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Feast-keepers who are vocal in their churches are being chastised and disfellowshipped while, at the same time, there are conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church which are

ARTICLES

Are Adventists moving to feast keeping?

Dale Ratzlaff with a Seventh-day Adventist minister

There has been a slow—some would say insidious—movement growing in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It has been fueled by the Messianic Movement in the Christian world. It started many years ago as a ripple, beginning with some independent groups, but the ripple is a growing wave, attracting increasing numbers of people within Adventism.

This movement has to do with keeping the feasts given to Israel. Mainline Seventh-day Adventists have held that the rituals of sacrifice and feast-keeping were done away with at the cross, but the Ten Commandments are still binding. Feast-keeping Seventh-day Adventists, however, believe that only the sacrifices came to an end at the death of Christ and that the feasts, the hundreds of statutes and judgments, including the Ten Commandments, must be kept today. In practice, though, they recognize there must be some exceptions. John Vandenburg writes in his book, *Holy History With the Commandments, Statutes and Judgments*,

Since the sacrificial system was fulfilled at the cross, there is no need to include the statutes of sacrifice; therefore, they have been eliminated except in such instances where eliminating them might cause the loss of the meaning of another statute. Those statutes that have to do with the church's execution of punitive judgment have also been eliminated. The state governments have assumed this right; therefore, such execution of physical punishment is left with the civil government. 1

John Vandenburg has mailed his book to large numbers of Adventist homes in North America. Twice a year he hosts one of the larger feast gatherings near Tera Bella, California, with 150 to 250 people attending. His camp meetings have attracted some well-known Adventists as speakers including Dr. Mike Casey, Alan Fine, Hugo Gambetta, Charles Morton, Jeff Peppinger, Samuel Pipim, David Pogge, Patricia Robertson, Mary Lou Stollenmaier, Ted Tesner, Stephen Wallace, and Lewis Walton.² There are many other feast camp meetings around the country, but many people who are unable to travel keep the feasts at home or in small groups.

Among these various groups there is a vast difference in belief. Some believe that all the hundreds of statutes must be kept, and others believe only selected ones apply. Then there are those who argue over the exact dates on which to keep each of the feasts. Some are very adamant in using the barley harvest to define the date for the beginning of "God's holy year". Quite a few Seventh-day Adventist "feast-keepers" are now proclaiming that the Sabbath must be kept according to the "new moons" calendar and boldly state that most Seventh-day Adventists are keeping the wrong day for Sabbath.

Others are making statements that, since they are living in the "antitypical day of Atonement," all intimate sexual relationships between husbands and wives must now stop until Jesus comes. This same idea is applied if one desires to be one of the hundred and forty-four thousand who will be pure to finish the work of preaching the gospel to the world.³

Then there are those who believe that they not only should observe the feasts, statutes, and judgments, but they should also dress and look like Jews, with the yarmulke, or skull cap, on the head, the prayer belt, black clothes for men, unshaved beard during holy days, and the wearing of the prayer shawl, among dozens of other Jewish dress customs. With so many differing practices going on, much confusion exists among the different feast-keeping groups.

Confusion among Adventist leaders on the feasts

Feast-keeping is becoming an issue within the Adventist church. Some church leaders are writing articles refuting the "keeping of the feasts." Before he died, Joe Crews wrote a little booklet against feast observance. Doug Bachelor, of Amazing Facts Ministry, has written a booklet and reportedly is producing a DVD showing that these feasts are no longer to be observed. Dennis Priebe has a website on the Internet against the keeping of the feasts.⁴ Several booklets have been written by different people in the church and circulated among the members to help them understand that feast-keeping is obsolete.

Feast-keepers who are vocal in their churches are being chastised and disfellowshipped while, at the same time, there are conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church which are encouraging participation in some of the Jewish beliefs in order to appeal to the many Jewish communities scattered in different parts of the U.S., and in some foreign countries. In 2004 an article in the *Adventist Review* stated, "It's encouraging to see that 12 new [Adventist] synagogues have recently been formed in North America. It's a precious experience to participate in a worship service that has its roots in a service similar to the type Jesus attended during His life on earth."

