

Bible Correspondence Course

Lesson Ten

It was a Sunday morning just like any other Sunday morning. We had just been shown to a table by a sunlit window and were enjoying our first cup of coffee when, without warning, a rather large “rabbit” bounded into the room. It quickly made the rounds of several tables where children, with round eyes and open mouths, received little cellophane packages of candy eggs. The rabbit then hopped out the door, leaving the children buzzing and the adults amused.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of all this is that no one was surprised. Of course, when you’ve been to Disneyland and seen Mickey Mouse, Goofy and the Seven Dwarfs, what’s so exciting about a young lady in a bunny costume on Easter Sunday morning?

There is, however, one very important difference between Mickey Mouse and the Easter bunny: The Easter bunny is connected to a religious observance! What is religious, you ask, about bunnies, colored eggs, rolling eggs on the White House lawn, egg hunts, hot cross buns and Easter ham? For most people, nothing at all. Yet these customs are all firmly attached to the highest of all Christian high days, Easter Sunday.

THE BIBLICAL RECORD

The observance of holy days, or holidays, is deeply entrenched in every form of the Christian religion. Where do these days come from? Are Christmas and Easter mentioned in the Bible? What holy days, or festivals, if any, did the early Christian church observe? The answer may surprise you.

In this lesson we are going to carefully examine the biblical record that has to do with the observance of days. Be sure to take your time with this study, looking up each of the scriptures and reading them in their context (with their surrounding verses, to get the story flow).

THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS

1. Did any New Testament writer call into question the observance of certain days? (Galatians 4:8-11)
2. What was the religious background of those to whom Paul addressed this statement? (verse 4)

Note: These people had clearly been pagan before their conversion. This statement could hardly have been made concerning adherence to the religion of Moses - nor would the holy days God delivered to them (which Jesus kept faithfully throughout His life and ministry) have been described as “weak and beggarly.” There is an interesting play on words in verses 8 and 9 which is lost in some translations. The expression “ye did service” (Authorized Version, verse 8) has the same Greek root as “bondage” (verse 9).

Read these verses carefully with this in mind and the following facts emerge: (1) There was a time when these people did not know the true God - something that could not be said of the Jews. (2) At that time they “served” (were in bondage to) false gods. (3) In the process of time they came to know God (see verse 9). (4) They are now “turning again” to the “bondage” of “weak and beggarly elements.”

Note the repeated emphasis of the word “again.” This bondage is not new to these people. They have returned to their old gods, the “weak and beggarly elements.” What is the outward manifestation of this backsliding? “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years...”

How are we to understand this verse? Clearly, in this context, Paul is specifically referring to the pagan days, months, etc., which had formed an important part of the Galatians’ pre-Christian tradition. But is Paul saying that Christians should not observe any days?

Several important facts have to be considered. First, has there ever been a Christian church which didn’t observe days at all? Clearly, the observance of Christmas and Easter is the observance of days. What about Sabbatarian, Saturday-observing, Christians? Isn’t the Sabbath a day, and don’t they observe it? Isn’t Sunday a day, and don’t most Christians observe it?

3. Did the early Christian church observe any days? Which? (Acts 2:1, Acts 20:6, Acts 27:9)

Note: Commentators recognize Luke’s reference to “the fast” as an allusion to the fast that took place annually on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32).

4. Did Paul himself observe any holy days? (Acts 18:21, Acts 20:16)

Note: It has occasionally been argued that Paul wasn’t observing the Jewish holy days, but that he merely wanted to be present at Jerusalem to preach to the many Jews who would be assembled there for Pentecost. The argument fails in view of the fact that most Christian churches have always kept Pentecost! It is difficult indeed to brush aside Acts 2:1 as though it were a coincidence that the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. If days are of no importance, it was a grave oversight for Christ to so powerfully reinforce a Jewish festival. Surely He would have foreseen that this would forever establish “Pentecost” in the affections of His church.

Even the simplest of dictionaries identifies Pentecost as “a Christian feast on the seventh Sunday after Easter commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.” The Church of England may have obscured the origin of the day by calling it “Whitsunday,” (White-Sunday, because of the white clothes traditionally worn by baptismal candidates on that day) but there’s still no hiding its origins. Pentecost, originally a Jewish festival, has always been observed by Christians. Then, why quibble over whether Paul and the apostles observed it?

The reference in Galatians 4:10 is a reference to pagan days observed by pagans, and is only an incidental reference to an isolated problem. It is not an admonition that Christians are to observe no days at all.

