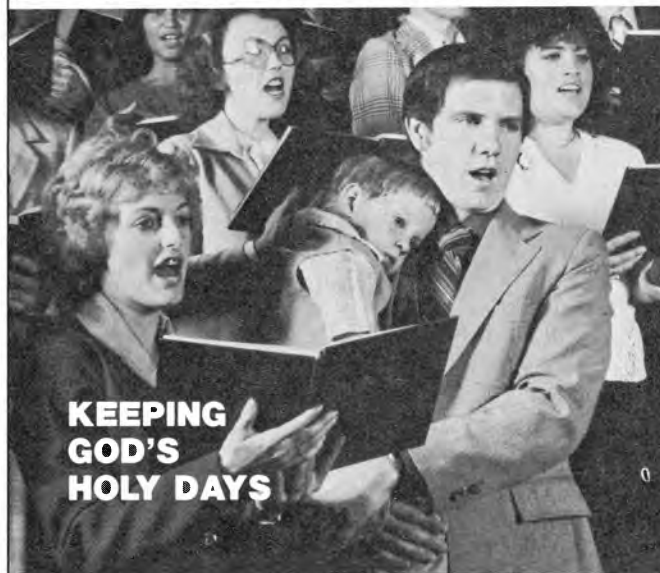
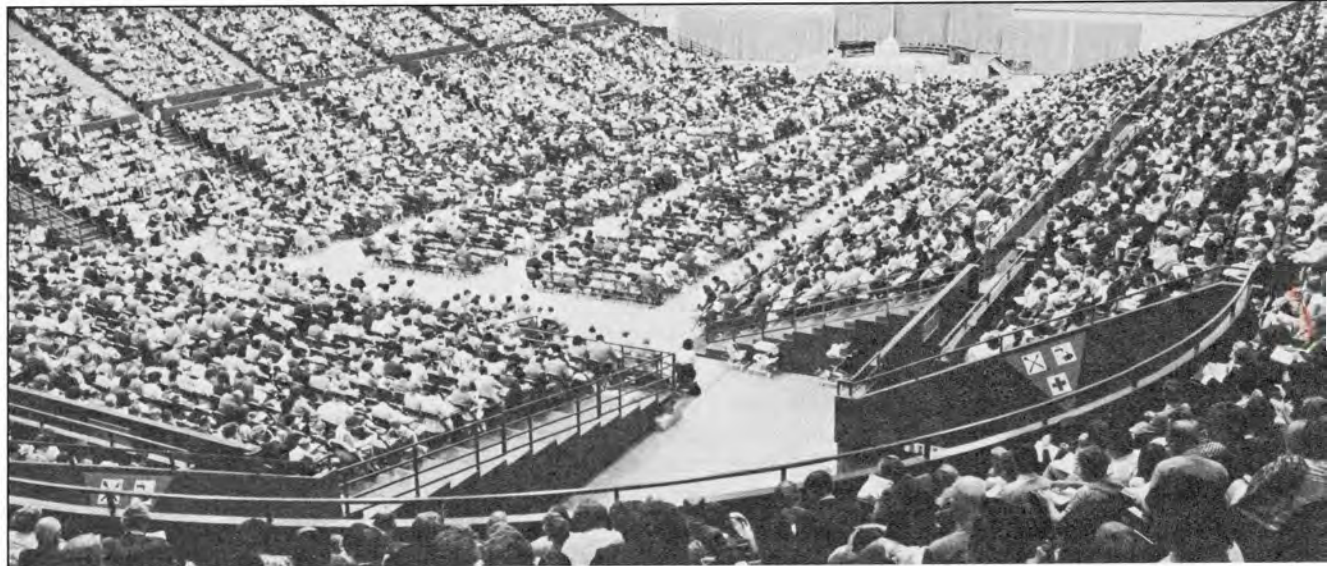




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THE AMBASSADOR COLLEGE

Bible CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 23

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About Our Cover . . .

One way God's people show true love to their Creator is by observing the days He made holy, and which He commanded to be kept holy. Unlike the religious holidays observed by many in the world today, God's Holy Days reveal the great purpose and plan of God for mankind. This overview lesson summarizes the true meaning of God's days. Photos show members of the Worldwide Church of God keeping the Feast of Tabernacles at some of the dozens of festival sites around the world.

Ambassador College Photos

Why Christians Should Keep GOD'S HOLY DAYS

Why did God institute the WEEKLY Sabbath and, later, seven ANNUAL Sabbaths? What do they picture? Were GOD'S Holy Days for ancient Israel only, or are they also for the New Testament Church of God?

GOD created mankind for a stupendous, awe-inspiring purpose! That incredible purpose was first revealed when man was created. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

Your Bible here reveals that God is reproducing Himself through man. God made us for the purpose of fashioning and molding us into His *character* "image"—ultimately to be born as spirit-composed members of His universe-ruling Family!

But this creative work takes time. To accomplish this wonderful purpose in mankind, God has allotted 7,000 years—seven millennial "days" (II Pet. 3:8).

During the first 6,000 years since Adam's sin, God has allowed humanity to go its own way, do its own thing, govern itself by its own laws, as influenced by Satan. During the last 1,000 years, man will be ruled directly by Jesus Christ and the saints. Satan will then be completely restrained from broadcasting his evil attitudes to people.

The Bible reveals that God instituted for His Church certain days that picture His *purpose* for human life, and the *plan* by which He is accomplishing that purpose.

Weekly Sabbath Pictures God's Purpose

When God set apart and made holy the seventh-day Sabbath for man (Gen. 2:2-3; Mark 2:27), He gave mankind a day of rest that has great significance.

To His "Church in the wilderness"—the congregation of ancient Israel (Acts 7:38)—God revealed that Sabbath keeping would be a "sign" between Him and His people (Ex. 31:16-17). This sign is a

proof of *identity*. Keeping the weekly Sabbath reminds us that God is the Creator of all things, including man. It is also a major sign identifying the *true* people of God!

The Sabbath also pictures to God's people the soon-coming Millennium, when mankind will experience "rest" from war, poverty, fear and suffering. This 1,000-year period will be the seventh millennial "day"—the "Sabbath"—of God's 7,000-year "week." It is then that the knowledge of God's wonderful purpose will fill the earth (Isa. 11:9).

But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath has even further significance and meaning. It also looks *forward* to the completion of God's spiritual creation in man. The Sabbath is a *type* of the Christian's future *spiritual* "rest"—of being born into the divine Kingdom or Family of God! When born of God's Spirit, we will no longer be working against the weaknesses of our present mortal flesh. With spirit-composed bodies, we will never become tired or weary. We'll always be alert and active!