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, retired Adventist seminary professor, has written two books promoting the value of feast keeping today.⁵ In doing so, he uses Ellen White to support his conclusions including the following statements:

In her book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White devotes a whole chapter to "The Annual Feasts." Reflecting on their value for Israelites and Christians today, she writes: "Well would it be for the people of God at the present time to have a Feast of Tabernacles—a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to them. As the children of Israel celebrated the deliverance that God had wrought for their fathers, and His miraculous preservation of them during their journeying from Egypt, so should we gratefully call to mind the various ways He has devised for bringing us out from the world, and from the darkness of error, into the precious light of His grace and truth." In this statement Ellen White clearly recommends the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles by the church today.⁶

Bacchiocchi also states,

I came to realize that the continuity or discontinuity of the Feasts is determined not by their connection with the sacrificial system, but by the scope of their typology. If the Feasts had typified only the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent, then obviously their function would have terminated at the Cross. But, if the Feasts foreshadow also the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ at His second Advent, then their function continues in the Christian church, though with a new meaning and manner of observance.⁷

The celebration of the great saving acts of God commemorated by the annual Feasts can bring about worship renewal by making our worship experience God-centered rather than self-centered.

The redemptive acts of God are commemorated in the Bible weekly through the Sabbath and annually through the Feasts. The latter fulfilled three basic functions which are still relevant for Christians today. First, the Feasts commemorated the past mighty works of God. Second, they anticipated the future divine deliverance. Third, they motivated the people to live in the present obediently before a holy God. These functions are still relevant for Christians today.⁸

From the *Pacific Union Recorder*, September, 2007, we find this statement:

When Ruth Limbert, a Jewish Adventist from South America, called the Pacific Union Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department to ask about the possibility of having a Passover Seder in Los Angeles, little did she realize what would develop. More than 70 people met in a Los Angeles hotel for a catered Passover meal and celebration of the Festival of Freedom, with special guest leading the service—Pastor Richard Elofer from Israel.

Elofer urged the group to continue meeting at least once a month, possibly on Friday evenings. The PARL department followed up with leaders of the Southern California Conference and with Pastor Will McCall of the Canoga Park Church, and plans were developed for ongoing meetings. The first Friday evening program in May commemorated the holiday of Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks.

...The new group will be called Beth Ohavey Torah, which means "the house of those who love Torah." Torah refers to the five books of Moses, but also more generally to God's instruction.

...Seventh-day Adventists who attend will gain a deeper appreciation for their own faith and an increased understanding of Scripture, which is rooted in Jewish ideas and customs.

Bob Trefz, who publishes an independent newsletter called *Cherith Chronicles*, had this to say.

In Seventh-Day (sic) Adventism particularly, at every level now, from Jewish-Adventist scholars writing books, to Jewish-Adventist synagogues being planted at Andrews University and in the field, to Adventist youth being educated in Judaism at Jewish synagogues, to infiltrators coming to historic camp meetings advocating the feast days, wearing Rabbinic prayer shawls and praying to Yeshua, the battle is on.⁹

Most Seventh-day Adventists who oppose the feasts may not realize it, but their arguments fall on deaf ears of the feast-keepers for two reasons. First, there are Adventist leaders on both sides of the issue creating much confusion. Second, the feast-keepers can show from Scripture that one cannot separate the feasts, the hundreds of statutes, and the judgments from the Ten Commandments as they are all "The Law of the Lord". Feast-keeping, they would say, actually supports the concept of "keeping the commandments of God." Historically the Seventh-day Adventist church has held that of the 613 commandments in the Torah, only the Ten Commandments survived the cross. However, Adventism has no good biblical argument against the feast-keepers since the church has a strong emphasis on keeping the "commandments of God." The Ten Commandments are part of the whole law, or Torah—the one "Law of the Lord". Many believe that the Sabbath and the feasts stand or fall together. In fact Dr. Bacchiocchi makes the following supportive statement:

"What is true for the Sabbath is also true for the annual feasts. The weekly Sabbath and the annual feasts are grouped together in Leviticus 23 presumably because they both were *moadim*, that is, divinely "appointed times" with a prophetic significance. Terry Hulbert emphasizes this point, saying, "The reason for the introduction of the Sabbath [in Leviticus 23] was that both the feasts and the Sabbath were *moadim*. Both were appointed times. The feasts had been discussed elsewhere (e. g. Exodus 12 and Leviticus 16) and the Sabbath often had been mentioned before. But in Leviticus 23, they are specially and specifically treated as *moadim*. This phenomenon can only be explained as revealing a special characteristic common to both feasts and Sabbath. This characteristic is that, although each had real historical import for Israel, they also had real prophetic significance."¹⁰

Most Seventh-day Adventists who oppose the feasts may not realize it,

The feasts of the Torah—are they for the Church?

In this section our task is to determine if the feasts given to Israel should be celebrated by Christians today. At the outset we recognize that there are at least four possible answers.

One: the feasts should be kept by all Christians today. These feasts are designed to bring meaning to God's saving activities in the past and to prepare Christians for the future acts of God including the final judgment and second coming of Christ. They should be kept as part of the sanctified life in obedience to God's law, i.e. the Torah.

Two: Only Jewish Christians should keep the feasts given to Israel as part of their national heritage. Not only should they keep the seven feasts outlined in the Law of Moses, but they should also keep the feast of Purim in remembrance of the deliverance brought by Esther and the feast of Hanukkah in celebration of the cleansing of the sanctuary after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanies.

Three: Christians are not required to keep any of the feasts or other rituals of the old covenant but will receive an added blessing if they do.

Four: Christians are not required to keep any of the feasts or other rituals of the old covenant as these were designed to commemorate God's saving activities in connection with His covenant with ancient Israel—the old covenant. They can and should be *studied* by Christians today, but their required *observance* may lead to legalism and actually detract from the simple gospel of Christ.

In my study of the material written to support present day feast-keeping,¹¹ I have found many, if not most, of the writers read into a given feast a meaning that is not obvious in the Old Testament record itself. Sometimes these derived meanings rely on rabbinical interpretations that were added hundreds of years later. How much weight these added meanings should have is a matter of speculation. With few exceptions I have chosen to limit this study to the Scriptures themselves. What follows is not intended to be an in-depth study of the old covenant feasts. Rather, it is a summary of what I consider to be the salient points with supporting references in the footnotes.

The feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

As these two feasts are linked together both in their historical background and their time of celebration, we will consider them together. The origin of these celebrations is found in Exodus 11 and 12 which detail the instruction for these feasts in connection with God's act of delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage. I assume that most of our readers are familiar with these events; if not you may want to read Exodus 10 and 11 and note the many things that pointed forward to Christ. Most of the shadows and symbols, however, could only be rightly interpreted after the Christ event.¹²

In reading these two foundational chapters it becomes obvious that these feasts and rituals were for the members of the old covenant community *only*.

"Now this day [Passover] will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance... whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel... You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance... whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread" (Ex 12:14–20).

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; but every man's slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it (Ex. 12:43–45).

All four Gospels dedicate major emphasis to the last week of Jesus' life which was Passover week. It is clear that all the Gospels see the death of Christ in Passover imagery and thus give new meaning to the symbols associated with the Old Testament Passover. In so doing the Gospels see the Christ event as the true fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Consider the following:

- Jesus is designated as "the Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29, 36).
- Jesus is the "bread of life" or the "living bread" (Jn. 6:35, 48, 51).
- We are redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).
- Key elements in the Old Testament Passover were the flesh and blood of the lamb. Jesus draws these symbols to Himself. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:53–56).
- In the Old Testament the blood of the Lamb was applied to the doorposts with a branch of hyssop. On the cross Jesus was given sour wine with a branch of hyssop.
- John sees the fact that in Jesus' death no bones were broken as a fulfillment of the Old Testament instruction that no bones were to be broken in the Passover lamb (Jn. 19:36 cf. Ex. 12:46).

