

THE SEVEN ANNUAL FEASTS OF ISRAEL AND WHY THEY MATTER

If we want to understand the Lord's ways through history, few things in Scripture are more important to understand than the seven feasts of Israel the Lord required the nation to observe. In Leviticus 23 Moses gives us the seven feasts of the children of Israel. Here is the list: the **Feast of Passover** – the observance of the night in Egypt in which the lambs were slain and eaten, and whose blood was applied to the sides and tops of their doors in order to deflect the judgment of the death angel coming for the firstborn; the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** – the removal of all leaven from every house; the **Feast of First Fruits** – the bundling, cutting, thrashing, parching, grinding, and presenting to the Lord of the first grain to ripen in the spring (barley); the **Feast of Pentecost** – the offering of two leavened loaves made of fine flour; the **Feast of Trumpets** – a call of attention to something yet remaining; the **Feast of the Day of Atonement** – the day of national recognition of sin, repentance from sin, and reconciliation to Yahweh; and the **Feast of Tabernacles** – the great and joyful festival commemorating Yahweh's care for the nation while they lived in tents in the wilderness.

The sacred calendar appears in the feasts of Israel, and the flow of time follows them precisely. The Lord began by setting forth seven one-thousand-year days to accomplish His purpose of securing a Bride for His Son. The seven-day week ends with a Sabbath on the seventh day. The eighth day, the first day of the new week, is Jesus' day of resurrection, and it represents the eternal state after the seventh one-thousand-year Sabbath rest, which is the millennial, or Messianic, Kingdom. After the Kingdom age, eternity (the glorious eighth day) begins.

The feasts themselves are prophecies of events that fulfill them, and with such minute precision that no fair-minded person could ever doubt their divine origin. They are progressive, and they detail the process of redemption, as we shall see. They are seven in number because the number seven designates measurements of time in the divine scheme. For example, the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, and every seven years is a sabbatical for the Land of Israel, and the year after seven times seven years is the year of Jubilee.

The Sabbath day each week is a symbol of God's promised rest to His people in the Messianic Kingdom. Even with the six thousand years since Adam, time can be divided up into three parts – two thousand years from Adam to the giving of the Law; two thousand years from the Law to Jesus the Messiah; and two thousand years under Jesus the Savior. This leaves the Messiah's second advent and kingdom rest – the Sabbath of one thousand years. After the Kingdom is complete, eternity begins as the "eighth day." All that precedes this "eighth day" was "a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). The perfect and eternal Sabbath of Yahweh is the reality to which all the rituals of Israel were but a shadow, viz., it was on the eighth day that male babies were circumcised and given to Yahweh; the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended, was an eighth day; and the day of resurrection was an eighth day. So in relation to the past, the day is an eighth day, but in relation to the future it is a first day. Eternity after the Kingdom age surely ends all that preceded it, but, as the first day, it also looks forward to a glorious

future This is why Christians honor the resurrection of Jesus and look to eternity by meeting on the first day of the week. The disciples met together on that day when Jesus appeared to them. Eight days later they had their second meeting on the first day of the new week, and Jesus appeared again to set the precedent from that time forward.

FEAST OF PASSOVER

The history of redemption begins, understandably, with the **Feast of Passover** on the fourteenth day after the first new moon of the spring solstice. Moses describes it in Leviticus 23:1-5:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings. 'These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.

This new moon was the beginning of the year for the nation, and it set the schedule for the following seven festivals. The Feast of Passover commemorates the exodus from Egypt, of which Psa. 105:42-43 sings:

"For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness."

That exodus from Egypt – type of “this present evil world” – was made possible by the death of the paschal lambs whose blood the people applied to their door posts and headers to ward off the angel of death. No type, or picture, in the Bible is as perfect as this one, for the Lamb of God Himself was the reality of the Passover lambs. Jesus’ sacrifice as the Father’s sacrificial lamb is the bedrock upon which redemption rests. John the Baptist was crystal clear on this point.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." (John 1:29-31).