The Bible also reveals that God set apart and made *holy* certain other days of the year *in addition* to the weekly Sabbath.

Annual Holy Days Picture God's Master Plan

God has a Master Plan by which He is fulfilling His awesome purpose for mankind. And His Son, Jesus Christ, plays the central role in God's little-known plan for man.

God's plan is revealed by seven annual festivals. These annual observances give a step-by-step outline of how God is working out His Master Plan for man. Each vividly pictures a great event in God's

plan. It was not until after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt that God revealed the rest of His annual festivals.

As God made the weekly Sabbath for man *when* man was made, so He gave His people seven annual festivals, with their annual Holy Days (Sabbaths), *when* He established the Church (or congregation of Israel) in the wilderness. But Israel, under the covenant made at Sinai, had no promise of receiving the Holy Spirit, and therefore could not understand the spiritual meaning of these annual observances.

Regardless of carnal Israel's lack of understanding, God's annual Holy Days were ordained to be kept FOREVER! Christ kept them. The New Testament Church, founded by Jesus in A.D. 31, kept them. And God's Church keeps them today!

Just as the weekly Sabbath is a "sign" between God and His people, so are the annual Holy Days (Ex. 31:13). They are the "feasts of the LORD"—"my feasts," said God (Lev. 23:2, 4).

These feasts are, as the God of the Old Testament said in Leviticus 23:37-38, to be kept as holy convocations "*beside* the [weekly] sabbaths of the LORD"! And as we learned in Lesson 17, God's festivals, which are a part of God's Law, were not done away with when the Sinaitic Covenant ceased to be in force at Christ's death.

The whole story of God's marvelous plan is to be reenacted year after year by God's Spirit-begotten children—*spiritual Israel* today—through the keeping of God's Holy Days. The observance of these days reminds them of His great Master Plan and their part in it.

God's Spiritual Harvests

In the land settled by ancient Israel (later known as Palestine and now occupied by the modern state of Israel), there is a small spring grain harvest followed by a much larger late summer and autumn harvest. These yearly agricultural harvests are symbolic of God's *spiritual* "harvests" of mankind!

Today, we can understand from the teachings of Christ and the apostles that God intends the spring festivals to illustrate that all those He has called to become His Spirit-begotten children *before* Christ's Second Coming are only the "firstfruits" harvest (Jas. 1:18)—only the relatively *small beginning* of His spiritual harvest of individuals into His divine Family.

The festivals of the much larger autumn harvest season picture God's calling of thousands of millions of humanity to salvation and Sonship in His glorious Family *after* Christ's return.

In Leviticus 23, we find a summary of these

HARVESTTIME—God used the small spring grain harvest and the large late summer and autumn harvest of the Promised Land to picture His *spiritual harvests* of humans into His divine Family. Shown is an ancient method of threshing grain in the village of Naim in lower Galilee.



P. Gross

annual festivals. The first three, beginning with the Passover, are *memorials* of the first part of God's Master Plan. They picture the firstfruits of Christ's labors. The last four festivals look *forward* to the future and show *how* and *when* God will reap the great autumn harvest of people into His Family!

Holy Days Preserved for God's Church

The ancient Israelites, in general, did not understand God's great purpose for mankind. Nor did they understand the spiritual significance of the steps within God's Master Plan as pictured by His annual Holy Days. God did not reveal this spiritual understanding to them (Eph. 3:4-5) because it was not yet His time to give them His Holy Spirit.

Then why did Christ give God's Law and Holy Days to ancient Israel?

The Bible tells us that the "oracles"—the Old Testament Scriptures, which include the knowledge of God's weekly Sabbath, annual Sabbaths and festivals, and God's true calendar—were given to Israel to be passed on from generation to generation. The Israelites, as we read in Acts 7:38, "received the lively oracles *to give unto us* [New Testament Christians]."

But more than seven centuries later, the house of Israel went into Assyrian captivity, losing their identity and their knowledge of God. They did not preserve the Hebrew or Old Testament Scriptures nor God's calendar for Christians today.

Then who did?

The Jews!

The house of Judah—the Jews—which became separated from the nation Israel after the death of

Solomon, went into Babylonian captivity during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar about 120 years later. But Judah *retained* the knowledge of her identity and her God.

Recognizing the fact that they had gone into Babylonian captivity for breaking the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17-18), the Jews became *overly* strict in its observance. Even though they lacked spiritual understanding, they faithfully retained the knowledge of the true Sabbath, and preserved the Old Testament Scriptures and the true calendar.

Notice what Paul, under inspiration of God, asks: "What advantage then hath the Jew?" Then he answers in part: "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2).

God used the Jews to preserve the Hebrew or Old Testament Scriptures, the weekly Sabbath and the calendar by which we may know exactly when to keep God's Holy Days each year. Of all the tribes of Israel, God entrusted the Jews to be the carriers of this revealed knowledge for the New Testament Spirit-begotten Church!

All of God's festivals are listed together in Leviticus 23, starting with the seventh-day Sabbath, a weekly festival. Lessons 24 through 31 will cover these important festivals thoroughly, beginning with the weekly Sabbath. An entire lesson will be devoted to each. The vital details of God's Master Plan for fulfilling His great purpose in man will unfold for you in the coming months!

This lesson will present a brief **OVERVIEW** of each of God's Holy Days, focusing on their symbolic meaning and specific relevance to Christians today. Let's begin to understand the tremendous meaning of these "feasts of the LORD"!

LESSON 23

God's Seventh-day Sabbath

As we have learned in previous lessons, God's plan calls for the restoration of His government on earth through His divine ruling Kingdom, composed of future Spirit-born members of His Family. God's government is based on His spiritual Law of love. It is love toward God and love toward fellowman. God's love is further magnified by the Ten Commandments, the first four of which show us how to love God—how we are to worship Him.

The fourth commandment, like the other nine, is an absolutely essential part of God's Law. Keeping

God's seventh-day Sabbath holy is a sign that identifies those who worship the *Creator* God, and Him only. This is because the Sabbath is a *memorial* of God's creation. But the Sabbath also looks *forward* to the Millennium and the *completion* of God's spiritual creation in man.

Let's begin to understand the great meaning involved in keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

1. On which day of creation week did God rest? Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:11. Did God rest because He was tired from all the work He had done during the previous six days? Isa. 40:28.

COMMENT: God is composed of spirit and never

becomes tired, as physical human beings do. Therefore He had no reason to rest except that by resting, God “made” the Sabbath and set an example for humans to follow.