A careful reading of the Gospels indicates that Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover in accordance with the customs for its celebration. However, a central truth taught in the Gospels is that Jesus took the well-known Passover symbols of wine and bread and transformed them into the Lord's Supper. The Passover was only to be celebrated by the covenant community of Israel. If a foreigner wanted to join in this celebration he was only allowed to do so after he was circumcised.¹³ However, as the new covenant gospel was to go to all nations,¹⁴ a new ritual was needed that would separate it from the nationalistic Jewish laws. This ritual Jesus inaugurated at the Last Supper. Just as the Old Testament Passover had instructions as to why it should be celebrated and directions in how it should be done and remembered,¹⁵ so Jesus instructed the men who were the founders of the new covenant church. Note the emphasized words below.

"And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'" (Lk. 22:19, 20).

Years later Paul gave this instruction:

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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 He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

The Old Testament Passover looked back to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and dimly looked forward to the coming death of Christ.¹⁶ The Lord's Supper looks back to the death of True Lamb of God, who died for the sins of the whole world¹⁷ and looks forward to the Second Coming of Christ. The Lord's Supper is now the repeatable sign Christians of all nations are to celebrate in remembrance of Christ's death and foreshadowing His second coming.

Jesus said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine or "eat of it" until the kingdom of God comes.¹⁸ Based upon this statement, some teach that the Passover will be celebrated in heaven¹⁹ and therefore we should also celebrate it today. Paul makes it clear, however, that it is the Lord's Supper that looks forward to the Second Coming of Christ.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

This passage leads us to conclude that Jesus had reference to the Lord's Supper, not the Jewish Passover, when he said he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

There are several other references or allusions to the Passover in the New Testament²⁰ that some interpret to mean the New Testament church observed Passover; therefore, they say, so should we.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people (1 Cor. 5:6–9).

The context of this section falls under the heading "Immorality Rebuked" and details how one of the Corinthian "believers" had his father's wife. Apparently, the church was boasting about this sin, and in this context Paul says, "Clean out the old leaven..." meaning sin in the congregation. Some would take, "Therefore, let us celebrate the feast" as instruction that Christians are to continue to keep the Passover. Most, however, believe that Paul is here using the Old Testament Passover as an illustration to help the Corinthian church clean up its act.

Paul's marked use of this imagery at this time has led to the generally accepted conclusion that he wrote this letter shortly before the Jewish Passover season, so that his mind was naturally filled with this imagery....But it would be unsafe to conclude that the old Jewish festivals were still celebrated in the newly formed Christian congregations.²¹

Most likely Paul's use of, "Let us keep the feast", means let us live the Christian life in holy consecration to God.²²

Some have suggested that Paul may have kept Pentecost in Troas where he stayed seven days.²³

To use this verse to prove the Passover was to be kept in the young Gentile churches is at best a week assumption. The main point of the passage is that Paul and his associates gathered with this Gentile church on the first day of the week to celebrate the communion service. We must remember that *description* is not *prescription*. The fact that on several occasions in the New Testament Christians spoke in tongues does not mean that all are required to do so. Some of the Corinthians were apparently being baptized for the dead,²⁴ but this practice is never taught as Christian theology.

To make the celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread mandatory for the church today is contrary to the old covenant instruction that it was only for the nation of Israel, and it undermines the new covenant ordinance, the Lord's Supper.

The Feast of First Fruits

Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it (Lev. 23:10, 11).