Even as the one-year-old paschal lambs were required to be without blemish or spot, so Jesus’ perfect human life that was cut down in its prime qualified Him to be the great antitype of those many lambs of Israel’s Tabernacle sacrifices.

Each of the nation’s families was instructed to take a bunch of hyssop and apply blood of the paschal lamb to the posts and lintels of their doors. Hyssop is the smallest of plants growing in rocks and ruins. It denotes humility. “The spiritually poor and needy, the

meek and brokenhearted, can alone partake of the Feast of the Paschal Lamb. Humility is the bunch of hyssop which is dipped in the blood of the humble Jesus” – Benjamin Weiss.

Moses told the people to eat the roasted lambs with bitter herbs and unleavened bread – roasted over the direct flame to denote Jesus’ bearing firsthand the direct and searing judgment for sin because of His Father’s holiness. They were to eat all of it, showing that “everything He does, He has, He is, the whole is given unto us to feast upon. I cannot spare a single particle of this provision – not the smallest fiber. I must have Him all to meet the exigency of my case, the necessities of my soul. I apprehend, my brethren, that if we know anything of Jesus, as we ought to know, we shall be anxious to know *all* about Him” (J.B. Lowe).

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Closely associated with the Passover was the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. Though it is confused today because there is no Jerusalem Temple, and because of the traditions of Judaism, Paul described it in his first letter to the Corinthians. In 5:6-8 he writes:

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul here urges the saints, who after receiving Christ as the Passover Lamb for the forgiveness of sins and as their new life, to purge themselves of any corruption to live a holy life unto Him. The only holy life we can lead originates in our “dear dying Lamb” who resurrected to be our peace, our joy, our grace, and all the other virtues that reside in His wonderful life.

This feast began (15 Nisan) the day after Passover (14 Nisan) and lasted for seven days. Leviticus 23:6-8 describes it:

And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no [a]customary work on it. 8But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.’

The nation was to purge its homes of all leaven – representing the fermenting rot of inward corruption – for seven days, a divinely complete period of time. Following the shed blood of the paschal lambs, which covered the sins of the people, there was to be personal, familial, and national introspection of life under Yahweh in order to be His proper representatives to the world. It was national Israel’s responsibility to be His holy people by keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread by ridding themselves of all corruption

and sin. But it is vital to realize that without the shedding of the blood of the paschal lambs, this was a useless exercise. Passover must come first to lay the groundwork, and Passover is entirely Yahweh's sovereign arrangement. Once the blood is applied to cleanse sin, that nation was obligated to rid itself of the inward corruption of the heart typified by the fermenting leaven.

Our Lord Jesus is the unleavened bread of life. John writes this:

“I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (6:48-51).

Israel took the Passover when they received Christ into them as their Savior from sin, and now we are to walk in Him from that time forward, shunning the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are now His saints – the holy ones – if they “keep the feast.” To be a Christian is to accept and apply the work of the Son of Man as the Lamb of God; to be a follower of this Lamb requires the eradication of the corruption of the soul life and of the flesh. They must strive with all of their souls to live a life characterized by the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,” not by displaying “a form of godliness but denying the power thereof” (1 Tim. 4:1-2). The reality of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the remnant believers walking in Christ in purity, allowing Him to pervade them with His Person and to feed us with the bread of life containing all the virtues of that wonderful, divine, eternal life, and diligently maintaining a life of purity and holiness through prayer, fellowship, and study of the Word. This is the way to “keep the feast,” to maintain a life unspotted from the internal rot of our natural lives.

The beginning of the fulfillment of this feast was at the last meal Jesus ate with His disciples, at which time He instituted His communion table.

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” (Luke 22:19). Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Matt. 26:27-30).