5. Did Paul ever advocate the observance of days to a Gentile church? (I Corinthians 5:6-8)

Note: The clear statement “Let us keep the feast” can only be a reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follows the Passover. All the allusions are quite clear. In commenting on this passage, Conybeare and Howson put it this way: In spite of the opinion of some eminent modern commentators, which is countenanced by Chrysostom, we must adhere to the interpretation which considers these words as written at the Paschal season, and suggested by it. The words leaven, lump, Paschal Lamb, and feast all agree most naturally with this view. It has been objected that St. Paul would not address the Corinthians as engaged in a feast which he, at Ephesus, was celebrating; because it would be over before his letter could reach them. Anyone who has ever written a birthday letter to a friend in India will see the weakness of this objection. It has also been urged that he would not address a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles as engaged in the celebration of a Jewish feast. Those who urge this objection must have forgotten that St. Paul addresses the Galatians (undoubtedly a mixed church) as if they had all been formerly idolaters (Gal. iv.8); and addresses the Romans, sometimes as if they were all Jews (Rom. vii. 1), sometimes as if they were Gentiles (Rom. xi. 18). If we take “as ye are unleavened” in a metaphorical sense, it is scarcely consistent with the previous “cast out the old leaven”; for the passage would then amount to saying, “Be free from leaven (metaphorically)”: whereas, on the other view, St. Paul says, “Be free from leaven (metaphorically) as you are free from leaven (literally).” There seems no difficulty in supposing the Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven in the love-feasts. And we see that St. Paul still observed the “days of unleavened bread” at this period of his life, from Acts 20:

6. Also, from what follows, we perceive how naturally this greatest of Jewish feasts changed into the greatest of Christian festivals. (The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, pages 389, 390). This transition of the Passover to Easter Sunday is one of the more remarkable aspects of this study. Historical references abound that the church, from its earliest time, observed the Passover. One of the earliest controversies centered on whether the Christians would observe the Passover on Nisan 14 (the Jewish date) or on Sunday — specifically “the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox” (as worded by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.). Historians referred to this argument as the “Quartodeciman Controversy.”

Please note that it was not a question of whether the early church would observe the Passover, but when. Although some sources may imply that it was a controversy between the observance of Easter and the observance of the Passover, they overlook a fundamental point: The Latin and Greek words for Easter are Pascha, from the Hebrew Pesach, which means Passover. Other Latin-based languages use a variation of Pascha for

“Easter” to this day. In Spanish, for example, the word is Pascua. The English term “Easter” is of Germanic origin and was unknown to early Christian writers, who carried on their discussions in Latin and Greek.

It is of interest to note that even the Roman church recognized the annual observance of the Passover. The adoption of the term “Lord’s Supper” (I Corinthians 11:20) may have been important because the “Communion service” was observed weekly, monthly or quarterly rather than annually on the anniversary of Christ’s death. The anniversary of Christ’s death, even when moved to Sunday, was called the Passover. The “Communion” service was referred to as “the Lord’s Supper.” By some process of reasoning, that supper, which had its origins in the Passover, became separated from the anniversary of Christ’s death. So far we have found, not only in New Testament writings, but in history, that the only days observed by the primitive church grew out of “Jewish” festivals.

Any argument that the holy days were done away must deal with the fact that “the festivals observed by the apostolic church were, at first, the same as those of the Jews; and the observance of these was continued, especially by Christians of Jewish birth, for a considerable time” (Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, page 346).
6. But doesn’t Paul tell the Romans that there is no need to observe days? (Romans 14:5, 6)

Note: A careful reading of these verses in their context will reveal nothing as to the right or wrong of observing days. What it will tell us is that men will differ in the way they look at days, while each man is accountable solely to God for any observance or non-observance. Each man is to be fully persuaded in his own mind as to what is right and what is wrong. It is not for other men to judge him.

While Paul admonishes the Romans not to judge others, he admonishes the Colossians not to allow themselves to be judged (Colossians 2:16). This verse is incorrectly translated in the King James Version. It should read: “Let no man therefore judge you for eating or for drinking, or in part of a Holy Day, or the new moon, or of the Sabbath days.” The holy days are no more abolished by this than are eating and drinking.

Asceticism was a mainstay of some Greek religions as well as of some Jewish sects. Like other pagan philosophies, it was finding its way into the church; this is reflected in Romans 14 as well as Colossians 2:20-23. Paul’s admonition had to do with judging and a party spirit that would inevitably arise as contrasting life-styles clashed.

Paul is not dealing in these passages with the right or wrong of observing days; we have to look elsewhere for that. He was dealing solely with Christians who were judging one another when they ought not.

7. Did Jesus observe any holy days? Which? (Luke 4:16)

Note: This was not a one-time occurrence. Jesus customarily went into the synagogue on the Sabbath; He observed the Sabbath with the Jews. Did Paul follow a similar custom? (Acts 17:1, 2)

8. Did Jesus observe the Passover? (John 2:13, 23)

9. Was His last supper with the disciples a Passover supper? (Luke 22:7-16)

10. Did Jesus observe any other days? (John 7:10, 37-39)

Note: By now it should be apparent that Jesus, Paul and the rest of the New Testament church did observe holy days or festivals. It is also readily apparent that Christmas and Easter were not among the days they observed. It would seem that the setting apart of certain days and times as “holy” fills a very real need for mankind. It doesn’t seem to be so much a matter of whether we observe set times as it is of which times we observe and, more importantly, why.