The fulfillment of this feast is the resurrection of Christ who is said to be the first fruits of those who are asleep.²⁵ In harmony with the fulfillment of this feast, Christ was raised on the day after the Sabbath²⁶ on the first day of the week.²⁷

The term "first fruits" is variously used in the New Testament, but there is no hint that the Christian Church, especially the Gentile Church,²⁸ was to keep this feast.

Pentecost—the Feast of Weeks.

Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated 50 days after the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.²⁹ There is no mention of the celebration of this feast in the four Gospels, and its first occurrence in the New Testament is found in Acts 2 in connection with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Luke's custom is to include a time marker in reference to the events he records:³⁰ "When the day of Pentecost had come."³¹ Whether the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost because it was that day, or whether the Holy Spirit was poured out at that time because there were many pilgrims present in Jerusalem and it afforded an excellent opportunity for these people to hear the gospel is a matter of speculation. Probably both are true. Luke specifically records "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven"³² and then goes on to list some sixteen groups who were present. It is instructive to note that in Peter's Pentecost sermon there is no mention that the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was in anyway a fulfillment of the Old Testament day of Pentecost. Peter sees this event as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel.³³

**We must remember that
description is not**

By 270 A.D. the Jews held a common belief that the Torah was given at Sinai on the day of Pentecost.³⁴ This tradition may well be true, and if so, there is an interesting contrast between Sinai and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. When the law was given, Israel immediately fell into sin, and 3,000

of the people died.³⁵ When the Holy Spirit was given, 3,000 people repented, believed and were baptized into the church.³⁶

There are a few other isolated references to Pentecost after Acts 2.³⁷ The feasts then, as our holidays do now, often served to designate seasons of the year. That Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost fits in perfectly with his evangelistic model. First, there would again be people there from all parts of the Roman Empire, and second, he observed Jewish practices when to do so would give him an evangelistic advantage.³⁸ There is no evidence that the Gentile church was instructed to observe this feast.

The Feast of Trumpets

Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD" (Lev. 23:24, 25).

Every new moon in Israel began with a special celebration marked by blowing of trumpets.^{39, 40} This feast was a special new month celebration as it marked with certainty the beginning of the tenth month and thus the Day of Atonement.

Trumpets in the Old Testament signify many things: the beginning of months, when God spoke at Mt. Sinai,⁴¹ a call to battle or victory,⁴² a call to stop fighting,⁴³ a device to get attention,⁴⁴ a call of warning,⁴⁵ a call to worship⁴⁶ and more.

The Feast of Trumpets is not mentioned in the New Testament. However, trumpets are mentioned ten times. Three, perhaps four, of these are in connection with the second coming of Christ;⁴⁷ one refers to the Pharisees who sounded a trumpet before they put in their offering,⁴⁸ One refers back to Sinai,⁴⁹ and six are found in the Revelation with reference to something other than the second coming of Christ.⁵⁰

The Jewish Rabbis suggested that this feast should be identified with the creation of the world. Others taught that it represented a day when mankind would be judged.⁵¹ Many believe that the Feast of Trumpets points to the last-day judgment and/or the rapture. Even if this is so, there is no compelling data to suggest that this feast should be celebrated by the Christian church today. With the very limited information we have regarding the Feast of Trumpets and the plethora of meanings associated with this term, one should not be dogmatic in any modern-day application.

The Day of Atonement

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:26–18).

The term "Day of Atonement" is not mentioned in the New Testament. The ritual of the Day of Atonement as recorded in Leviticus 16 is filled with sin offerings.⁵² The purpose of the Day of Atonement was,

...to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year (Lev. 16:34).

The NT is filled with verses that clearly state that Christ's death and resurrection brought complete forgiveness of all sin.⁵³ Further, Scripture makes it clear that this atonement was a once for all event and applies Day of Atonement imagery to the death of Christ.⁵⁴

For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God (Rom. 6:10).

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices... because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself (Heb. 7:26, 27).

