

## The Holy Days and God's Plan

*This lesson is rather "meaty" so you may like to read it to your children in stages. The highlighted scriptures support the text and you may wish to read some of them to your children.*

We all enjoy the Holy Days! Grown-ups look forward to them because they teach us more about God's Way of Life. You children look forward to them because your parents might give you some special presents and because you can have fun with your friends - especially at the Feast of Tabernacles! But WHY do we keep the Feasts?

Well, it's because God tells us to! We read about this in Leviticus 23, one of the chapters in the Bible that lists all the Holy Days:

**The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel: 'You will announce the Lord's appointed feasts as holy meetings. These are my special feasts'" (Leviticus 23:1-2, *International Children's Bible, New Century Version*).**

Did you notice what God<sup>1</sup> said? They are not our Feasts, or the Israelites' Feasts, or the Jews' Feasts - which is what most people believe. These are GOD'S Feasts - and He wants EVERYONE to keep them - not just the Israelites! When God gave these Feasts, He told His people to keep them forever (Leviticus 23:14,21,31,41). So that's what we do! We keep God's Holy Days today - and so did Jesus and the first Christians (see Luke 22:7-13; John 7:10-11,14,37; Acts 20:16; Acts 27:9). After Christ returns, the whole world will be taught to celebrate the Holy Days (Zechariah 14:16).

But why does God want us to keep His Holy Days? Well, it's because the Feasts are a SIGN that we are His people (Exodus 31:12-13)<sup>2</sup> and because God wants us to REJOICE, to learn to RESPECT (fear) Him, and to APPRECIATE that He is God (Deuteronomy 12:7,12,18; Deuteronomy 14:23). But we also keep the Feasts because they teach us about GOD'S PLAN to make us part of His "Family!"<sup>3</sup> You see, the Holy Days picture the steps - or

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<sup>1</sup> Although most English Bibles refer to the God of the Old Testament as "the LORD", we also refer to Him as "God" in these lessons. (Information about *who* this God is can be found in the 1<sup>st</sup> Genesis Lesson and the 4<sup>th</sup> Teen Lesson.)

<sup>2</sup> God's people today are *spiritual*/Israelites (Romans 2:28-29; 1 Peter 2:9).

<sup>3</sup> The Bible reveals that God is creating a "family" and that His Plan is to make us part of that family. 2 Peter 1:4 explains that God wants us to share in His divine nature and John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Hebrews 2:10-11 and 1 John 3:2 reveal the "family" relationship He wants to have with us. God wants us to be His children - His sons and daughters.

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main things - that have to happen before God's Plan can come true.<sup>4</sup> They also show us the important part that Jesus plays in this plan - NONE of it would be possible without Him! So let's see what the Bible tells us about the Feasts and find out what they teach us about God's wonderful plan for mankind.

### The Sabbath

The first part of Leviticus 23 talks about the Sabbath. That's because it's a WEEKLY Holy Day (Leviticus 23:3). God made the Sabbath by resting on it and then He blessed it to make it holy (Genesis 2:1-3). And He tells us to KEEP the Sabbath holy by resting on it (Exodus 20:8-11). So that's what we do. We don't do our normal work on this day - we rest and go to Church services instead. This is what God wants us to do on all of the Holy Days.<sup>5</sup>

The Sabbath looks back to Creation and reminds us that God, through Jesus Christ, began His Plan by creating everything (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16). It also looks forward to the Millennium<sup>6</sup> - the time when God's Kingdom will be on this earth and we can be part of His Family.

### The Passover

The first annual - or yearly - Feast is the Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5). God told the Israelites to keep the first Passover by killing a lamb and putting some of its blood on the doorposts of their houses. This would protect them from the 10<sup>th</sup> plague that God sent upon the Egyptians. You probably know the story. The LORD passed through the land that night and every firstborn child and animal died. But this didn't happen to the Israelites because they obeyed God's instructions! They put the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts and the LORD saw it and PASSED OVER their homes. None of their firstborn were killed! God told them to keep the Passover every year to remind them of this (Exodus 12:21-27).

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<sup>4</sup> Colossians 2:16-17 tells us that the Holy Days are a shadow - or picture - of things to come.

<sup>5</sup> God says in Leviticus 23:1-2 that these days are "holy convocations". A convocation is a meeting or an assembly where God's people gather to hear instruction from His Word (see, for example, Nehemiah 8; Matthew 13:53-54; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 13:13-16).

<sup>6</sup> The Bible tells us that at that time, the whole world will enter a kind of "Sabbath rest". Hebrews 4:4-11 and Isaiah 11:1-10 talk about this rest in the context of the Millennium.

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Jesus is called OUR Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) and the Passover reminds us that He died to SAVE us from death. This is something that had to happen for God's Plan to come true. You see, God can't have anyone in His Family who sins - who breaks His Law and does things that are wrong.<sup>7</sup> But of course we all do, don't we? (Romans 3:23). So Jesus became our Saviour and died to save us from our sins. He died so that our sins can be forgiven and we can have the chance to live forever (John 3:16-17). Then three days after Jesus died, God *resurrected* Him - brought Him back to life as a Spirit Being who will live forever! This was also part of God's Plan<sup>8</sup> - a very important part - and we'll learn more about it and what it means in future lessons.<sup>9</sup>

### The Days of Unleavened Bread

Right after the Passover are the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8). This is the second step in God's Plan. These days remind us that God wants all of us - including children - to live His Way of Life.<sup>10</sup> He doesn't want any of us to sin and break His commandments (Romans 6:12-13; 1 John 3:4-6). So we keep these days by putting leaven<sup>11</sup> out of our homes and by eating unleavened bread. God tells us to do this because leaven is sometimes used in the Bible to picture sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) - and when we put leaven out of our homes it reminds us to put sin out of our lives! Eating unleavened bread will remind us to live God's Way of Life.