The liturgy of the Bible is rich with symbolic meaning, as is the liturgy of paganism. It may come as no great surprise to find that the eggs and rabbits of Easter are fertility symbols. It takes little imagination to then connect the new life in the egg to the new life in the resurrection, hence: Easter Sunday. It was a small step from worshiping the “sun and its rising” to the Easter sunrise service where the risen Christ - “Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2, Luke 1:78) - is worshiped. Similar Christian symbolism can be derived from the rich ceremonies of Christmas.

But, since all this symbolism has its roots in paganism, should we attempt to adapt these symbols to the worship of Christ?

11. Does God permit man to adopt the symbols of pagan religion as means of worshiping Him? (Deuteronomy 12:29-32)

THE PASSOVER

Since we have seen that Jesus, the apostles and the early church kept the Passover, it is obviously important for a Christian to understand the meaning of this festival. What were its origins? What was its original symbolism? How do these symbols translate into New Testament Christianity?

12. What is the origin of the Passover? (Exodus 12:1-51)

13. Was the Passover ordained as a temporary festival? (verse 14)

14. What was the purpose of the Passover? (verse 14) Was there a similar purpose stated for the New Testament Passover or “Lord’s Supper”? (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

15. Do you notice a possible source of the concept of “Easter Week”? (Exodus 12:15) Is this also a possible source of the tradition of special breads (such as hot cross buns) during Easter Week?

16. Were the Days of Unleavened Bread to be a temporary festival? (verse 17)

17. What meaning did Jesus give to bread as a prophetic symbol? (John 6:31-51)

18. At what season of the year was this statement made? (John 6:4) In what context did this event take place? (John 6:5-30)

19. What was the reaction to Jesus’ teaching on this subject? (John 6:52-71)

Note: It’s not difficult to understand their reaction to Jesus’ statement about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Such a suggestion would be revolting to almost anyone who didn’t understand that He was speaking symbolically. But what exactly is the meaning of eating His flesh and drinking His blood?

The concept has its roots in the very earliest Semitic (pre-Abraham) covenant rituals. The word “covenant,” to the English reader, retains little of its more primitive meaning. To us, a covenant is simply an agreement or contract. But in the biblical sense it means much more. A covenant creates kinship - blood relationship - between two persons who may be totally unrelated. As a result, the covenant causes both parties to take on all the obligations of kinship, whether defined or undefined.

The American Indian had the custom of “blood brotherhood,” which involved cutting the hand of both parties and allowing the blood to mingle, making them of “one blood” symbolically. The early Semites, on the other hand, drank one another’s blood to establish the covenant of blood brotherhood. Later generations adopted the killing of a sacrificial animal, drinking its blood (a practice that was forbidden under Moses - Leviticus 17:14), sharing a sacrificial meal (Genesis 31:44-46), sprinkling the blood on both parties (Hebrews 12:24), or dismembering an animal and passing around the parts (Genesis 15:7-18). All these customs, in one way or another, symbolized the sealing of a covenant. The original Passover (Exodus 12) involved a sacrificial animal, striking its blood on the door-posts, a sacrificial meal including unleavened bread and the flesh of the animal. It was, in an ancient sense, the striking of a new covenant. And so, on the occasion of His last Passover, Jesus handed a cup of wine to His disciples, saying: “Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27, 28).

20. What were the two primary symbols of the New Testament Passover service? (Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Note: It is already obvious that the wine in the Passover service represents the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But what does the bread signify? (I Corinthians 11:23, 24)

21. Were there those who did not understand the significance of the bread? (I Corinthians 11:29). What was the result of this lack of understanding? (verse 30)

Note: Why should the failure to understand the meaning of unleavened bread in the Passover service result in sickness and even untimely death for those who partake of the Passover “unworthily”? Notice in verse 24 that the bread symbolizes Christ’s body “which is broken” for us. True, the prophecies state that not a bone of Jesus would be broken, yet His body most certainly was broken. Why? And what is the connection with our own sickness and disease?

Most Christians understood clearly that Jesus shed His blood for their sins. Many, when partaking of Communion or the Lord’s Supper, do so with deep emotion because they realize Christ died in their place.

Not so many Christians, however, partake of the bread with the same depth of feeling. What they may not realize is that, just as it was necessary that the Messiah die for them, it was also necessary that he suffer for them.