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here...He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; [Day of Atonement sacrifices] but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11, 12 NIV).

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10).

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, [Day of Atonement] make perfect those who draw near to worship...Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:1–10 NIV).

From the Scripture record it is abundantly clear that the death of Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Day of Atonement. Hebrews makes it clear that it was a once-for all event, completed, done.

In contrast to the scriptural references, however, Samuele Bacchiocchi states:

The Day of Atonement typifies Christ's final act of cleansing that will be accomplished at His coming when He will cleanse His people of their sins and will place all accountability on Satan (Azazel). The cleansing accomplished by Christ at His return makes it possible to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which foreshadows the rejoicing of the saints at the inauguration of a new life in the new earth.⁵⁵

I believe Bacchiocchi's statement above is a complete contradiction of the forgoing biblical record and seriously undermines the gospel. Near the end of his chapter on the Day of Atonement he sums up:

The promise of cleansing of the Day of Atonement has both a present and future phase. In the present, the Day of Atonement summons us to search our hearts and forsake our sinful ways by the power of Christ's blood which can purify our lives (Heb 9:14). **The moral cleansing we experience in the present reassures us of the future and final cleansing** from the presence and consciousness of

sin that will be accomplished on the antitypical Day of Atonement, when Christ "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Heb 9:28). (my emphasis)

Anytime we look to our experience for assurance of final cleansing we have departed from the New Testament gospel. Our righteousness is always and ever grounded in the righteousness of Christ and never in ourselves. As Paul so clearly states:

...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3:9).

It is my conviction that any attempt by the Christian church today to celebrate the Old Testament Day of Atonement undermines the completed work of Christ.

The Feast of Tabernacles:

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for seven days with a special 8th day ending⁵⁶ which many see as a separate (7th) feast.⁵⁷ This feast was a memorial of God's protection in the wilderness. Note that it was only for the "native-born" Israelite.

You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God (Lev. 23:42, 43).

This is the feast mentioned in John 7:37–39.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

In the celebration of this feast in New Testament times, the priest would fill a golden pitcher with water from the fountain of Siloah and pour it out with the wine from the drink offering into two perforated flat bowls.⁵⁸ It is clear that Jesus took the shadowy symbols of this ritual, drew them to Himself and transformed them by giving a new and expanded meaning that was not clear in the Old Testament shadow.

Are the feasts for today?

There are a number of things that one must consider in answer to the question above. I will summarize these as follows:

Study does not equal required celebration: Those who promote modern-day feast-keeping emphasize the importance of a more thorough understanding of the feasts. They picture all the feasts of Israel as shadows of the redemption of mankind. Whether or not this is true of all the feasts is a matter of opinion. We do know from Scripture that several of the feasts met their fulfillment in the Christ event. There is certainly nothing wrong with studying the Old Testament record to see how these shadows pointed forward to Christ. This is a good exercise that should be encouraged as it will strengthen faith in the Scriptures. From our Christian perspective we can look back and see that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

Feasts only for Israel: Several of the instructions for the feasts in the Old Testament record, as pointed out above, specifically mention that they are for Israel only. When we carefully consider the wording of the instruction for all the feasts we can rightly infer that all of them are for Israel only. Note the many usages of "Speak to the sons of Israel".⁵⁹ The New Testament church had to face this issue as soon as the gospel went to the Gentiles. We have the clear and certain conclusion of the first church council as recorded in Acts 15—the observance of Jewish holy days was not required. The Gospel of John was written late and shows that the Christian church was moving away from Jewish celebrations. Note the way he describes the feasts as "feasts of the Jews" and not simply "feasts" as one would expect if they were to be kept by the church.

After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (Jn. 5:1).

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near (Jn. 6:4).

Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near (Jn. 7:2).