2. Who in the God Family made that very first Sabbath? Col. 1:13-16; Mark 2:27-28.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath because He made it! As we have proved in our previous studies, He was the Lord of the Old Testament and the actual Creator of all things.

By ceasing to work on the seventh day of creation week, Christ set apart that 24-hour period and every seventh day afterward for a special and holy use. (The Sabbath begins at sunset, in the evening, at the close of the sixth day, and ends at sunset, in the evening, at the close of the seventh day. See Leviticus 23:32 for an example of when God begins and ends days.)

3. For whom did Jesus say the Sabbath was made? Mark 2:27. Who would that include? Exodus 20:8-10, especially verse 10.

COMMENT: “The sabbath was made for man,” declared Jesus. Every seventh day from creation was set apart by God as time to be specially observed by mankind. The Sabbath was to benefit *all* who would ever live, if they kept it as God intended.

4. How did Christ intend the Sabbath to benefit mankind? Deut. 5:14. (Notice the word *rest*.)

COMMENT: The word *Sabbath* means “rest” in Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was written. Physical rest and mental relaxation after a busy week are obvious reasons for keeping the Sabbath. God knew humans would need periodic rest and change from work.

But the purpose for keeping God’s Sabbath goes far beyond merely resting on it. The seventh-day Sabbath has to do with God’s great *purpose* for creating mankind!

Man desperately needs this time each week in which to have *close spiritual contact* with God. The Sabbath gives us time to think more about God, to pray to Him, to worship Him (both in private and in fellowship with others) and to study the Bible to understand more about God’s awesome purpose for our lives and how to achieve it.

5. Was the observance of the Sabbath day to be a special sign of identification between God and His people? Ex. 31:13, 16-17. Did God also make Sabbath observance a *separate covenant* with His people? Verse 16. Was it to be a perpetual covenant, binding *forever*? Verses 16-17.

COMMENT: So that the ancient Israelites would especially remember that the eternal God is Creator, Sustainer and Supreme Ruler over all His

creation, God singled out Sabbath observance as the one great sign by which they would always be reminded that *He* is the Creator, and that *they* were His chosen people. It was the one commandment that would make Israel especially stand out from all other nations.

So God *doubly* commanded Sabbath observance by making it a *separate* covenant, or agreement, with His people Israel. (The Sabbath was already one of the Ten Commandments God had given them earlier.) It was to be an *everlasting* covenant—a *sign* that would identify the people of God of all generations, including “spiritual Israel” today—Spirit-begotten members of God’s New Testament Church. Notice further:

6. Does the Bible plainly reveal that a real Christian is one who has become a *spiritual* Israelite—one of Abraham’s “seed” through Jesus Christ? Gal. 3:28-29; Rom. 4:16.

COMMENT: God made the special Sabbath covenant with Abraham’s physical descendants. It was to be obeyed throughout their generations. Today, all Spirit-begotten Christians have become Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants and therefore keep the Sabbath!

The Sabbath is a reminder of our Creator, who not only created the universe, but who is also creating His holy, righteous character in Spirit-begotten Christians—character that will endure forever when they are born into His divine Family! Thus the Sabbath *reminds* us every week of the Creator God and His wonderful purpose for mankind.

7. Did Jesus Christ keep the Sabbath? Luke 4:16, 31.

COMMENT: Jesus regularly attended religious services on the Sabbath day. He obeyed His *own command* to meet for worship services every Sabbath (Lev. 23:3). This is the day He would naturally observe, because He is the One who made the Sabbath and ordained that it be kept holy!

8. Was it also the Apostle Paul’s custom to keep the Sabbath? Acts 17:1-2. Is there other evidence that the early New Testament Church observed the Sabbath? Acts 13:13-16, 42, 44; 18:1, 4.

COMMENT: There is no question that the early New Testament Church of God observed the seventh-day Sabbath. Those who are striving to obey God today will also be keeping the same day Jesus, Paul and the entire early Church kept.

9. What is God’s warning to us in Hebrews 3:8-12, 17-19? (Notice the word *rest* in verses 11 and 18.) Was rebellion, especially Sabbath breaking, the reason God did not allow an entire generation of Israelites to enter His “rest”? Ezek. 20:12-13, 15-16.



GOD'S CREATION—God's Spirit-begotten children are reminded every week that God is the Creator by keeping His seventh-day Sabbath holy.

COMMENT: The land of Canaan—the promised “rest” Israel finally entered (Josh. 1:13)—is referred to in the Bible as a type of the Christian's *spiritual* “rest”—of being born into the Kingdom or Family of God and living forever.

10. If we believe and obey God, will we enter God's “rest”—eternal life in His Kingdom? Hebrews 4:3, first nine words, and verse 11.

COMMENT: The equation is clear: Belief in God equals active obedience. Those who really believe God will be *keeping His Sabbath!*

God's Sabbath should not be treated lightly or forgotten. We are commanded to “Remember the sabbath day” (Ex. 20:8) because it is a memorial of God's restoration of the earth and the creation of man. And the Sabbath pictures the coming eternal “rest” that true Christians will enter when born into the Family of God as spirit-composed children of God. They will then be *free* of all the physical weaknesses and limitations of this mortal life.

11. Did God command the entire nation of Israel to meet together (a “convocation”) on the weekly Sabbath? Lev. 23:3. What are New Testament Christians admonished regarding the assembling of themselves? Heb. 10:25.

COMMENT: God's people today attend weekly Sabbath services of the Worldwide Church of God in more than 50 nations around the world. Every

Sabbath, they meet together to receive spiritual instruction from the Bible, taught by the ministry of God's Church (Eph. 4:11-13).

God's people *rejoice* in His Sabbath and enjoy fellowshiping with each other on this day. They are learning what a *great blessing* it is to keep God's Sabbath holy—the day that reminds us of the Creator God and His stupendous *purpose* for mankind!

The Passover

Most Bible commentators and scholars agree that the many passing references to God's annual festivals in the New Testament indicate that their observance in the early Church was known, accepted—even *taken for granted*. More importantly, Christ and the Church of God *customarily* kept the annual festivals: “In the early Christian church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention” (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 628).

However, it is obvious from a study of the New Testament that God's annual festivals took on a new significance in the apostolic Church of God. Jesus' teaching and example gave new understanding about the meaning of these days and how they are to be observed.

Notice what *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* says about the early New Testament Church of God keeping the biblical festivals in a new and different way: “The sanctity of special times [such as Easter and Christmas] was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians . . . [who] *continued* to observe the Jewish festivals [of Leviticus 23], though *in a new spirit*, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed” (vol. 8, p. 828, 11th edition, emphasis ours).