22. Was it necessary that Jesus suffer physical pain, humiliation and rejection as a part of His sacrifice? (Matthew 26:62-68, Matthew 27:26-31)

23. Was it necessary that Jesus die by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans (a slow, painful death) rather than stoning at the hands of the Jews (a quick death) ? (John 3:14, 15, John 12:32, 33)

24. Did the Jews expect the Messiah to have to suffer and die? (John 12:34)

25. Did the prophets foretell of a suffering Messiah? (Isaiah 53:1-12)

Note: Christian commentators universally explain this chapter as a prophecy of the sufferings of Christ.

26. Was the Messiah to suffer rejection? (Isaiah 53:3)

27. Was He to suffer physical pain? (Isaiah 53:3)

Note: The word “sorrow” and “grief” in the King James Bible are “sickness” and “pain” in the Hebrew.

28. Was He destined to suffer all this for His own errors, or ours? (Isaiah 53:4, 5, 8 and 12)

29. Was all this the result of someone’s iniquity? (Isaiah 53:6)

30. What was accomplished by the physical pain endured by Christ? (Isaiah 53:5, compare I Peter 2:24)

31. Did Jesus in any way identify physical healing with the forgiveness of sin? (Mark 2:3-12)

Note: It was a simple matter for Jesus to claim the power to forgive sins, and quite another matter to prove it in such a manner that they would know (verse 10) He had the power. The power to forgive sins was demonstrated by visibly removing a temporal penalty for sin: disease. Not all sickness and disease come upon us because of our sins (John 9:1-7) but to whatever extent our physical suffering is a result of sin, Christ suffered for us that we might be healed.

In the Passover service we have the complete picture of Christ's sacrifice for us from the foot washing service (John 13:1-17, compare Philippians 2:5-8), to the bread and wine.

32. Apart from our own remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, what other purpose does the Passover serve? (I Corinthians 11:26)

Note: The Christian, by the ordinances he observes, witnesses to the world that Jesus Christ died for their sins as well as his own. By observing the Passover (and by baptism, in a similar manner), he shows forth the Lord's death to others. How long is it to be observed this way? "Till He come" (verse 26).

33. Did Jesus come to do away with Old Testament laws, like the Passover? (Matthew 5:17-20)

Note: The word "fulfill" in verse 17 (plerosai in the Greek) is correctly translated. The word "fulfilled" in verse 18 (genetai in the Greek) is incorrect; it should read "come to be." The argument is advanced by some Christian groups that the law is fulfilled in Christ. Yet, with the Passover "fulfilled" in Christ, nearly all Christian groups still observe the Lord's Supper while neglecting entirely those holy days that are yet to be fulfilled. It is a strange inconsistency.

34. Besides "all being fulfilled," or "coming to pass," what else must take place before one jot or one tittle can pass from the law? (verse 18) Summary: In view of all the evidence, how can a Christian abstain from keeping the Passover? We may prefer to call it the "Lord's Supper" (I Corinthians 11:20, although it is not altogether clear that Paul meant it that way), but Jesus clearly called it the Passover (Luke 22:13-15) and instituted it on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, the date specified in Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23. And if we, as Christians, observe this the first of God's holy days, why stop there? There are several more holy days ordained by God. Do they have any meaning for Christians?

THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

1. What is after the Passover in the series of annual holy days God gave to His chosen people? (Leviticus 23:1-8)

2. Were the sacrifices here mentioned a part of the original instructions for the Days of Unleavened Bread? (Jeremiah 7:22, 23)
 3. How long were the children of Israel commanded to eat unleavened bread? (Exodus 12:15)
 4. Was it necessary to abstain from ordinary work on any of these days? (Exodus 12:16)
- Note:** The first and last days of Unleavened Bread were [Annual] Sabbath days, days in which no ordinary work was done and days of solemn assembly for worship (“holy convocations”).
5. Why was their bread unleavened when they were liberated from Egypt? (Exodus 12:39)
 6. What was the original meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread? (Exodus 13:8-10)
 7. What were the Israelites to remember when they observed these days? (Deuteronomy 16:3)
 8. What was the condition of the Israelites in Egypt? (Exodus 1:7-14)
 9. In bringing them out of Egypt, from what was God delivering them? (Exodus 6:6)
 10. Is there any meaning for the Christian in the concept of deliverance from servitude? (Romans 6:9-23)

Note: Later, in Romans 7:14, Paul speaks of being “sold” under sin. This is a metaphor drawn from the practice of selling slaves in the marketplace. Just as Israel was in bondage in Egypt, so man is in bondage to sin.

11. Is there any similarity in the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread to an Israelite and the meaning to a Christian? (I Corinthians 5:6, 7) How are Christians delivered from their past sins? (verse 7 with Romans 5:1-8) What about future sins? (verses 8-10)

Note: Leavening, for seven days, becomes a type, a metaphor, of sin. Just as a search is made initially to clear leavening out of a home, so a Christian must put sin out of his life.