The dilemma of observance: Assume for a moment that the church is required to observe the feasts of Israel. How is this done? Is one going to sacrifice again? In observing the Day of Atonement, is one going to start killing lambs and goats again? Most feast-keepers today say no. Rather, they just try to keep every other aspect of the feast. I received an email from an Adventist feast-keeper who was advertising an upcoming feast on a particular day which was designated as a "Sabbath" (not the 7th day Sabbath), and with the invitation was a note that vegans could bring their vegetarian food for the feast. How does one celebrate the Feast of Trumpets? Do we need to find two trumpets that have been hammered out of silver,⁶⁰ should the trumpets be made from a ram or goats horn, or could one just borrow one from the high school band? Each of the annual feasts is considered to be a Sabbath. Just how does one keep the Sabbath? Are we to use Old Testament guidelines? These questions could literally be multiplied by the thousands, but the point should be clear: if one attaches value to the observance of a given feast, one is left with the dilemma of just how it is to be observed. This in turn allows for differing groups to reach conflicting conclusions, and thus the door is opened wide for legalism, judgment, and eventual separation from each other. Walls are rebuilt where Jesus broke them down (Eph. 2:14). The focus is moved away from the simple gospel to the details of feast observance.

The required observance of the feasts and the required observance of the seventh-day Sabbath stand or fall together. Leviticus 23 clearly lists all of them as "The Lord's appointed times." This is recognized by all, or nearly all, of those who promote feast keeping for today. Adventist Sabbath scholar Samuele Bacchiocch, as noted above, recognizes that the Sabbaths and the feasts cannot be separated.

The Jewish Church did not do well. It is true that many of the New Testament Jewish Christians continued to observe the laws of Torah.⁶¹ History tells us that these Jewish Christians did not do much for the expansion of the church. It was God's design that the Jews and Gentiles be united in one church

History tells us that these Jewish Christians did not do much for the expansion of the church. It was God's design that the Jews and Gentiles be united in one church family. They had the same gospel and both were free from the laws of Torah. However, as the Jewish Christians continued to cling to these rituals, they felt superior to other Christians and looked down on the Gentiles.

family.⁶² They had the same gospel⁶³ and both were free from the laws of Torah.⁶⁴ However, as the Jewish Christians continued to cling to these rituals, they felt superior to other Christians and looked down on the Gentiles.⁶⁵ If it had not been for the expansion of the Gentile Christian church, it appears Christianity would have become extinct. History, therefore, teaches us that when we add old covenant required rituals to the gospel we hinder the spread of the true, simple gospel of Christ.

New Covenant or Old? The foundational issue in modern-day feast keeping lies in how one understands the covenants. As I have written in depth on this subject in *Sabbath in Christ* and in articles in *Proclamation!* ⁶⁶ I will not give an in-depth study here. May I suggest, however, that the reader carefully study Galatians by reading it through several times in one sitting and in different translations. Also study Acts 15, 2 Corinthians 3, and Hebrews 6-12. Christians are not under any of the old covenant rituals mentioned in Leviticus 23. The moral principles in the new covenant replace the moral laws in the old covenant and are a better guide to moral Christian living.

Feast-keeping: encouraged or discouraged? I believe that the old covenant feasts should be thoroughly studied but not observed. Certainly there is nothing wrong with occasionally observing a Seder to understand the shadowy imagery of Passover. But to make it a required ongoing practice would detract from the brilliance of the risen Christ. While Romans 14:5 allows for Christian liberty on the observance of days, Paul elsewhere comes down hard on those who require observance.

You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain (Gal. 4:10–11).

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16, 17).

Christ fulfilled all the old covenant rituals. On Sunday morning the risen Christ met two discouraged disciples and stated this truth:

And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk. 24:25–27).

Then, as if to underline the importance of this truth, some of the last words of Jesus were:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:44–47).

