" of the Spiritual harvest! We are compared to the early "spring" harvest -- but the great "fall harvest" will occur later! We are those who have the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23). As the apostle James wrote: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that WE should be a kind of *firstfruits* of his creatures" (Jas. 1:18).

Predestination, then, has to do with the *time* when we are called. A *few* are called now, and chosen to become "first-fruits" to God and the Lamb. But the vast majority will be called later!

The Plan of God Revealed -- Passover and Unleavened Bread

Few realize it, but the Plan of God is revealed in the pattern of the Holy Days which God gave to Israel. The annual Holy Days began with the Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread, in the spring of the year (Lev.23:4-6). The Passover represented the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's paschal lamb, who gave His life for us (I Cor.5:7). The days of Unleavened Bread symbolize our putting leaven, that which causes bread to "puff up," a type of *sin*, out of our lives (see I Cor. 5:8).

The Passover represents the *beginning* of the Plan of God -- not its termination, or ending! The Plan of Salvation *begins* with the Passover, and Christ our Passover Lamb, who was slain for us on the cross, or tree -- the stake on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple platform in ancient Jerusalem. The Plan of God begins with the "crucifixion" of Christ on the cross -- *but it doesn't END there!* There is *much more to it than that!* Merely "accepting Christ," as the Protestants teach, *is not the truth of the gospel!* "Accepting Christ" as Saviour is JUST THE BEGINNING!

What happens *after* we accept Christ, and His shed blood covers our sins? Even as the ancient Israelites slew their Passover lambs in Egypt, and dabbled the blood on their doorposts and lintels, so that they would be protected and spared when the "death angel" passed over that night, and slew the firstborn of all the Egyptians -- even so the "blood of Christ" causes God to spare us, and put His canopy of protection over us. But that is only the beginning of God's Plan, and the beginning of His Holy Day season!

During the days of Unleavened Bread the people brought a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest to the priest, called an "omer." The priest then waved it before the Lord. This sheaf of *firstfruits* represents TRUE CHRISTIANS -- the true "firstfruits of God" who will receive salvation and eternal life! Also, during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Israelites *came out of Egypt*, which was a type of *bondage to sin*. On the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is a HOLY DAY of God, they literally walked

through the Red Sea, dryshod, with the walls of water towering over them on their right and on their left. On this awesome day, they LEFT EGYPT -- A TYPE OF SIN. They put sin completely out of their lives! God rescued them from the power of Egypt, even as He rescues us from the power of our own sinful human nature (Rom.6:6, 13, 8:1-2), and from the power of "sin and death" (Rom.8:2) by giving us His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32, which enables us to CONQUER SIN and OVERCOME it (Gal.2:20). Even as God rescued Israel from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, so He rescues us from the power of Satan the devil, of whom Pharaoh was a "type"!

So the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures out coming out of sin, turning to God and obeying His commandments, statutes, judgments, and laws -- and leaving spiritual "Egypt" -- sin -- behind. It pictures the Christian life of overcoming, and enduring to the end.

But during this Feast, on the day after Passover, the "omer" was waved before the Lord, and was continued to be waved each morning as the Israelites counted "fifty days" until the arrival of the NEXT Holy Day -- Pentecost! What does this period of "fifty days" represent?

Passing through the "Red Sea," the apostle Paul tells us, was a type of "baptism," when we are buried with Christ in the water, and then come up out of the water "in newness of life" (Rom.6:3-4). The "50 days" from Passover to Pentecost, then, picture the Christian life of OVERCOMING OBSTACLES, and enduring to the end, and building holy, righteous, godly character! The ancient Israelites had to journey through the desert, from the Red Sea to the Mount Sinai, where they met with God, and received the Ten Commandments, and became "married" to God in a marriage covenant (Jer.3:14). This was an arduous journey, and tested their faith, and their obedience.