Just as no leavening is to be eaten for seven days, (seven is the number of completion or perfection), so the Christian is not to go back into sin (or receive sin back into his life) till his course is finished (Romans 6:1-7). The eating of unleavened bread symbolizes taking the sinless Jesus into ourselves - the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. **Note:**

THE FIRST FRUITS

At this same time of the year, a ceremony of great significance took place. The festivals were all arranged around the harvest seasons, and it was at Passover time that the first barley became ripe. There was an interesting restriction, however, on the use of that first barley harvest, and the restriction was connected to a particular ceremony. The wave sheaf ceremony is described in Leviticus 23:10-14.

1. Were they permitted to eat any of this early harvest before the wave sheaf was offered? (Leviticus 23:14)

2. What is this sheaf called? (verse 10)

Note: The sheaf is, of course, called the “sheaf of the firstfruits” or “wave sheaf.” Is there any special significance for the Christian in the concept of “firstfruits,” and what exactly does this sheaf portray?

3. How is the concept of firstfruits seen by a New Testament writer? (I Corinthians 15:20-23)

4. This scripture seems to say that Jesus was the very first to be “harvested” from the dead. Is this supported elsewhere? (Acts 2:29-34)

Note: David, who we know from the prophets will be in the Kingdom, wasn’t there yet when Peter spoke these words. He was still in his grave. No man could precede Christ into the presence of the Father. No man could be “harvested” from the world before Christ was presented as the “firstfruits” from the dead.

5. Early in the morning, after His resurrection, had Jesus ascended to the Father? (John 20:17)

6. Later that same day, is there evidence that He had been to the Father and had returned? (Matthew 28:9)

Note: The first time He appeared, they were not allowed to touch Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father. Later they are allowed to touch Him, making it plain that He had presented Himself to the Father in the interim.

7. This took place on the morrow after the Sabbath. What was [probably] happening in the temple at that same time? (Leviticus 23:10, 11)

Note: It is a simple conclusion to see that the sheaf of firstfruits offered here foreshadowed the presenting of the risen Christ as the firstfruits of God’s harvest of men.

8. Are Christians also seen as a sort of first fruits? (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4)

THE FEAST OF WEEKS

1. What is the next festival listed in God's revelation? (Leviticus 23:15-21)
2. Was this to be a Sabbath (rest) day? (verse 21) Was it a temporary festival?
3. Is there a calendar date given for this festival? (verses 15, 16)

Note: This festival is not to fall on a calendar date, but on a day of the week - 'the morrow after the seventh Sabbath' from the wave sheaf offering.

4. Is this festival given a name? (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:9, 10, 16)
5. What do New Testament writers call it? (Acts 2:1; 20:16)

Note: "Pentecost" comes from the Greek and means "fiftieth," a reference to the feast falling on the 50th day after the wave sheaf. The festival is referred to variously as Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Firstfruits. The seven intervening weeks are the weeks of grain harvest in Palestine, beginning with the first ripe barley during the Days of Unleavened Bread and finishing with the wheat harvest before Pentecost. Pentecost, then, is a harvest festival.

6. How did Jesus think of the harvest (in a symbolic sense)? (Matthew 9:36-38; John 4:35)
7. When was the time of harvest? (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)
8. Did the Feast of Pentecost take on special meaning for the New Testament church? (Acts 2:1-47)
9. Was there an indication that a worldwide harvest was beginning? (verses 6-11)
10. Did Peter see a connection between the events of that day and the "Day of the Lord"? (verses 16-20 with Joel 2:28-32) Were the events of this first New Testament Pentecost the ultimate fulfillment of Joel's prophecies or a type of what was to happen at the end time?
11. Was there a major "harvest" for the church on that day? (Acts 2:41)

Note: It would appear that the day of Pentecost itself looks forward to the return of Christ and a massive pouring out of God's Spirit. The seven weeks of harvest thus would portray the harvest of souls taking place in our age between Christ's departure and His return to this earth. There is a remarkable parallel between the Feast of Weeks and the jubilee year (Leviticus 25:1-17). It is easy to make the connection between the jubilee as the "fiftieth," or "pentecost," year and the Feast of Weeks. It's just as easy to connect the jubilee with the establishing of Christ's Kingdom.

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

1. What is the next festival after Pentecost in God's plan? (Leviticus 23:23-25)
2. What events were announced by the blowing of trumpets in Old Testament times? a. Exodus 19:16-19, Exodus 20:18 b. Numbers 10:1-10 c. Psalm 81:3 d. Isaiah 27:12, 13 e. Jeremiah 4:5 f. Ezekiel 33:1-6 g. Joel 2:1, 15 3. Did the blowing of a trumpet take on special meaning to the New Testament church? (I Corinthians 15:50-52, I Thessalonians 4:16) 4. Is there a yet future significance to the Feast of Trumpets? (Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1, 13; Revelation 11: 15)

Note: The seventh angel sounds the last of the seven trumpets. It is at this last trumpet that Christ returns and the resurrection takes place - two events of enormous importance to Christians!