It seems to this writer that our time would be much better spent in proclaiming the simple gospel of grace through faith in Christ rather than trying to work through the dilemma of how and when to observe old covenant feasts. †

Endnotes

1. John VanDerBurgh, *Holy History With the Commandments, Statutes and Judgments*, Appendix, p. 69.
2. <http://www.bibleexplorations.com/html/calendar>
3. "No work can be performed on Yom Kippur. One must also refrain from all eating and drinking. Further, to be fully observant, there must be no washing or bathing, no anointing of the body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), no wearing of leather shoes, and no sex." See <http://www.blogger.com/septembers-holy-days-part-iii-yom-kippur-day-atonement>. See also Rev. 14:3–5.
4. <http://www.dennispriebe.com/documents/New%20Light%20For%20Adventists.html>
5. See <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>
6. See http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/festivals_1/1.html
7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. *Cherith Chronicles*, Feb-Mar 2004, Bob Trefz, p. 6.
10. See http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/books/festivals_2/4.html, p. 13.
11. Material from the Universal Church of God, Retired SDA scholar, Samuele Bacchiocchi, and a few other sources.
12. See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.
13. Ex. 12:43–45.
14. Mt. 24:14, 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Act. 1:8.
15. See Ex. 12.
16. From our perspective on this side of the cross we see the true meaning of the Passover. However, based upon the Old Testament context and instructions it is unlikely that the Israelites saw in the Passover anything more than the historical deliverance from Egypt.
17. 1 Jn. 2:2.
18. Lk. 22:18.
19. Rev. 19:9.
20. Acts 12:3.
21. R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1-2 Corinthians, P. 224.
22. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10, p. 218.
23. Acts 20:5–7.
24. 1 Cor. 15:29.
25. 1 Cor. 15:20.
26. Mt. 28:1.
27. Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1.
28. Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 16:15; Jam. 1:18; Rev. 14:40.
29. Lev. 23:15, 16.
30. Luke, more than the other Gospel writers, includes time markers in his carefully researched account.

31. Acts 2:1.
32. Acts 2:5.
33. See Acts 2:17–21. cf. Joel 2:28–32.
34. See Merruk /C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 693.
35. Ex. 32:28.
36. Acts 2:41.
37. Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8.
38. 1 Cor. 9:19–23.
39. Num. 10:10.
40. 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:12, 13; 31:3; Ez. 45:17; 46:1–7; Hos. 2:11; Neh. 10:33; Isa. 1:13,14.
41. Ex. 19:16.
42. Josh. 6:5; Jud. 3:27, 6:34; 7:18; 1 Sam 13:3 and many, many more.
43. 2 Sam. 2:28; 18:16.
44. 1 Kg. 1:34; Isa. 58:1.
45. Ez. 33:3–6.
46. Isa. 27:13.
47. Mt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16 and perhaps Rev. 4:1.
48. Mt. 6:2.
49. Heb. 12:19.
50. Rev. 1:10; 4:1; 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14.
51. See Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 411
52. See Lev. 16:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 25, 27.
53. Mt. 26:28; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.
54. See Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, Appendix, p. 33–39 for additional evidence that the Most Holy place is here in view.
55. Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Andrews University, *God's Festivals in Scripture and History*, Vol. II., "The Fall Festivals", "The Day of Atonement in the New Testament." Chapter 5, paragraph 6.
56. Lev. 23:34–43.
57. *God's Holy Day Plan—The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, p. 9, a publication by the United Church of God. In this presentation of the feasts, the Feast of First Fruits is left out and the seventh feast is the "Last Great Day, or eighth day."
58. See R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, John, p. 572–579.
59. Lev. 23:2,10, 24, 34
60. Num. 10:2.
61. See Acts 15:5; 21:20; Gal. 2:11–21.
62. Eph. 2:14; 3:1–6.
63. Gal. 2:1–10.
64. Rom. Rom. 6:14, 15; 7:2–6; Gal. 3:23–29.
65. Gal. 2:11–21.
66. See "The Continental Divide of Biblical Interpretatio", Download at http://lifeassuranceministries.org/Proclamation2001_JulAug.pdf