The Passover lamb was to be slain on the afternoon of 14 Nisan, eaten at sunset at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – 15 Nisan. However, because Jesus *was* the Passover lamb, He couldn't have done this; so He and His disciples ate together the night of His arrest, at which time Jesus instituted His communion supper for His new covenant people, the remnant Christians of Israel, and that became the reality of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If you notice His words (which Roman Catholicism has brutally

distorted), Jesus said “this is my body which is given to you.” He is speaking the reality of what *will* happen shortly, but yet, in the reality outside of time, He speaks as if it had *already* happened. He speaks of the cup in the same way. This communion supper, this fulfillment of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, formally belonging to Israel but now passing to His Body of believers until which time the nation will recognize their Passover lamb with tears and mourning, was instituted before Jesus was slain, but outside the realm of time, it was an accomplished fact to Him, and He spoke of it that way.

THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

The third feast, the **Feast of First Fruits**, happens within the seven-day period of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was meant to commemorate the first grain (barley) to ripen in the land. The priests waved a barley sheaf before the Lord the day after the Sabbath, which was always the 15th of Nisan regardless of the day of the week. That day, of course, was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here’s how Moses described it in Leviticus 23:9-14:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

It was a busy three days for the Jewish priests. They had to deal with the paschal lambs, to oversee the removal of all leaven from Israel, and they had to secure a bundle of barley for the waving of the first fruit. They had to locate the first sheaf to be reaped, tie it in a bundle, cut it down, thrash it to remove the grain, parch the grains in a perforated pan so each grain touched the open flame, grind the grains in a mill, pass the flour through sieves, add oil and frankincense to it, and offer the mixture before the Lord, leaving some to the priests for their food. The application of this offering should be readily apparent to a believer who is familiar with the types and shadows pointing to Christ the reality.

Barley is the first grain to ripen in the land. Jesus is the first fruit of resurrection. Paul wrote of “Christ the firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:23) when he explained the resurrection to the Corinthians. Again,

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (15:20).

But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. (15:23)

He bore the cutting and thrashing and parching and grinding, but with the enlivening Spirit calling Him forth from death, He became that glorious mixture offered to the Father after His resurrection. So we who were subject to death because of our connection with the first Adam, are now connected inextricably by our new birth with the second Adam, and share in His immortal life and virtues. James confirms this when he writes,

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (1:18).

When Jesus cried "It is finished" on the tree of death, an unprecedented event took place. This is how Matthew describes it:

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:50-54).

These must be the first fruits of Israel resurrected to be taken up with the ascension of Jesus once He came forth from the tomb. These, along with Jesus, form the sheaf of barley to be waved before the Father as the fulfillment of the Feast of First Fruits. We should find among these resurrected ones those listed in Hebrews 11.

These first three spring feasts happened rapid fire in three days of one another. The Passover lamb was slain, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began the next day and lasted seven, and the First Fruits were offered on the third day. Christ is vividly seen as the fulfillment of these three feasts. This brings us to the Feast of Pentecost.

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

The **Feast of Pentecost** is vitally important to Jews. Here is the description from Leviticus 23:16-18

Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.

The nation of Israel rejected her Messiah, the real paschal lamb, so until the nation is revived and acquires her Temple, the full practice of the feasts is impossible. But the Lord will never be without His testimony on the Earth. There were those Jews in the beginning who *did* receive Jesus, who *did* experience the fulfillment and reality of the feasts, who knew regeneration as announced to Nicodemus in John 3 (Passover), who labored to rid themselves of extraneous baggage in their lives in order to follow Jesus (the true Unleavened Bread), who lived in the reality of the resurrection (First Fruits), and who were in the upper room fifty days later when the Spirit descended and gave birth to the *ekklesia* of Matthew 16 during the feast of Pentecost whom we know as the Christian remnant. This is the first loaf of leavened bread. Leaven indicates sin and impurity. The Jewish remnant of believers was, of course, comprised of fallen but forgiven sinners. Their loaf was leavened.