1. Who does the Bible say originated these annual festivals, besides the weekly festival of the Sabbath? Lev. 23:1-4. Did God specifically state that His annual feasts were to be observed *in addition* to the weekly Sabbath? Verses 37-38.

COMMENT: Notice that these are *not* the “feasts of the Jews” or “feasts of Moses,” as some have thought. They are *God's own feasts*, which God instituted and gave to His people to keep annually.

2. What is the first festival to be observed each year? Lev. 23:5. When did God institute the first Passover? Read and summarize Exodus 12:1-14, 21-27.

COMMENT: The Passover, the first of God's commanded annual festivals, pictures the beginning—

the very first step—in God’s great Master Plan of salvation for mankind.

The Passover was to be a yearly reminder of God’s intervention in delivering the Israelites’ firstborn from death. It also pictured, in advance, the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, “our passover” lamb (I Cor. 5:7; I Pet. 1:18-19), for the sins of mankind. The sparing of the Israelites’ firstborn from the death angel through the shed blood of lambs on that first Passover is a symbolic *type* of our being spared today from the eternal penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23) through Christ’s sacrifice.

After Jesus’ death, the Passover, celebrated with the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine, became a yearly memorial of His sacrifice, for Jesus became the *reality* that the Passover lamb had foreshadowed.

3. Did God command, *before* Sinai, that the Passover be kept forever? Ex. 12:14, 24. Did Jesus Christ observe the Passover? John 2:13, 23.

COMMENT: Jesus kept the annual festivals. He, as the God of the Old Testament, was the One who originally gave them to Israel!

4. Did Jesus institute the New Testament Passover, with His 12 disciples present, on the night before He was crucified? Matt. 26:17-20. What was one *new* command He gave them regarding the observance of the Passover? John 13:1-5, 14-15.

5. Did Peter, at first, refuse to allow Jesus to wash his feet? Verses 6-8. Could Peter have any relationship with Jesus unless he allowed Him to wash his feet? Verse 8. Why did Jesus institute this new observance of foot washing during His last Passover meal? Verses 12-16.

COMMENT: Open-toed sandals were the customary footwear of Jesus’ time, and so the feet would become dusty. Foot washing, upon entering a home, was a menial task that only servants performed.

By washing their feet, Jesus was illustrating to His disciples that He had come to earth to *serve* mankind. Shortly afterward, He proved the extent of His extreme service to this world when He gave His very *life* for the sins of all mankind. Foot washing depicts the attitude of *humility* and *service* to others that Christ desires every Christian to have.

6. Did Jesus plainly command His disciples to wash one another’s feet? John 13:14-15. Were they to teach the world to do likewise? Matt. 28:19-20. Are those who obey Christ’s words by participating in this meaningful ceremony promised a special blessing? John 13:17; 14:23.

7. What completely *new way* of observing the Passover did Jesus institute shortly before His death? Matt. 26:26-29. What command did He give

the disciples regarding this new manner of keeping the Passover? Luke 22:19-20. Were they to teach this to the world? Matt. 28:19-20.

COMMENT: Jesus did not abolish the Passover—He merely changed the *symbols* used. Instead of annually shedding the blood of a lamb and eating its roasted body, we are now to use unleavened bread and wine.

The New Testament Passover is to be kept as an *annual memorial* of Christ’s death. It reaffirms year by year “till he come” (I Cor. 11:26) the true Christian’s faith in the blood of “Christ our passover” (I Cor. 5:7) for the remission of sins, as symbolized by the drinking of wine.

Eating the broken bread symbolizes our faith in the body of Christ, broken open for our physical healing. Jesus Christ allowed His body to be ripped open in dozens of places by scourging until He could not even be recognized! He suffered this torture so we, through faith in His broken body for us, may have the forgiveness of our *physical* sins—the healing of our bodies when we are sick (Isa. 53:5; I Pet. 2:24; Ps. 103:2-3; Jas. 5:14-15)—in addition to the forgiveness of our *spiritual* sins through His shed blood. And so the broken unleavened bread is a reminder to us that it is by “his *stripes* we are healed.”

As Christ Himself commanded, true Christians today observe the Passover on the eve of the day of His suffering and death—on the 14th day of the first month of *God’s* calendar, in the evening, after the beginning of the day.

(The exact date for the Passover, and all of God’s annual festivals, varies from year to year according to the Roman calendar. The correct dates for all the festivals over the next several years are listed in *God’s Sacred Calendar*, which you may request by sending in the literature request coupon included with this lesson.)

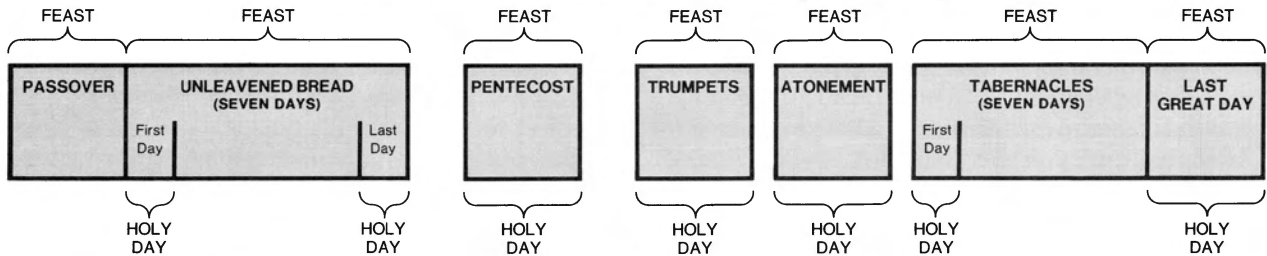
8. Did the Apostle Paul teach New Testament Christians to keep the Passover by partaking of the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine, as Jesus had done and commanded? I Cor. 5:7-8; 11:23-26.

COMMENT: The Church Jesus built kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread—not Easter. (“Easter” in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version is a flagrant mistranslation of the Greek word *pascha*. It should be rendered “passover,” as it is in all modern translations.)

9. Will the Passover be kept by Christ and others after He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth? Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:15-16. In the meantime, was the Passover to be kept as a *memorial* of Christ’s death? Review I Corinthians 11:25-26.

COMMENT: Jesus commanded His disciples to

GOD'S ANNUAL FESTIVALS (LEV. 23)



Ambassador College Art

keep the Passover in remembrance of Him until He returns. The apostles did keep it, and today, God's true Church still keeps the Passover!

Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Passover, the first of God's commanded annual festivals, pictures the beginning, the very first step, in God's great Master Plan of salvation for mankind. It was Jesus Christ, "our passover" (I Cor. 5:7), who suffered and died for our sins. But accepting Christ's sacrifice to pay for our sins is not enough.