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

1. What is the next holy day in the sequence? (Leviticus 23:26-32)
2. What does the phrase "afflict your souls" mean? (Ezra 8:21)

Note that it is incorrect to call this a "feast" day.

3. Are there special warnings connected with this day? (Leviticus 23:29, 30)
4. Is it a day of rest - a Sabbath? (verse 32)

Note: An elaborate ceremony took place on the Day of Atonement; it is described in detail in Leviticus 16:1-34.

5. Was the high priest allowed to come into the Holy of Holies any time he wished? (Leviticus 16:25, 29)

Note: The [holy place in the] temple itself was a rectangular enclosure. About one third of the area of the rectangle comprised the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept behind the veil. The high priest was allowed to come into this area only one time in a year (Hebrews 9:1-7).

6. What was the significance of his only being allowed entrance once a year? (Hebrews 9:7, 8)

Note: It was necessary for Aaron to make an atonement for himself as the first step in this ceremony for a very important reason. As will become evident, he represents Jesus Christ as our High Priest throughout this ceremony. At the heart of this ceremony were two goats (verse 8), one "for the Lord" and the other for the "scapegoat" = escape goat. The Hebrew word translated "scapegoat" in the King James Version is azazel. It's a combination of two words in the Hebrew: aza for "goat," and azal, which means "to go away" or "to disappear." Roughly translated, azazel means the "goat of departure."

7. What was to be done with the first goat? (Leviticus 16:15-17)
 8. What would New Testament writers have seen as the fulfillment of this atonement? (Romans 5:6-11)
 9. Was Jesus seen in the role of both High Priest and sin offering in this ceremony? (Hebrews 9:11-14)
 10. If the high priest entering the Holy of Holies pictured Christ going before God as our intercessor, what does the high priest's return from the sanctuary signify?
 11. What does the "returning" high priest do next? (Leviticus 16:18-22)
 12. What significance did New Testament prophets place on this ceremony? What event follows the return of Christ in John's prophecy? (Revelation 19:11-16, Revelation 20:1-3)
- Note:** The very next event to follow Christ's return and the ultimate defeat of His two key symbolic human enemies is the binding of Satan for a thousand years and his being taken away to "the bottomless pit," or the "abyss." Many biblical commentators see the abyss as the equivalent of the "place not inhabited" of Leviticus 16. If so, then what is happening in Leviticus 16 is the confession of all the transgressions and sins of Israel and the placing of those sins symbolically on the head of Satan the devil, who is the author and father of all sins. (Other commentators, following the non-canonical Epistle of Barnabas, see a parallel between the goat "of departure" and Jesus carrying our sins "outside the camp".)
13. How did Paul further explain the "once and for all" sacrifice symbolized in this ceremony? (Hebrews 9:24-28)
 14. Did these sacrifices actually forgive sin? (Hebrews 10:1-4)
 15. Once forgiveness is achieved, is there any more need for sacrifice? (Hebrews 10:18-25)

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

1. What is the next festival in God's plan? (Leviticus 23:33, 34)
2. Was this also a harvest festival? (verse 39)
3. What are the biblical commandments relative to this festival? (Deuteronomy 16:13-17)
 - a. Is it especially a family festival? (verse 14)
 - b. Is this a celebration in response to God's generosity to His people? (verse 15)
 - c. Is it a "pilgrimage" festival - that is, a time for travel to the place God chooses? (verse 16)
 - d. How were they to finance this pilgrimage? (Deuteronomy 14:22-27)

e. Is it a time for giving a special offering in thanksgiving to God? (Deuteronomy 16:16, 17)

f. How were the Israelites to live during these days? (Leviticus 23:40-42). Why? (verse 43)

Note: God has always emphasized the temporary nature of human existence. Abraham, for example, was uprooted from a stable environment (Genesis 12:1-5) and spent the rest of his life as a nomad dwelling in tents (Hebrews 11:9).

4. Did this concept of sojourning, dwelling in tents or tabernacles, being strangers and pilgrims have special meaning to New Testament writers? (Hebrews 11:8-16, 38-40)

5. Did they see Christians as sojourners, strangers and pilgrims in this world? (I Peter 1:17, 2: 11)

6. How did they use the term “tabernacles”? (II Peter 1: 13, 14; II Corinthians 5:1-4)

Note: The Feast of Tabernacles carries a meaning for Christians very similar to its original concept. Even as Israel of old, we also dwell in tabernacles as we pass our sojourning between Egypt and the promised land.