Who comprised the second loaf when Moses gave the law? What other people group would have fit the requirement as the second loaf? Israel was Yahweh's chosen nation. They had many privileges that other people did not enjoy, but they also had great responsibility as well. They were to educate and incorporate Gentile converts as part of Jewish society. Israel was never meant to be isolated, but inclusive of the Gentiles. When the nation failed to do what its Christian remnant did and murdered Stephen, the Lord, through Peter, brought in the Gentiles through the persons of Cornelius' household. They were the second leavened loaf.

The barley had been harvested and offered up at the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring; now, fifty days later, the wheat was ready to be waved before the Lord. This harvest of wheat follows what Jesus said of Himself in John 12:24:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.

The beginning of the fulfillment of that implied prophecy occurred on the Feast of Pentecost when three thousand Jewish souls were harvested as a wave offering to the Lord and were added to the *ekklesia* of Christian saints. Here we have the original grain (Jesus) dying and producing much fruit (Christians). The offering to the Father consisted of His Son at the Feast of First Fruits, and His Son's at the Feast of Pentecost. All that Jesus demonstrated in His life and living on Earth was now deposited into the remnant of believers, both Jew and Gentile. They became the new meal offering to Yahweh, full of the heavenly characteristics of their Savior, their Lord. What the nation of Israel failed to provide to Yahweh, the little flock, the remnant of believers, would

There is a further truth to be derived from the two loaves of the offering. The apostles, including Paul, worked feverishly to appeal to the nation of Israel to repent, to accept her Messiah, and to usher in the kingdom age. For thirty years they taught, they performed signs and wonders, they spoke in different languages to communicate with their foreign fellow Jews, and they endured hardship and persecution at their hands, but the result was devastating. The nation rejected their message and her Messiah, ushering in a terrible retribution that has lingered for over nineteen hundred years.

The coming together of two incompatible peoples did not prevent the stunning departure of the nation in rejecting Messiah. To think what could have been! This is the one offering consisting of two *leavened* loaves, leavened because, unlike the first three offerings (Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits) dealing exclusively with the pure Jesus, this offering consisted of two sinful people groups, the Jews and the Gentiles. Both groups were full of sin and riddled with the leaven of corruption, but having passed through the first three feasts, that is, incorporating the slain and spotless and risen Lamb of God, they were cleansed and filled with the Spirit and were fit for oneness as the *ekklesia* of God.

The Feast of Pentecost was a feast of harvest, this time not of barley, as in the Feast of First Fruits three days after Passover, but of the first ripening of wheat. As the enlargement of that precious grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died, the remnant believers were to follow His pattern as grains dying to self, the flesh, and the world.

Under the old covenant no Gentile could ever achieve equal footing with Jews, but all that is changed at the house of Cornelius. All are equal members of His little flock, His remnant saints. The two people are made one. This is extraordinary, and this is the vision revealed to Peter.

This is the Feast of Pentecost, of freedom, of jubilee, of the new covenant wherein Christ is the inner life to energize His saints consisting of “the believing Jew and the believing Gentile, washed in the same blood, sanctified and indwelt by the same Spirit. This feast could rightfully be called the feast of the remnant of Israel, the feast of the redeemed Jew and the redeemed Gentile, and, unlike the prior two feasts dealing exclusively with the spotless Lamb of God, this feast, after the offering of the two leavened loaves, required the slaughter of seven lambs, a divinely complete number, along with a young bull, two rams, one goat, and two more lambs as a sin offering before the Lord. This shows how much the Christian *ekklesia* requires the protection of the Lamb’s sacrifice to do its service unto the Lord. This participation in His life and nature with Jews and Gentiles together *is* the *ekklesia* of Matthew 16:18, the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost.

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

The early summer Feast of Pentecost precedes a long, hot summer of barrenness before the first day of the seventh month brings in the fifth feast, the **Feast of Trumpets**. It is noteworthy that the seventh month contains the final three feasts. Seven is the number of divine completion, so it is fitting that the last of the seven feasts would occur during the seventh month. This is no mistake. Moses wrote:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.’ (Lev. 23:24-

25)

To Israel the trumpet blast will be the beginning of a time of reflection culminating ten days hence in the Feast of Atonement. Psalm 81:1-7 speaks of it.