Once we have repented of our sins and been forgiven by God, we must strive to *forsake sin completely*. We must come out of this world's ways of sin (Rev. 18:4)—just as Israel left Egypt, a type of sin (Heb. 11:25-26). We must be striving to put *all sin* away from us. That is *our* part in God's Master Plan.

To help keep us in the knowledge of the *second step* in God's plan, Christ gave His Church the second annual feast. The observance of this feast impresses upon us that we must strive not to return to the sins Jesus paid for with His shed blood. Let's understand.

1. What feast did God command the Israelites to keep immediately after the Passover? Ex. 12:17; Lev. 23:6. Were they to keep it just this one time? Ex. 12:17; 13:10.

COMMENT: Notice that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was given by God *before* the people reached Mt. Sinai—before they even left the land of Egypt. It is also to be kept by all their succeeding generations—*forever!*

2. For how many days is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to continue? Ex. 12:15; 34:18; Num. 28:16-17; Deut. 16:3-4. Were the first and seventh days set apart as *Holy Days*—days on which the people were to assemble themselves, much the same as they would on a weekly Sabbath day? Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:3, 7-8.

COMMENT: The first month of the Hebrew calen-

dar, which God inspired the Jews to preserve for New Testament Christians, was called Abib or, later, Nisan. It falls sometime during the months of March and April of the Roman calendar today. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th of Abib, the day after the Passover. It continues for seven days until the 21st of Abib. Both the 15th and the 21st are special Sabbaths—annual "holy convocations"—days of rest and worship of God.

At this point it would be well to distinguish between God's annual festivals or feasts, and His annual Holy Days or Sabbaths. God's Master Plan includes *seven* annual festivals. Two of these, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles, are seven days long. There are also *seven* annual Holy Days, which are Sabbaths of rest from regular work. Each of these Holy Days occurs on, or during, a festival (the Feast of Unleavened Bread has two). But the Passover, the first of the festivals, is *not* a Holy Day or Sabbath. (See the above chart.)

3. Were the Israelites to put *all* leaven and leavened food out of their homes and property, and keep it out during the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Ex. 12:15-19; 13:7.

COMMENT: A leavening agent is any substance used to cause dough to rise by fermentation. Yeast, baking soda and baking powder are leavening agents.

4. Is leaven clearly a symbol for sin? Matt. 16:6, 11-12; Luke 12:1; I Cor. 5:8.

COMMENT: Leaven is often referred to in the Bible as a type of sin. Leaven puffs up—and so does sin. *Unleavened* bread is a flat bread that contains no leavening agent, and therefore typifies the absence of sin. And since seven is God's special number signifying completion and perfection, the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread remind us that God wants His people to strive to put sin completely out of their lives.

5. Does God specifically command His people to eat unleavened bread during this festival? Ex. 12:15, 19-20; Lev. 23:6.

COMMENT: The Israelites were not merely to remove all leavening and leavened foods from their property. That would have only symbolized putting away sin. They were commanded to *eat* unleavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This act of eating unleavened bread symbolizes the opposite of sin—*active obedience* to God!

6. Upon repentance and baptism, Christ's sacrifice blots out all of one's past sins. When Paul asked if we should continue in sin, what did he answer? Rom. 6:15-16. What was his apostolic command? Verses 11-13.

COMMENT: Christ died so that we would not have to pay the penalty of eternal death (Rom. 6:23). After repentance and baptism, God expects us to strive to *obey* His Law—to "unleaven" our lives. God does not want us to continue in sin, for Christ is not the minister of sin (Gal. 2:17).

7. Did Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, say New Testament Christians should keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread? I Cor. 5:8.

8. What did Paul say that clearly shows the Church of God at Corinth was, at the time he wrote, keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Verse 7. Notice the words "as ye are unleavened."

COMMENT: The Apostle Paul was telling the Corinthian church members to put out spiritual leaven, just as they had already put out all physical leaven in preparation for this festival. They were to keep the Feast not only with unleavened bread, but also with the spiritually "unleavened" attitude of sincerity and truth.

9. Does God want Christians to forsake this world's way of sin? Rev. 18:4. Are we to continually *strive*—to expend effort and energy—to put sin out of our lives as it crops up? Heb. 12:1, 4.

COMMENT: If we are to become Spirit-born members of God's Family, we must prove that we will obey God here and now by striving to get the *spiritual* leaven of sin out of our lives and keep it out! This is *our part* in God's great Master Plan.

Hence, every spring the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread specially reminds Spirit-begotten Christians of their continual need to keep God's commandments. It is a time when they symbolically renew their resolve to live in harmony with God's Law—to *rededicate* their lives to continual spiritual growth and overcoming.

Pentecost—Feast of Firstfruits

God knows that to successfully put sin out of our lives and keep it out, our own human willpower and abilities are not enough. We need the spiritual

power of God's *Holy Spirit* to help us keep God's spiritual Law.

This is the *third step* in God's Master Plan, pictured by the third annual festival, the day of Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Firstfruits.

1. What were God's instructions regarding this festival? Lev. 23:15-17, 20. Was this feast a Holy Day, or Sabbath of rest, on which the people were to assemble? Verse 21. Was it to be kept by God's people every year forever? Same verse.

COMMENT: At this point we need to understand the symbolism of a ceremony associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and how it ties in with the third annual festival. The meaning of this ceremony is important, although it no longer occurs since the Romans destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70.

2. What kind of offering had to be presented to God before the spring harvest could begin? Verses 9-11, 14.

COMMENT: As explained in the introduction of this lesson, God established His festivals in conjunction with the two annual agricultural harvests in the land of Palestine. God uses these harvests as a pattern for the two *spiritual* "harvests" of His great Master Plan.

The physical harvests help us understand that God is not dealing with the vast majority of the world today. God is calling only a very *few* into His Church before Christ's Second Coming. God intends the spring festivals to illustrate to His Church yearly that His Spirit-begotten children are the "firstfruits" of salvation (Jas. 1:18)—the relatively *small beginning* of His spiritual harvest of mankind into His divine Family.

The spring harvest began in the following manner: On the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of newly cut barley, cut the night before, was prepared and brought to the priest, who waved it in the air to be accepted by God. This was called the "wavesheaf offering" and represented the *first* of the firstfruits harvest.

Once the wavesheaf was offered, the harvest could begin. The spring harvest ended by the time of the Feast of Firstfruits, 50 days later. (The New Testament name for this festival, Pentecost, literally means "fiftieth [day].") The people gathered on this annual Sabbath to give God thanks for the firstfruits of the year's crops He had given them. Now let's see the interesting connection between the wavesheaf offering and Jesus Christ.