Even so, after we are baptized, we enter into a life of struggle against sin, a life of overcoming spiritual obstacles, set backs, faith-building trials, and overcoming persecution -- until we finally reach "Mount Zion," and the Kingdom of God! The "50 days" from Passover to Pentecost picture the Christian life of overcoming, until the return of Christ, when we will marry Him as His bride! (Eph.5:25-27; Rev.19:7-9).

Pentecost -- the Marriage of the Bride and Lamb

Then comes the festival of Pentecost fifty days later. It is significant that the New Testament Church of God actually *began* on this Holy Day, when the Holy Spirit first descended on men and imbued them with spiritual power (see Acts 2:1-4). In Old Testament times, on Pentecost God Himself descended on the Mount Sinai, and gave the Ten Commandments -- the Law of God -- to His people. Isn't it interesting that the Holy Spirit was given *on the very anniversary of the giving of the Law*? Why was this? The answer is, we need God's Holy Spirit in order to have the power and fortitude to OBEY God's Law!

The Holy Spirit is what was missing from the Old Covenant, so that the people

continually went astray, back slid, and fell victim to the sins of idolatry, Sabbath breaking, and rebellion against the Laws of God! But through the Holy Spirit, God is now writing His laws with our very hearts and minds (Heb.8:7-10).

Pentecost was the time of the actual spring harvest, which *began* with the wave sheaf offering typifying the "firstfruits." The harvest of Pentecost symbolizes the actual spiritual harvest of the Church of God, those called out of this world to be a kind of "firstfruits" to Christ! (Lev. 23:15-22). It pictures the "bride of Christ" being harvested, to rule the nations with Him at His coming!

After Pentecost, there are no more holy days, until the FALL holy day season. Then all the rest of God's Holy Days fall within ONE MONTH -- the "seventh month" -- the month of Tishri! The Spring Holy Days being completed, picturing the harvest of the "first-fruits" of God, now we come to the next installment of the Plan of God -- *the Harvest of the Rest of Mankind!*

The Feast of Trumpets -- Calling the World to Repentance!

Beginning the seventh month, Tishri, which is also the FIRST MONTH of the civil calendar, is the Festival of Blowing of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24-25). Notice! This is the Feast of *Trumpets* -- PLURAL -- *not the Feast of the Trumpet* -- singular! What does this Feast Day represent in God's great Plan?

Many have assumed that this feast represents the second coming of Christ -- that is, the final or seventh trumpet of Revelation, when He will return (Rev.11:15-19). But is this really so?

Notice! In the book of Joel, we read: "BLOW YE THE TRUMPET in Zion, and *sound an alarm* in my holy mountain: let all of the inhabitants of the land tremble: *for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand*; a day of darkness and of gloominess a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains" (Joel 2:1-2).

Here we see the REAL symbolism of trumpets! Trumpets are blown as an ALARM -- they signify a WARNING BLAST of impending danger, peril, calamity, destruction! They are a warning to GET READY -- GET PREPARED -- for the day of judgment is coming soon!

The Feast of Trumpets does *not* picture the day of "judgment." It pictures the blowing of trumpets, in ADVANCE of the day of judgment, and pictures God's warning to repent of sins and to get ready to face the returning Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords! Thus, as the Jews have understood from time immemorial, the Feast of Trumpets pictures God's WARNING TO REPENT -- they are God's FINAL CALL TO REPENTANCE!

This feast day represents the day of TRUMPETS which pictures the awesome

trumpets BLOWN in the book of Revelation (Rev.8-7), the trumpet-plagues of the "Day of the Lord," the timewhen God calls all mankind to REPENTANCE, in preparation for the soon coming of Jesus Christ back to this world! The "trumpets" are warning blasts, a call to repentance, and a warning of impending calamities. Each trumpet blast will be accompanied by a divinely sent PLAGUE to convince mankind that God means business! (see Rev.8-9). They are a warning, sent by a loving God who doesn't desire to have to punish His people, but who will not put up with sin and rebellion any longer. The "trumpets" --plural -- lead up to the soon-coming JUDGMENT, which will occur when Jesus Christ returns to earth to set up the Kingdom of God (see Rev. 11:15-19).