Sing aloud to God our strength; Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song and strike the timbrel, The pleasant harp with the lute. Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, At the full moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, A law of the God of Jacob. This He established in Joseph as a testimony, When He went throughout the land of Egypt, Where I heard a language I did not understand. "I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the baskets. You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

The trumpet will be the commencement of Israel's final seven years, the seventieth seven in Daniel chapter nine. The ten days between the trumpet call and the Feast of Atonement represents this seven-year week of trouble during which the nation will be tried severely, will reflect upon its sins, and will eventually recognize and bitterly mourn their firstborn, their Messiah – the fulfillment of the Feast of Atonement. Zechariah wrote in 12:10-12,

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieves for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn,

The blowing of the trumpet was to remind the people of something present or something at hand, something yet remaining. The final seven years of Israel's history, the long-suspended seventieth seven of the prophet Daniel yet remains. So once the trumpet sounds, the dispensations change. The dispensation of the Christian era that has lingered since the day of Pentecost at the Spirit's outpouring will be completed, and the dispensation of the nation of Israel will begin its final seven years. This feast is a huge turning point in the history of humankind. It is the end of the journey for Christians, and the beginning of the end for the remnant of the nation of Israel. The trumpet blast will call the dispersed Jews back to their land and back to the God of their fathers. It is a call to come up to the pleasant land, to make "aliyah" – the act of going up. Isaiah speaks to this in 18:3-7:

All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth: When he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see it; And when he blows a trumpet, you hear it. For so the LORD said to me, "I will take My rest, And I will look from My dwelling place Like clear heat in sunshine, Like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect And the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks And take away and cut down the branches. They will be left together for the mountain birds of prey And for the beasts of the earth; The birds of prey will summer on them, And all the beasts of the

earth will winter on them. In that time a present will be brought to the LORD of hosts From a people tall and smooth of skin, And from a people terrible from their beginning onward, A nation powerful and treading down, Whose land the rivers divide— To the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, To Mount Zion.

The trumpet calls to every Jew everywhere to come up, to regather, to return to the land, and to Yahweh. It sets the stage for the remnant of 144,000, 12000 from each tribe, to forsake the world and religious systems, to examine their lives and their allegiances, and to commit to Yahweh and His purpose. It is the clarion call to the nation of Israel to prepare for the coming Day of Atonement, the sixth feast.

Seeing the significance of this feast should inspire Israel to prepare for cataclysmic events. it will be the beginning of the metaphorical ten days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, a time of national suffering and reflection and repentance, what Moses described as a “*Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls.*” Again, Isaiah writes,

And it shall come to pass in that day That the LORD will thresh, From the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; And you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

(Isa. 27:12-13)

The return to Israel for the final seven years of her dispensation sets the stage for the sixth feast, a solemn and introspective and mournful affair that will usher in the nation’s recognition of its Messiah.

THE FEAST OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The **Feast of the Day of Atonement**, the sixth of the seven, carries this description:

I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. “Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.” (Leviticus 23:26-32)

This feast is not directed at individuals or at families, but to the nation. It is Israel’s

national day of repentance and reconciliation, and as such, it does not look back on any specific event, but forward to a future event yet to be fulfilled. It is Israel's ten-day period of examination during the final seven years of their economy (dispensation), at the end of which comes the Day of Atonement when the nation recognizes her Messiah.

It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.” “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves. “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. (Zechariah 12:9 – 13:1)

This feast of the Day of Atonement has everything to do with the affliction of the national soul person by person. It is a time of intense self-examination, of reconciliation, of expiation. An old writer says “the Day of Atonement is designed to shadow forth the future dealings of God with them, and will have its accomplishment in that day, when they shall *as a nation* be brought to repentance for their sins, and faith in the blood of the Lamb.” The fulfillment of this feast day has never come in Israel's history, but it is coming. There is not one event that the Feast of the Day of Atonement commemorates, because it happens in the future at the close of Israel's final seven years when her Messiah delivers them from the hand of her enemies. Isaiah writes:

**Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.”
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. (Isa. 35:4-6)**

Then shall their corporate eyes be opened and their sins forgiven. What a glorious promise to the nation!