3. Who was the first to be resurrected from the

dead into God's Family? Acts 26:23. Was He therefore the *first* of the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest? I Cor. 15:20, 23; Col. 1:18. Therefore, are Spirit-begotten Christians clearly the firstfruits of God's great Master Plan? Jas. 1:18; Rom. 8:23.

4. After Christ was resurrected from the dead, did He have to ascend to His Father in heaven? John 20:17. On that same day after returning from heaven, could His disciples then touch Him? Compare Matthew 28:9 with John 20:19-20, 27-28.

COMMENT: This was the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was on the very same morning that the wavesheaf was offered that Jesus Christ was accepted by His Father as the *spiritual* "wavesheaf" offering in heaven!

Christ therefore fulfilled the symbolism of the Old Testament wavesheaf offering. He was the first resurrected Son of God—the first harvested product of God's Master Plan. He became the *firstborn* Son of God—the first human to complete the process of salvation and be "born again."

But Jesus could not have become the captain of our salvation and our elder brother without possessing an all-important ingredient from God—something we all must have if we are to be born again as He was.

5. Could Jesus do any spiritual works, including obedience to God, with just His human strength? John 5:30; 8:28. Where did He get the necessary power? John 14:10, last part.

COMMENT: The Father "dwelt" in Jesus through the Holy Spirit!

6. Did Christ promise the same spiritual help to His disciples? John 14:16. What is the "Comforter"? Verse 26.

7. On what day did the disciples actually receive God's Holy Spirit? Acts 2:1-4. Did they thus become members of God's spiritual Church? I Cor. 12:12-14.

COMMENT: Fifty days after Christ was accepted in heaven, the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples just as Jesus had promised. It was on the day of Pentecost that God sent His Spirit to *begin* His Church—to beget and strengthen the firstfruits He was beginning to call into His Church, symbolically represented by the two "wave loaves" mentioned in Leviticus 23:17, 20.

The New Testament festival of Pentecost is now a *memorial* that commemorates the founding of the New Testament Church of God through the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It was on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 that the initial *firstfruits* of

God's spiritual harvest began to be prepared by His Spirit for "reaping" into God's divine Family.

Feast of Trumpets

But the firstfruits cannot be reaped into God's Family unless they are "born again" (John 3:3-8)—resurrected and changed into spirit. That will not occur until Jesus Christ comes again, which brings us to the *fourth step* in God's Master Plan.

The Feast of Trumpets portrays a pivotal event in God's plan. This festival not only pictures the coming of Christ to resurrect and change the firstfruits, it also pictures the terrible time of world war just ahead and the intervention of Jesus Christ to save humanity from total annihilation, as well as to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Let's understand exactly how this festival fits into God's great Master Plan.

1. When is the fourth annual festival to be observed? Lev. 23:23-25. Is this another annual Sabbath of rest from one's regular work? Verses 24-25. Are God's people commanded to meet together before Him on this Holy Day? Verse 24.

COMMENT: The number *seven* in God's plan signifies completion and perfection. The seventh month of God's calendar contains the final four festivals, picturing the completion of God's Master Plan for mankind. The festival that occurs on the first day of this month marks the beginning of the final events in God's plan.

2. Was this festival to be a memorial of blowing of trumpets? Verse 24.

COMMENT: It is from this ceremony that the Feast of Trumpets draws its name. There is a great deal of symbolic meaning tied in with the blowing of these trumpets—especially with regard to the end time in which we're living.

Trumpets were blown to announce God's festivals, as well as to call God's people to assembly. Trumpets were also used as an alarm of invading armies and impending warfare. This terrifying sound filled the people of ancient Israel with fear, because they knew the horror of war was imminent! It is this warning of *war* that sets apart the Feast of Trumpets from God's other festivals.

3. When did Jesus say that God's coming Kingdom would be established—wouldn't it be in a time of world war? Matt. 24:3, 6-8; Luke 21:31. Would man then have the power to destroy all human life from the face of the earth? Matt. 24:21-22.

4. What does the book of Revelation say regarding the blowing of supernatural trumpets shortly before the return of Jesus Christ? Rev. 8:1-2, 6.

COMMENT: The seventh seal that covered the scroll (Rev. 5:1), when opened, disclosed seven angels with seven trumpets representing seven consecutive colossal world events. These are to be physical punishments from God to warn the nations not to go further into national and personal sins.

The last three trumpet plagues (also called “woes”) specifically picture three phases of catastrophic world war. At the third, mankind will be saved from extinction by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

5. Will those who turn to God be protected from these trumpet plagues? Rev. 3:10; 7:2-3; 12:14. Is it for the sake of the “elect” that Christ will intervene in world affairs to cut short the time of great trouble and rescue mankind from nuclear annihilation? Matt. 24:22.

COMMENT: The elect of God are the *firstfruits* of His great Master Plan. They are the ones God has called out of this world to be the “firstfruits harvest” of the divine Family He is creating.

6. Did Jesus promise to send His angels to gather together His elect at the blast of a great trumpet? Verses 30-31. Is the sounding of this trumpet the time of the resurrection of the dead in Christ? I Thess. 4:16-17; I Cor. 15:51-52; Rev. 11:15-18. Is this trumpet the seventh and *final* one of the seven introduced in Revelation 8? I Cor. 15:52.

COMMENT: At the sound of the seventh trumpet, announcing the return of Jesus Christ, the firstfruits of God’s plan will be resurrected and changed—*born* as immortal spirit beings into the Family of God! God will then have reaped the smaller spiritual harvest of individuals into His Family. They will then begin to help Christ rule the earth (Rev. 20:6) and reap the much greater spiritual harvest during and after the Millennium. The last three festivals picture the details of how this will be accomplished.

Day of Atonement

What about Satan? What happens to him after Christ returns?

The *fifth step* in God’s Master Plan, the Day of Atonement, reveals the answer. It pictures Christ deposing Satan the devil from his present position as world ruler (II Cor. 4:4) and Satan’s removal to a place completely away from mankind. He will be bound for 1,000 years, no longer able to deceive the nations and influence man to sin.

After Satan’s imprisonment, the rest of humanity will be reconciled—made *at one*—with God. Let’s understand the meaning in the symbolism of this unique fifth festival of God.

1. What annual Sabbath follows only nine days after the Feast of Trumpets? Lev. 23:27; 16:29-31. Are God’s people commanded to assemble before Him on this day? Lev. 23:27.

2. How are we to observe the Day of Atonement? Verse 32. How does one “afflict” his body on this day? Isa. 58:3; Ezra 8:21.