7. The Feast of Tabernacles follows closely the Day of Atonement, which pictures the binding of Satan. What major prophetic event follows the binding of Satan? (Revelation 20:1-4)

8. Did the disciples see any connection between “tabernacles “ and the Kingdom of Christ? (Matthew 16:28 through Matthew 17:9)

Note: Many have puzzled over the transfiguration of Jesus, wondering what it means. They are particularly puzzled by the appearance of Moses and Elijah when Moses and Elijah were long dead and buried. The keys to understanding this are found in Matthew 16:28 and Matthew 17:9. What Peter, James and John saw was a vision of the Son of Man in His Kingdom. When Jesus returns, Moses and Elijah will be alive and reigning with Him (Revelation 20:4).

9. Is there a special connection between the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles? (Exodus 34:22)

Note: They are mentioned both together and alone in this verse because they are both harvest festivals - Pentecost the feast of firstfruits early in the season, and Tabernacles the “feast of ingathering” at the end of the season. In this is subtly stated one of the most profound truths of God’s Word. After the time “firstfruits” is closed - after Christ has returned and set up His Kingdom - there is yet to come a harvest of souls into God’s Kingdom.

10. Read carefully the 14th chapter of Zechariah and answer these questions:
- What is the time setting of the prophecy? (Zechariah 14:1)
 - Is it the time of the return of Christ and the establishing of His Kingdom? (verses 3-11; compare verse 4 with Acts 1:9-12)
 - Will the Feast of Tabernacles be observed during this time? (Zechariah 14:16-19)
 - Will the feast be observed by Gentiles? (verse 18)
 - Would this make any sense if the Feast of Tabernacles had been abolished at the cross?

THE LAST GREAT DAY

- When is the last holy day in God's plan? (Leviticus 23:36, 39)
- What follows in the prophetic scheme of things? (Revelation 20:5-12)

Note: We have already seen in the first three verses of this chapter a strong correlation between the ceremony of the Day of Atonement and the binding of Satan for a thousand years.

This was preceded by the return of Christ and the first resurrection. It is followed by the establishment of a government (note the wording, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them"), a government that lasts for 1,000 years. It would appear that this thousand-year period corresponds to the Feast of Tabernacles in the annual holy day sequence.

HOW MANY RESURRECTIONS?

You will notice that John refers to the resurrection as the "first resurrection." In doing so, he automatically implies that there is a second resurrection. This second resurrection follows immediately on the heels of the thousand-year reign of Christ just as the last day of the festival follows the Feast of Tabernacles. Notice that it is the eighth day and that the Feast of Tabernacles is continually referred to as a seven day festival. The eighth day is not a part of the Feast of Tabernacles. (However, in practical terms it is).

Following the parallel between the holy days and the scheme of prophecy, the Last Great Day of the festival foreshadows the second resurrection and the "Great White Throne" Judgment (Revelation 20:11).

This passage of Scripture is more than a little disquieting in the light of the traditional understanding of the day of judgment. The image so many people hold of a judgment bar, where the sinner is brought to hear his record read out before sentencing, doesn't really fit here. In the first place, all of the dead "in Christ" have already been raised a thousand years before (I Thessalonians 4:16). Notice that all those who are being judged are being judged according to their works (Revelation 20:12) - and yet "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

WORKS OR GRACE?

How does one get his name written in the book of life? What is the meaning of this being judged according to works when salvation is by grace?

Peter gives us a clue when, writing in the first century, he said, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (I Peter 4:17). From Peter's day to this, Christians have been judged during their lives. When Jesus Christ returns and the dead are raised, there is no more judgment for the Christian. Peter's statement gives us the clue: Judgment is a process. Is it a process that goes on during one's lifetime "according to their works"?

3. Did Jesus reserve a special message for the "Last Great Day"? (John 7:37-39)

4. Did Jesus always offer that living water to any man? (John 6:44)

Note: Clearly, unless the Father draws men to Jesus they cannot come!

5. Did the Father draw all men at that time? Was it given to some to understand the truth and not given to others? (Matthew 13:10, 11)

6. Was it the Father's intent that all be converted by Christ's ministry? (Mark 4:11, 12)

7. Was Paul concerned about the number of Jews who were rejecting Christ? (Romans 9:1-5)

8. Did he see a permanent loss of these people, a permanent rejection of them by God? (Romans 11:1-5).

9. Who was responsible for blinding most of Israel prior to that day? (Romans 11:7-10)

Note: It is obvious that it is God who is responsible for blinding those people; the truth is that they have not yet been allowed to understand the truth of God. It should become immediately apparent that if we accept the traditional Christian beliefs of heaven and hell - that a man goes to his reward immediately at death - then it would appear that Jesus and the Father, by design, consigned a group of people to hell who had never had a chance to be saved. It doesn't make sense, does it? There came a day when Jesus was struggling with some of the unbelieving Jews and He told them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen Me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:35-37).

It is clear that if all those the Father gave Christ would come to Him, then those who were not believing had not been given to Him by the Father.