For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. (Lev. 16:30)

Zechariah underscores Moses:

“the iniquity of the land shall be removed in one day” (3:9).

To what priest is Moses referring if not to the high priest, and since the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement must showcase Israel's recognition of her Messiah, then we can safely insist that this High Priest is Jesus Himself. He is the ultimate and final sacrifice of the old covenant. Right now this High Priest is within the veil of the heavenly Temple, but He will soon come forth at the hour of Israel's deepest sorrow, humiliation, and helplessness, and will cleanse the people before the Father, and will enshrine them.

And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; And you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken. (.Isa. 62:12).

He will, in effect, release into the wilderness the scapegoat bearing the sins of the people.

We cannot let this solemn Day of Atonement pass without noting a few particulars about atonement, for it is pregnant with divine ministrations for our apprehension. We should pray decisively for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the (full) knowledge of him" regarding this matter.

The details of the atonement come from Leviticus 16, what one expositor considers among the finest chapters in all inspiration. The Day of Atonement was the single day of the year that the high priest entered into the holiest place to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before Yahweh. There was no access to the Lord's presence except for this one day and only by the well-cleansed high priest acting on behalf of the people. Every year he had to repeat the same process because

"it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

Animal sacrifices, being imperfect, could never take away sins; nor could an imperfect man be a perfect priest. Therefore, Yahweh was shut in, and Israel was shut out, except for one day a year. But there is One who broke the cycle.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. Can any fathom the depths of that thought? His glorious sacrifice, coming on the heels of a perfectly lived human life, met two requirements – all the claims of His Father's nature and character and position; and all of man's sinfulness, guilt, and paucity. Moses explains:

"Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. (Lev. 16:3).

The ram satisfied the Father's requirements; the bullock met the need of the people's sins.

But Aaron could not come into the inner chamber in a sloppy way. He had to wash his body and dress in linen (Lev.16: 4), foreshadowing the perfection in character and person of our great High Priest. Jesus is precious and glorious and spotless and holy, and "altogether lovely," the very reality of the washing and the fine linen.

Aaron selected two goats, presented them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle, and cast lots upon them,

“one lot for the LORD, and the other for the scapegoat” (Lev.16:8).

The goat upon which the lot fell became the Lord's, and it became the sin offering. The other goat became the scapegoat,

But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness. (Lev. 16:10).

The spiritual truths depicted in this activity are sublime, and they witness to the incredible character of our Father and His Son. The Father has a deep and peculiar interest in the death of His Son, for He has been vilified by the world. “His truth has been despised. His authority has been contemned. His majesty has been slighted. His law has been broken. His claims have been disregarded. His name has been blasphemed. His character has been traduced.” (Mackintosh) But the death of His Lamb has perfectly satisfied the majesty, the truth, the holiness, and the character of His person. In other words Christ glorified His Father on the very planet where He had been besmirched since the death of Abel. What Yahweh could have righteously done in response to this wholesale rejection by His creatures, His Lamb bore upon Himself, and completely vindicated. All the righteousness and holiness and majesty of Almighty God were satisfied by the death of His Son. The moral side of Yahweh was met head on by the humble death of His spotless Lamb.

And what is so amazing about Jesus' wonderful death is that it provided the means, the foundation, whereby the Father could exercise, even lavish, His grace and mercy and longsuffering and kindness upon the world.

“For God so loved the world. . .”