COMMENT: The Day of Atonement is perhaps the most unusual Holy Day, as far as what God expects us to do. It is the one day of the year on which God commands us to *fast*—to abstain from food and water (Ex. 34:28; Esther 4:16)—for 24 hours, from sunset on the ninth day of the month to sunset on the tenth day (“from even [ing] unto even [ing]”—Lev. 23:32).

Fasting for spiritual reasons at any time of the year should be for the purpose of humbling ourselves—to draw *closer* to God and His righteous way (Isa. 58:6-11). Thus fasting on the Day of Atonement is a vivid reminder of the state of mind necessary for salvation—of humility, godly sorrow, earnestly seeking after God and His way—a condition to which this world will have been brought by the catastrophic events culminating in Jesus Christ’s return!

3. Does the Day of Atonement also differ from all other annual Holy Days in that no work of any kind is to be done on it? Num. 29:7; Lev. 16:29. Why is this day to be kept so solemnly? Lev. 23:28.

COMMENT: What does the word *atonement* mean? Webster says to *atone* means to “set at one.” To join in one—to form by uniting. This day actually symbolizes God and man being set *at one*: literally the Day of *At-one*-ment! But God and mankind cannot be fully at one—in full agreement—until Satan is restrained.

The 16th chapter of Leviticus details what God told the Levitical priesthood to do on the Day of Atonement. These rituals, although no longer performed, reveal another step in God’s plan to restore His government on earth and to bring saving knowledge to everyone.

4. Was the Aaronic high priest to make a special sin offering once a year to atone for all the sins of Israel? Lev. 16:32-34. Was this done on the Day of Atonement? Verses 29-30.

5. But before the high priest made this atonement, did he take two goats and then cast lots to determine who each would represent? Lev. 16:7-8. Was one to represent Christ, the LORD? Verse 8. Who was the other goat to represent? Same verse. Was he to be banished? Verse 10.

COMMENT: The English word “scapegoat” is not a correct translation of the Hebrew word God



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FORETASTE OF UTOPIA—The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the peaceful, happy World Tomorrow, when even the lion and lamb will dwell together in peace.

inspired. Most Bibles with marginal renderings show that the original word was *azazel*. *Azazel* among the early desert dwellers in the Sinai referred to Satan the devil!

6. Was the goat representing Christ offered as a sin offering for all the people? Verses 15-16. Were the sins of the people symbolically placed on the head of the other goat, representing Satan, which was then taken into the wilderness? Verses 21-22.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ atoned for our sins when He took the penalty of our sins (death—Rom. 6:23) upon Himself by sacrificing His sinless life for us. But the real *cause* of those sins is Satan the devil (John 8:42-44). In this Levitical ritual, all of man's Satan-inspired sins were symbolically put right back on Satan's head where they belong!

When Jesus Christ returns, the blame for mankind's sins will be placed squarely on Satan, who will then be *removed* from the presence of man. Notice the fulfillment of this part of God's Master Plan as revealed by Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation:

7. What will be done to Satan after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? Rev. 20:1-2. Where will he be cast? Verse 3. Also notice Revelation 18:1-2.

COMMENT: The "bottomless pit" or abyss was pictured by the desert wilderness where the *azazel* goat was banished. Satan and his demons will be

completely restrained by Christ from further leading mankind into sin. No longer will Satan be able to broadcast (Eph. 2:2) his evil attitudes.

At the devil's chaining by an angel of God (symbolically the "fit man" of Leviticus 16:21), the minds of men, formerly kept spiritually closed by Satan, will be opened by the Spirit of God!

For the first time, humanity will be able to understand God's Master Plan of salvation. People will then begin to realize their wrong ways and desire to repent and receive forgiveness of their sins. Only then will man become *at one* with Christ and the Father, as pictured by the Day of *Atonement*!

Feast of Tabernacles

1. What God-ordained festival occurs only five days after the Day of Atonement? Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13-15.

2. Does this seven-day feast begin with a Holy Day on which all ordinary work is forbidden, and on which people are to gather before God? Lev. 23:35. Did God command that this annual festival be kept forever? Verse 41.

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16; 34:22) because it celebrated the summer and early autumn harvest (Lev. 23:39).

3. What is the divinely set theme for the annual observance of the Feast of Tabernacles? Deut. 16:14-15. Does God say that good food should be eaten to increase one's joy and happiness during this feast? Deut. 14:26.

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles, picturing the *sixth step* in God's Master Plan, is a time of great rejoicing! For ancient Israel, it was a time of rejoicing because the abundant winter's store was taken in just before the Feast. But in the Millennium, which this feast pictures, the happiness, joy and prosperity portrayed by the Feast of Tabernacles will exist worldwide under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ. Universal adherence to God's way of life will make the World Tomorrow a literal *utopia*!

4. Are God's people to live in booths—temporary dwellings—during the Feast? Lev. 23:42.

COMMENT: A "tabernacle" or "booth" is a *temporary* dwelling. God commanded the ancient Israelites to live in temporary shelters made of tree branches (verse 40) while observing the Feast of Tabernacles. For God's people who attend the Feast of Tabernacles today, a tent, camper, motel or hotel room would certainly qualify as a temporary dwelling.

God intends the Feast of Tabernacles to sepa-

rate and free His people from the world. Living in temporary dwellings for an entire week—away from their everyday surroundings, jobs and most negative influences—God’s people enjoy a tiny *foretaste* of the universal freedom, joy and peace that will exist in the Millennium when Satan is gone and the Spirit of God is leading all of humanity (Joel 2:28, 32).

These are days of continuous, genuine Christian fellowship and just plain good fun! Tens of thousands of God’s people and their families gather at dozens of festival sites around the world. Christians at the Feast demonstrate now, by the way they live together in *harmony*, what today’s sin-filled, unhappy world will become like after Christ returns.

But just as the Feast of Tabernacles is a physical feast filled with rejoicing, it is also a *spiritual* feast of education and preparation. Members of God’s Church receive instruction from God’s ministers through inspiring sermons to help them further prepare to rule and teach with Christ during the Millennium.

5. After Jesus Christ subdues the warring nations at His return and establishes God’s government over the earth, will the nations begin to come to Him for instruction in God’s way of life? Mic. 4:1-2. Will the whole world finally come to understand God’s way to peace, happiness, abundant living and salvation? Isa. 11:9; Jer. 31:34.

COMMENT: Once Satan has been bound and the government of God set up, a 1,000-year golden age of world peace and prosperity will begin. Christ’s reeducation program for the entire world will bring about a new civilization based on God’s way of life—His Law of love—resulting in great physical and spiritual blessings.