The Great Trumpet and Yom Kippur

Christ will return at the blast of a *great trumpet* (I Thess. 4:16-17, 1 Cor. 15:51-52). Christ doesn't return when all the trumpets of warning are blown. They are blown in advance of His coming, to warn of the plagues of the Day of the Lord, and to warn the nations that He will soon return to judge their deeds and actions. Christ returns not at "trumpets" --plural -- but at the LAST and FINAL trumpet, at the conclusion of them all. This trumpet will be the LAST trumpet -- and the "last" trumpet, which is also the "great" trumpet, is blown on the Day of Atonement -- Yom Kippur -- on the Year of the Jubilee! God thunders: "Then shalt thou cause the TRUMPET OF THE JUBILEE TO SOUND *on the tenth day of the seventh month [that is, Yom Kippur!], in the day of atonement shall ye make the TRUMPET SOUND throughout all your land*" (see Lev.25:8-10).

Yom Kippur represents the day of the coming of Christ -- the day actual JUDGMENT will begin! (Lev. 23:26-32). The entire symbolism and ritual of this day portrays "judgment"! At the return of Christ, Satan the devil will be banished, chained up in a great abyss, for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-2). This also is pictured by the Day of Atonement, and the banishment of the "Azazel goat" -- which represents Satan the devil -- on this day to the "wilderness" (see Lev.16:10, 20-22). Notice how beautifully, accurately, and perfectly, *God's Holy Days* picture and set forth the true Plan of God -- the Plan of Salvation!

Next on the Agenda -- the "Feast of Sukkot"

But what happens *after* the return of Jesus Christ to this earth? What comes *next* in God's Plan? Following the return of Christ to earth, the entire world will finally be reconciled to God. Over a period of time, all nations will be re-educated, and will LEARN the truth of God, and will begin to OBEY His commandments (Isa.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4). Eventually, the re-education and retraining process will be completed, and "the earth shall be FULL of the KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD, *as the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:9).

The whole world will then be made "at one" with Him. With Satan banished, the whole world will soon break forth with singing and rejoicing and all mankind will accept the truth of God! That will be the time of the great fall Harvest, pictured by the FEAST OF TABERNACLES -- called the "Feast of Ingathering," or the "Feast of Harvest"!

The great fall Harvest, when millions will have the blinders stripped from their eyes, and will see and understand God's truth for the first time, is symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-37). This feast depicts the celebration of the ingathering of all mankind into God's Kingdom -- that is, mankind as a whole. At this time, Israel will be the chief among the nations, and the laws of the Lord will flow forth from Jerusalem to the whole world. Christ will sit upon the Throne of David, in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32), and rule the world. This will indeed be a great time of tremendous rejoicing, happiness, and celebration!

At this present time, blindness covers the nations, but at that time God will remove the scales from peoples' eyes. The apostle Paul put it plainly. He said: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that *blindness* in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so *ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SA VED*: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:25-26).

Whereas now God is calling only a few to be in His Church, and to receive salvation, at that time the *WHOLE WORLD* will be saved! As Isaiah the prophet wrote: "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will *destroy* in this mountain the face of *the covering* cast over all *people*, and the *VAIL that is spread over all nations*. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 25:5-6).

At that time, Isaiah says, the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard with the kid, and the calf and young lion shall curl up peaceably together, and the lion will eat straw like the oxen. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be *FULL* of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6-9). During that wonderful utopian time the nations will learn war more (Isaiah 2:2-4).

This is the *GOOD NEWS* that Jesus Christ brought! This is the good news of the Kingdom of God!