### Pentecost

After the Days of Unleavened Bread comes the next step in God's Plan, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:9-22). This Feast Day pictures God giving us His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). God's Spirit is His power<sup>12</sup> and He gives it to us to help us live His Way of Life (Romans 8:12-13). God will give us His Holy Spirit after we have repented of our sins,

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<sup>7</sup> See Romans 8:12-13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 22:12-14, *NKJ*.

<sup>8</sup> It was pictured in the Holy Days by the wave sheaf that was offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:11-12).

<sup>9</sup> See "The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread" and "The Day of Pentecost" lessons in the Holy Day series.

<sup>10</sup> See Deuteronomy 6:5-7, 17-18; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 11:7; Matthew 19:16-19.

<sup>11</sup> Bread, cake, cookies, etc - anything containing a leavening agent (yeast, baking soda, baking powder) to make it rise.

<sup>12</sup> This is a very simplified explanation of God's Holy Spirit. You'll find more information about God's Spirit in "The Day of Pentecost" lesson in the Holy Day series - and in the series of lessons for older teens.

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accepted Jesus as our Saviour, and are baptised<sup>13</sup> (Acts 2:38). We then become *God's* people! And it's only those people who have God's Spirit in them who can become part of God's Family (Romans 8:9-11).

In the Old Testament, Pentecost was also known as the day of the firstfruits (Numbers 28:26) because it fell at the time of the smaller, early harvest. During this harvest, the farmers gathered in the first crops, called the firstfruits. This teaches us something else about God's Plan<sup>14</sup> - He isn't calling the whole world to understand His truth now! He's only calling a few people - people who the Bible calls the "firstfruits".<sup>15</sup>

### The Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement

The next Holy Day is the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25). This pictures Jesus Christ returning to this earth to set up the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 11:15; Revelation 19:11-16). At this time, the "firstfruits" (those people who live God's Way of Life and have God's Spirit in them) will be changed into spirit beings and become part of God's Family (1 Corinthians 15:23). They will help Jesus Christ as He sets up God's Kingdom on this earth (Revelation 20:4).

But before Jesus sets up God's Kingdom, He will remove Satan so he can't deceive people any more, and that's what the next Holy Day, the Day of Atonement<sup>16</sup> (Leviticus 23:26-32), pictures. Once Satan is bound, people can be "at-one" with God (Revelation 20:1-3).

### The Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day

Finally we come to the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day (Leviticus 23:33-43). The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium - the time when Jesus Christ will be King over this earth for 1,000 years. It will be a wonderful time of peace and happiness (Isaiah 2:2-4; Isaiah 11:6-9; Isaiah 35:3-10). But we won't just be lazing around! We'll be busy helping

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<sup>13</sup> A person should not be baptised until he or she is old enough to "count the cost" and understands the seriousness of the commitment they are making. So baptism is a step for young adults and grown-ups, not children. You can find more information about baptism in the series of lessons for older teens.

<sup>14</sup> For more information about this, see the age 13+ version of this lesson or "The Day of Pentecost" lesson.

<sup>15</sup> See 1 Corinthians 16:15 NKJ; James 1:18.

<sup>16</sup> The Day of Atonement is a fast day - when your parents don't eat or drink anything.

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Jesus Christ get the world ready for what the last Feast - the Last Great Day - pictures.

In ancient Israel, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day took place in the autumn (or fall) just after the main - and largest - harvest of the year. This was the time when the farmers gathered in their remaining crops. The Last Great Day also pictures a harvest. It pictures the large SPIRITUAL harvest that will take place after the Millennium. At that time, all of those who never knew about God's Plan (and WEREN'T called to be part of the "firstfruits" before their death) will be brought back to physical life. This is when they will have their chance to learn about Jesus and how He died to save them. This is when they will have their chance to learn about God's Way of Life and decide whether they are going to obey Him or not (Revelation 20:11-13).<sup>17</sup>

Hopefully most people WILL decide to obey God, because the Bible says that those who don't will be burned up in a Lake of Fire! (Revelation 20:14-15). But everyone who decides to obey God, and accepts Jesus as their Saviour and King, will be changed from a human to a spirit being and will become part of God's Family and live forever in His Kingdom!

### Conclusion

The Holy Days picture each step that has to take place in God's Plan before we can become sons and daughters in His Family. And that's why God commands us to keep them. He wants us to UNDERSTAND what His Plan is - and we can only do that by keeping the Holy Days! So every year as we celebrate the Holy Days, we remind ourselves of God's wonderful plan for mankind. And as we do, we look forward to the GLORIOUS time when this plan has been completed and we can all be together in God's Kingdom and part of His very own family!

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-4 reveals that God's desire is for everyone to be saved and come to understand His truth - and this is the opportunity for those who weren't called during their own lifetime.