6. But what will happen to those nations that at first refuse to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and thus refuse to be reeducated to God’s way? Zech. 14:16-17. And if they still won’t obey? Verses 18-19.

COMMENT: Christ will reeducate the people of the world *through His annual festivals*. The world will come to know that God’s Master Plan pictures the way to physical blessings and spiritual salvation. Those who stubbornly refuse to keep the Feast of Tabernacles will suffer from drought and plagues until they submit to God.

7. Is there to be any end to the increase of God’s government? Isa. 9:7.

COMMENT: World population will increase rapidly in the Millennium. Eventually thousands of millions will be spiritually converted! The great “autumn harvest” of humans will be gathered into the Kingdom of God—born again as divine members of the ruling Family of God during the Millennium.

By the end of the thousand years, the great Family of God will be ready for the final step in God’s Master Plan. Even greater joy and accomplishments lie ahead after the Millennium!

The Last Great Day

What about all those who have lived and died without ever being called of God (including, perhaps, most of your loved ones today)—who never had an opportunity to know and really understand God’s purpose and plan for mankind? Are they lost forever?

The answer is revealed in the meaning of the Last Great Day—the seventh and last of God’s annual festivals—the festival that pictures the *seventh* and *final step* in God’s great Master Plan.

1. Is it God’s will that all who have ever lived come to the knowledge of His plan of salvation? II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4.

COMMENT: In His loving concern for all mankind, God has planned for *everyone* who has ever lived to receive an opportunity for salvation and Sonship in His Family, just as the already spiritually called and begotten children of God have been given their opportunity.

Just as the week is not complete without the seventh-day Sabbath, God’s Master Plan is not complete without His seventh and final annual festival.

The number seven in the Bible signifies completion and perfection. This seventh festival of God reveals the perfection of God’s great Master Plan—that God’s love and mercy toward mankind will extend *beyond* the Millennium.

2. Was there an *eighth day* of worship immediately following the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles? Lev. 23:36, 39.

COMMENT: The last annual Sabbath or Holy Day is observed immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. But because of its close proximity to this seven-day Feast, it was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and was called the “eighth day.” It came to be known among Christians as “the *last day*, that *great day* of the feast” (John 7:37). The Last Great Day is clearly a *separate* festival and Holy Day.

The Last Great Day pictures the completion of God’s Master Plan. That, as we learned in Lesson 21, is the Great White Throne Judgment period after the Millennium. Revelation 20:5 shows that a *second* resurrection will occur after the Millennium, and verses 11-12 reveal that those in this resurrection to *mortal* life, who died never having been called to participate in God’s plan of salva-

tion, will then be given their opportunity to become members of God's divine ruling Family.

These individuals will be given enough time to learn to obey God, just as Spirit-begotten Christians have opportunity to do today. Those who continue to live God's way of life, developing the character of God, will be changed from mortality to immortality at the end of this period of judgment, which apparently will last 100 years (Isa. 65:20).

3. How did Jesus refer to this special "day" or period of judgment for these people who have yet to hear and understand the wonderful message of salvation? Matt. 11:20-24; 12:41-42.

COMMENT: Christ mentioned the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh in Jonah's time and finally the Queen of the south. All of these examples of people who lived in different generations are compared to those of Jesus' day, the vast majority of whom did not understand or believe Christ's message. Jesus tells us that they all will be resurrected with the generation that lived during His time!

Jesus gave enough examples of people living at widespread times to prove that most of humanity will be alive at the *same time* on this earth. There will be pre-Flood men and women, all 12 tribes of Israel, those who lived during the Middle Ages and the vast majority living now. Even babies and children who died untimely deaths will be resurrected then. They will all rise in the second resurrection because they had not been called by God during their first life.

The ancient peoples Jesus mentioned in Matthew 11 and 12 would have repented if He had personally come to them in their day. And they *will* repent when resurrected and given access to the Holy Spirit after the Millennium.

Your Bible shows that the vast majority of those who ever lived will finally be born into God's Family at the end of this coming period of judgment, pictured by the Last Great Day.

God's Master Plan of salvation for mankind will then be *complete*.

Then the spirit-composed members of God's great ruling Family can look forward to new heavens and a new earth—and to new and wonderful opportunities in ruling the *universe* under God our Father and Jesus Christ our elder brother!

Christ the Focus of God's Holy Days

Through the years, God's Church has grown in the understanding of the spiritual meaning of God's Holy Days. Unlike the days commonly observed by traditional Christianity today, God's

days reveal His great *purpose* for mankind and *how* He is accomplishing it.

In this overview lesson, we learned that Christ, our Creator, is fashioning us into God's spiritual character image to become members of His divine Kingdom, as pictured by the weekly Sabbath. We also learned that God's annual festivals not only teach us His Master Plan of salvation, they point us directly to our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is "our *passover*" (I Cor. 5:7). It is by "putting on" Christ that we put sin out of our lives (Rom. 13:13-14), as pictured by the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*.

Christ is the first of the "firstfruits," and it was 50 days after His resurrection that He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of *Pentecost*. The Holy Spirit was sent to spiritually beget those whom the Father would call, thus enabling them to obey His Law, successfully overcome sin in their lives and grow spiritually.

Christ will return to earth to intervene in world affairs (pictured by the *Feast of Trumpets*), resurrect His firstfruits, and rule as King of kings and Lord of lords, putting down the despotic rule of Satan, the archdeceiver, as portrayed by the *Day of Atonement*. With the influence of the devil and his demons gone, all mankind will have the opportunity to become "at one" with Christ through repentance, baptism and the receipt of God's Spirit.

Christ is coming to set up the government of God on earth, making it a veritable utopia—pictured by the *Feast of Tabernacles*. Thousands of millions will be Spirit-begotten and born into the Family of God during the Millennium.

Finally, Christ will make salvation available to everyone who ever lived, but never heard or understood the truth, in the last great step in God's plan—the *Last Great Day*, picturing the last judgment period.

God's Church understands and teaches the precious truth concerning His purpose and plan for mankind. Around the world, Spirit-begotten children of God faithfully observe His weekly Sabbath and annual Holy Days every year!

* * * * *

Remember that with the next lesson we will begin our *expanded* study of each of God's Holy Days. Lesson 24 will cover the seventh-day Sabbath in-depth. Not only will the points brought out in this lesson's brief study of the weekly Sabbath be covered in greater detail, we will also answer questions such as: How is the Sabbath a special "test" commandment? Has time been "lost"? Did God change the seventh-day Sabbath to another day? How can we make God's weekly Sabbath a spiritual blessing and delight?

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