He continued to speak of the Father's will, but the Jews murmured at Him and they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then

that He saith, I came down from heaven?" (verse 42). They just could not accept Him. In this context, then, read again Jesus' statement in verses 43 through 45.

10. Was it possible for all those people to believe? (John 12:37-40)

11. Is it possible for those who were cut off because of unbelief to be brought back to God? (Romans 11:22, 23)

12. What proportion of Israel is eventually to be saved? (Romans 11:25, 26)

Note: But what about those who have died in a state of unbelief? Is it possible to be resurrected and then be given a chance at salvation? Read Ezekiel 37:1-28 and answer the following questions.

13. Who are these dry bones? (verse 11)

14. Is this prophesying a resurrection? (verse 12)

15. Is it a resurrection to physical life? (verses 5, 6)

16. Were these people taken to heaven at their resurrection ? (verse 12)

17. Will they have a chance at conversion, a chance to receive God's Spirit? (verse 14)

18. Will they live out their lives on this earth? Will they be under a government with a governor and laws? (verses 20-25)

19. Is this their time of judgment? (I Peter 4:17, Revelation 20:12)

Note: These people are going to come to know God and receive His Spirit; they will be converted. Those who lived out their lives in a blinded state, those who never came to know God, will, at last, receive mercy.

IS GOD HARSH?

It may have seemed harsh at first to consider that God would have concluded these people in unbelief, seemingly denying them a chance at salvation. But, as Paul put it in Romans 11:32, "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all."

Jesus knew that all those who heard Him were not ready to believe. He knew that there was still a great deal of rebellion, stubbornness and self-will in their hearts. Had He spoken to them plainly, they would have had no excuse for their sins. So He withheld the truth from them - for a time - by speaking to them in parables, but their day of salvation will come.

IN CONCLUSION

Throughout the generations of Old Testament history, these holy days played a unique role. This is not to say that Israel always kept them, much less that they kept them perfectly. There were long periods of time when the holy days fell into total disuse; generations of Israelites grew old and died and never heard of them! But every major occurrence of national repentance - of religious “revival,” if you will, found its focus in the holy days.

After the separation of the 10 northern tribes into a separate kingdom, however, King Jeroboam substituted other days, establishing, for example, a feast on the 15th day of the eighth month in the place of the Feast of Tabernacles. The remainder of the history of these 10 northern tribes was one of decay, religious confusion and growing violence. They never experienced a major religious revival. Not one king ever led the nation in returning to God. The holy days were abandoned for purely political reasons, and that abandonment left those people estranged from God throughout the remainder of their generations.

These holy days were ordained by God. They are His days. Attempts to label them “Jewish holy days” are a superficial attempt to set them aside as only having relevance to the Jews. These holy days are pregnant with meaning, not only for the Jews, but for Christians as well.

FROM HOLY DAYS TO HOLIDAYS

It is abundantly clear that the “traditional” Christian holy days - Christmas and Easter - have no place in the earliest traditions of the church. It is abundantly clear from both history and the Scriptures that the only holy days recognized by the apostles and their immediate successors were the holy days of the Bible.

It is also apparent that there was a change that took place among the dominant Christian churches, perhaps as early as the beginning of the second century. A transition was made from Sabbath to Sunday as the day of worship, the holy days fell into disuse, and Christmas and

Easter became the two great “Christian” celebrations.

Did the church have the right to make this change, or was it heresy?

REFERENCES TO HERESY

The apostles lived to see some decay begin to take place in the church. References to heresy abound in their later letters. As Jude wrote, late in the first century, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

It’s no coincidence that most of the arguments advanced against observing the holy days are arguments centered on a false concept of law versus grace. “Because we are under grace,” they say, “there is no need to observe the law.”

There is, indeed, nothing new under the sun. The arguments advanced in Jude’s day are still advanced to justify an abandonment of obedience to God’s law.

But the holy days are more than a law; they are a continuing revelation to man of the outline of the plan of salvation. By observing the holy days, we are kept in remembrance of things which God has done, and in hope of those things He will do.

The festivals outlined in this lesson are God’s holy days. They form a part of His holy and righteous law. They are pregnant with meaning for the Christian. The saints of Old Testament times were drawn back to God again and again by the observance of these days. They were punished and went into captivity because they ignored these days. Jesus Christ and the apostles observed these holy days. The early New Testament church observed these holy days. When Jesus Christ returns, even Gentile nations will be required to keep these holy days. How can the Christian church in the 20th century ignore these days? Still more, why should the church resist them?

WHAT PLEASES GOD?

Late in his life, John wrote, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (I John 3:22).

One of the greatest things we can ask of God was asked by the psalmist when he said, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law” (Psalm 119:18). God stands ready to reveal even more wondrous things of His plan of salvation in yet greater depth. But those things will be given to those who obey Him.

May God give us all the grace to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”