Without the death of Jesus the Father would have had to judge and condemn the world, but the death opened up to every person in every age the wonderful aspects of Yahweh's nature. In virtue of Jesus' death, the Father's righteousness was satisfied, and now His adorable attributes of goodness, mercy, love, kindness, righteousness, etc. could be poured out upon needy humankind. This is what the atonement accomplished. Now sovereignty and grace, mercy and truth, righteousness and love can meet together! Now the Father can exercise forbearance and “draw all men” unto Christ. Though the world still blasphemes, Yahweh can love and extend His mercy and draw the seeking ones. All this because of the death of Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, the fulfillment of all the animals slain on behalf of the sins of the people. This is why Jesus could command His apostles to

“ Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15).

Jesus' death opened His Father's grace to every man, because the "Yahweh's lot" fell upon His sacrificial goat, viz., upon the Son of His love, His Lamb. The atonement opened up the vast store of eternal treasures found in the Almighty, and now they are poured out upon "all flesh."

Aaron carried the blood of the goat of the Lord's lot and of the bullock inside the veil into Yahweh's presence and sprinkled the mercy seat seven times.

He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. (Leviticus 16:14-15).

How important is that blood? It secures the salvation of every true Christian, the salvation of the congregation of Israel, and the restoration of creation. Because Jesus shed His perfect blood as the fulfillment of every blood sacrifice, the Father is released to accomplish His eternal purpose through the outpouring of His grace. He can reunite Israel in the land of promise and change her into the Bride of His Son. He can pour Himself out on the Gentiles in order to draw them to Himself. He can restore creation. "He can display, in the view of angels, men, and devils, His own eternal glory – the glory of His character – the glory of His nature – the glory of His works – the glory of His government." (Macintosh). He can do all this because He has a working platform – the blood of His atoning Lamb upon the brass altar, upon the brass laver, upon the golden altar, upon the veil, upon the mercy seat – upon which to carry out His eternal design. We cannot exhaust the importance of the shed blood of Jesus!

Our High Priest is now in the presence of His Father in heaven. His one sacrifice provides the way into the heavenly Temple, and because of his torn flesh, the veil shielding the Father is rent from top to bottom. He is in the true holy of holies bearing us upon His heart. Paul wrote,

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" (Heb. 9:24).

He will soon come forth from heaven to the Earth and lead the nation of Israel into the reality of His finished work. Then they will see what the Lamb, slain at their hands, has done for them in carrying off their sins and in opening up the attributes of Yahweh for their eternal enjoyment. They will understand that their Messiah's death was primarily for Yahweh's glory – the pouring out of His divine traits upon His creation; and secondarily for the salvation from sin. What glorious enlightenment lies ahead for Israel!

Not only did Jesus' death enable the glory and outpouring of His Father's grace upon His people and the world, but it also carried away "all" the sins of the world, including Israel, the Christians, and the Gentiles. ALL were removed and taken away into a "wilderness" where no one could ever find them again. Jesus is the true scapegoat. Aaron laid his hands upon the head of the goat, confessed over him all the iniquities of the people, and

sent the laden goat into the wilderness.

Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21-22).

In Jesus' one act of sacrifice, He satisfied His Father's righteous requirements of holiness and majesty and sovereignty, and He opened the floodgates of His Father's adorable and precious attributes of grace and glory and lovingkindness. Then He carried away our sins into a place where they will never be remembered again. What can be better than this? Zechariah's prophecy concerning them will have its happy fulfillment.

I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' ” (13:9).

Though the cost to the nation is severe, so is the blessing. Yahweh will recognize them as His people, and they will recognize Him as their God. Then will be complete the preparation for the final festival of the busy seventh month.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The seventh and final feast of the yearly cycle is the **Feast of Tabernacles**, the happiest festival of the seven. Here are the Lord's instructions to Moses:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it. (Lev. 23:33-36, 39-42).

This is the celebration of a year's worth of productive labor and the fruits derived from it, so, in this regard, it is known as the Feast of Ingathering. But it also looks back on the tents of the wilderness and to Yahweh's protective care during the forty years, and so it is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. But most importantly, it anticipates a future day when Israel will have passed through their Day of Atonement, jettisoned their blindness and rejection of Messiah, mourned bitterly for their sin, and embraced Him as their firstborn son. At last the little nation chosen by Yahweh in His promise to Abraham will be reconciled to Him, and will fulfill its destiny of being the conduit of Yahweh's blessings to the rest of the world. The whole Earth will learn of the Messiah through Israel and will be compelled to go up to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles. Listen to Isaiah:

“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations” (25:6-7).