Hoshana Rabbah -- the "Great Day of the Feast"

On the last, or final day, of the Feast of Tabernacles, called "the great day of the feast," or "Hoshana Rabbah," a very special ceremony takes place. This is the "water-pouring ceremony." It is mentioned in John's gospel, chapter seven. Notice! "In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive . . ." (John 7:27-29).

Many have confused this day with the "eighth day" -- or the following festival, often referred to as "The Last Great Day." However, this water pouring ceremony did not occur on the "eighth day" -- it occurred on the *SEVENTH* day, that is, the final day of the Feast of Sukkot!

Hoshana Rabba, then, the final day of the Feast of Ingathering, or Harvest, depicts the FINAL DAY OF JUDGMENT -- *THE LAST GREAT DAY OF HARVEST!*

What great event does this picture? What is the "last day of harvest" -- that is, the LAST OPPORTUNITY FOR SALVATION?

To understand this fully, let's back track, now, and pick up some of the loose pieces, and answer some of the unanswered questions, and see what the Word of God has to say about this "Last Great Day of Harvest" -- this FINAL opportunity for salvation. Notice how it fits in perfectly and dove-tails with God's Plan, His mercy, and provides a wonderful way of salvation for the *billions* who have lived and died, never having understood God's Plan, and never having even heard the name of Jesus Christ -- Yeshua the Messiah!

Nineveh, Tyre and Sodom

Jesus alluded to the many wicked of past ages, who died in their wickedness, when He said to His disciples: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south [queen of Sheba during Solomon's day] shall *rise up in the judgment* with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:41-42).

Jesus went even further. He told His disciples that if a city rejected their message, "Verily I say unto you, It shall be *more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment*, than for that city" (Matt. 10: 15). Notice also Matthew, chapter 11. We read: "Then began he [Jesus] to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in *Tyre and Sidon*, they would have repented long ago **in** sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be *more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment* than for you.

"And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (Matt. 11:20-24).

The time is coming when all these ancient cities, and their inhabitants, will be

judged -- some more severely than others. When will this happen?

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel gives us a strong clue as to the answer. Speaking of a future time, he says: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was *full of bones*, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry" (Ezek. 37:1-2). These dry bones symbolize the millions of people who lived and died long, long ago -- perhaps thousands of years ago in many cases. That is why they were "very dry."

What happens to these bones?

"And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause *breath* to enter into you, *and ye shall live*, and I will lay *sinews* upon you, and will bring up *flesh* upon you, and cover you with *skin*, and put breath in you, AND YE SHALL LIVE: and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (verses 3-6).

Here a great resurrection to physical, mortal life is described! These people will be raised to physical life once again. They will be breathing creatures. They will have sinews, flesh, skin -- they will be physical human beings once again!

Ezekiel says: "So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.

"Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these *slain*, that they may live.

"So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, *and they lived, and stood up* upon their feet, AN EXCEEDING GREAT ARMY" (Ezek. 27:7-10). Who are these people?

"Then he said unto me, Son of man, *these bones are THE WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL*: behold, they say, Our bones are died, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I WILL OPEN YOUR GRAVES, and cause you to come *up out of your graves*, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall *put my spirit in you*, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then

shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord" (verses 11-14).

When will this great resurrection to physical life occur? It will be at the same time God brings the peoples of ancient Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, and the Queen of Sheba, back to life, to stand before judgment!

The time frame of this marvelous prophesy is given in the book of Revelation!

The Great White Throne Judgment

John writes: "And I saw a *great white throne*, and him that 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 [who are these?], stand before God; and the *books* were opened: and another book was opened, which is the *book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:11-12)

Here is another time of judgment! This same time of resurrection is described in Ezekiel 37, the "dry bones" chapter. These vast teeming millions, including the vast majority of mankind that ever lived -- billions of people -- will be resurrected, for a time of "trial" and testing. They will be flesh and blood, not immortal. These people will be the millions who were never called by God during this life; those millions who never understood the Plan of God, who never heard of Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven whereby men may be saved (Acts 4:12).

Among them will be all the babies who died, and children who died in their youth, never having had a chance for salvation. Those who were blinded to God's truth in this life will at that time be resurrected to mortal life, and given their first and only real opportunity for salvation (see Matthew 12:41-42).

Notice that the "book of life" will be opened. And that they will be judged according to their "works" (Rev. 20:12). These people will apparently live for one hundred years (Isaiah 65:20). They will build houses, and plant vineyards, and live a natural, normal life for one hundred years, during which time they will receive their opportunity for salvation. They will be taught, for the first time in their existence, the truth of God. They will be able to compare their previous life, under Satan's way, with life and blessings under God's way, in the Kingdom of God. And the vast majority will repent of their sins, accept Christ as Saviour, and be saved. As Paul wrote: "And so *all Israel shall be saved*" (Rom. 11:26). God is longsuffering and patient, not willing that any should die or perish (11 Pet. 3:9). Everyone who ever lived will have a complete and unhindered chance to learn God's ways, and to be saved.

But what about those who are the incorrigibly wicked? What about those who refuse to repent, and to obey God, and who continue on in sin no matter what God says, and no matter how patiently He holds out His hand offering them forgiveness? What

about those who REJECT the laws of God and give themselves over to sin and wickedness?

The Awesome Fate of the Wicked -- Total Destruction

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death.* And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:13-15).

Here all the incorrigible wicked will perish forever. Those who refuse to repent of their sins and blasphemies, who turn aside from God's way and trample on the shed blood of Christ, treating it as a little thing, those who *reject and refuse* God's way, will suffer the final judgment -- they will burn up in the lake of fire. And they will never live again. Their life will be extinguished, with finality. They will be put out of their misery. That is how God will banish all sin and punish the sinners who refuse to repent.

At that time, Peter says, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:10). At that time "sinners [shall] be consumed out of the earth" and "the wicked [shall] be no more" (Psalm 104:35). At that time God will "renew the face of the earth" (Psa. 104:30).

The prophet Malachi describes the scene this way: "For, behold, the day cometh, saith the LORD, that shall BURN as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be *ashes* under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:1-3).

Hoshana Rabbah is the last, final day of judgment -- the final opportunity for all mankind to be "saved," and to enter into the eternal Kingdom of God as His sons. Those who reject God's mercy and plan, those who fail to make the grade, those who turn away from God and rebellion as Satan the devil did, will suffer the same fate as the devil. They will be destroyed -- forever! If you haven't read it, be sure to read my article, "Satan's Fate -- Will Satan Be Punished Forever?"

Notice! This Great White Throne Judgment, pictured by Hoshana Rabbah, is also pictured by Jesus Christ, in a marvelous prophecy He gave. Notice His exact words:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory [throughout the millennial reign, with the saints ruling with Him]: And before him *shall be gathered ALL nations* [including the ones who lived long ago, as they are resurrected to mortal life]: and [in the Great White Throne Judgment, lasting perhaps 100 years] he shall separate them one from another, as

a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on the right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye *cursed, into everlasting [i.e., age-lasting] fire, prepared for the DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS*: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

"Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

"Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it *NOT* to one of the least of these, *ye did it not to me*. And THESE shall go away into *everlasting punishment [that is, eternal death!]*: *but the righteous into life eternal*" (Matthew 25:31-46).

Yes, God *IS* supremely *FAIR!* He is perfectly just, righteous, and absolutely perfect in judgment! All will have a chance -- an opportunity -- for salvation. What they do with that opportunity, however, is up to them.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't God wonderful? Isn't the Plan of God marvelous, surpassing human wisdom and understanding?

Paul wrote: "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have *mercy upon all*. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:30-36).

This day, Hoshana Rabbah, pictures the LAST GREAT DAY of harvest -- the

final great time or dispensation of SALVATION! After it, there is no more harvest -- the harvest is finished -- over.