And to Zechariah:

“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16).

At that point in history, when Israel enters her final thousand-year day of Sabbath rest – the millennial kingdom – this feast becomes “the feast,” the Feast of Yahweh, full of priestly processions and water oblations and numerous sacrifices and levitical singing of Yahweh’s praises and loud exclamations of joyful praises. It is truly a time of great joy in Israel, for it is then that Zechariah’s prophecies come into fulfillment. For example, in 13:9 we read this:

For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,’ Says the LORD of hosts, ‘And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

Finally, at the beginning of the Messiah’s thousand-year kingdom, Israel will be His people and Yahweh will be their God. Further,

And in that day it shall be That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, Half of them toward the eastern sea And half of them toward the western sea; In both summer and winter it shall occur And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be— “The LORD is one,” And His name one.. (Zechariah 14:8-9).

Jerusalem shall be the epicenter of the Lord’s kingdom on Earth, and the joyfulness and festiveness intended by the Feast of Tabernacles will come to fruition. Israel will be in her glory, and all the nations of the Earth will benefit by the outpouring of Yahweh through His chosen nation. Joel wrote,

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. (Joel 2:28 -31)

As if to underscore it all, Isaiah predicted this in his short, but amazing chapter twelve:

“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’ ” Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’ “Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say: “Praise the LORD, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted.”
(Isaiah 12:2-4)

This festival is the only one of the seven with an eighth day, a day of resurrection. This is the day when Jesus stood up and addressed the crowd. Israel had been feasting and celebrating for seven days, living in their makeshift booths to commemorate their sojourn in the wilderness, and on the eighth day returned to their normal lodging with much joy in their hearts to reflect upon it all. But in reality it was a dry well, for Israel had missed her Messiah living among them. That is why Jesus stood up at the very end of their most joyous festival, a festival of feasting and sacrificing, of drink offerings and lamp lightings, a festival to complete the yearly cycle of seven feasts, and cried out,

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38).

The fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy will have to wait until national Israel passes through its Day of Atonement at the end of the age. Then Israel will know the experience of the springing up and flowing out of the living water for the benefit of the whole Earth. Then shall “living waters go out from Jerusalem” as Zechariah foretold.

The eighth day, “the great day of the feast,” is the day when Jesus resurrected. It was upon that day He offered Himself as the living water to quench His people’s thirst. The Feast of Tabernacles, fulfilled during the Messiah’s kingdom, has still another day to follow, and that is the eighth day – the eternal day. For eternity Jesus will be the living water flowing down from His Father’s throne in the New Jerusalem, forever fulfilling the promise He made in Jerusalem to the thirsty celebrants. What a glorious day that will be for Israel, when at last the Bride of the Lamb will have made herself ready and all the ancient feasts will have been fulfilled!

WHAT MATTERS TO THE LORD

The human history that matters to the Lord is the history of His chosen Israel. That history is pegged to the seven feasts contained in the Law handed down by Moses. The first three feasts were fulfilled in one weekend when Jesus was executed and resurrected. The fourth feast was fulfilled when the Spirit descended upon the believers fifty days later. These, of course, occurred early in the first century, and here we are in the 21st century waiting for the commencement of the fifth feast when the trumpet will call the scattered Jews everywhere back to the land and city for the beginning of their final “week,” the answer to the missing, or suspended, seven years in the book of Daniel. The seven years will severely purge Israel and lead her to enlightenment and to deep and

sorrowful and powerful repentance, when the desperate nation will realize its Deliverer is the very one they had murdered centuries before. Then will begin the Messiah's kingdom with His chosen people – the satisfaction of the final feast when Yahweh and His people will dwell together again.