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, then, represents the Great White Throne judgment, the time when the billions of people who have lived and died, never understanding God's Plan of Salvation, will be resurrected to mortal life, and will be given their first and only chance for salvation, as they, too, will be re-educated and taught the truths of God! It also pictures the awesome time of final judgment -- and the final judgment of God upon the wicked, the proud, and the ungodly, who refuse God's Laws and His way.

Shemini Atzeret -- the "Eighth Day"

The Plan of God is complete -- except for one final thing. And that final thing is pictured by the LAST of God's annual holy days! Notice!

Right after the Feast of Tabernacles comes the final "feast" of the Lord -- the last "holy day" of the religious year. This is "Shemini Atzeret," that is, "the Eighth Day." What does it represent?

The "eighth day" itself is a special Holy Day and the concluding Feast of the Lord. During the feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of *Sukkot* in the Hebrew, the children of Israel dwelt in flimsy, quickly constructed booths, with thinly thatched roofs which were open to the sky, so the people could see the stars. This observance connected them with the "booths" which the harvesters used to dwell in, out in the fields, during the fall harvest. The "booths" also depicted the temporary shelters the children of Israel lived in as they journeyed through the desert, after leaving Egypt, before they settled in the Promised Land.

But on the final holy day of Shemini Atzeret, the people *no longer dwelt in the booths depicting the harvest*. On this day, they once again lived in their homes. What does it represent, then, in the overall Plan of God?

The key to understanding is in the name of the day -- the "eighth day." The number "8" has awesome significance in Scripture! There were "8" people in the Ark of Noah, when his family was saved, to begin a NEW WORLD AGE. There are seven days in the week, and the Sabbath Day depicts the Millennial reign of Christ and the Feast of Tabernacles. The day after the Sabbath is the "eighth day" -- and begins another week, another round of "time keeping" -- a NEW WEEK. Since the "week" depicts God's Plan, the beginning of a NEW week depicts the beginning of a NEW PHASE in the Plan of God -- it represents A NEW BEGINNING!

The NEW Heavens and NEW Earth

There will be a *new* heavens, and a *new* earth! God says, "For, behold, I create *new heavens* and a *new earth*: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into

mind" (Isa. 65:17). John describes it: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be *no more death*, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:1-4).

Did you get it? In that new heaven and earth, there will be NO MORE DEATH! Everybody will live forever! The whole earth will be populated with SAVED, immortal beings, human beings who have been transformed into immortal, eternal sons of God!

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, *I make all things new*. And he said unto me, *Write*. for these words are true and faithful.

"And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son*" (vs. 5-7).

The new Jerusalem will sparkle like a diadem upon the earth (Rev. 21:9-21). It is the *bride* of Christ. That means, those now called and chosen, those who make up the members of the Church of God, who will marry Christ at His return -- *they will dwell in the New Jerusalem, with Christ, and reign with Him on His throne, over the entire Universe, forever and ever!*

Jerusalem will be the headquarters for the Throne of God; from it God's rule will extend throughout all the galaxies of space, to the uttermost bounds of the Universe, to the farthest reaches of all Creation itself! On the other hand, those who are saved during the Millennial reign of Christ, and those millions who are saved during the Great White Throne Judgment, and who are given immortality, they will occupy the rest of the earth. They will be the "children" of the Lamb and His Bride.

John declared, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the *glory of God did* lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

"*And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it.- and the kings of earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it*" (Rev. 21:23-26). Only those who are "written in the Lamb's book of life" will be there (v. 27).

What a society that will be! What a glorious Kingdom! Can you imagine? There will be *millions* of sons of God, each of them glorified, given immortality, eternal life, each of them perfect in character, with tremendous power and authority, their faces shining as the sun in its strength!

The earth will be the headquarters of the entire Universe! It will no longer be a second rate planet in a third rate. solar system!

The saints are not going to "heaven," but *heaven is coming to earth!*