

The Holy Days and God's Plan

Read through this lesson with your parents (in stages if you prefer as it's quite "meaty"). Look up the referenced scriptures in your Bible to gain more understanding and prove this material for yourself.

Most of you have grown up keeping the Feasts - or Holy Days - with your parents, and they are days we usually all enjoy. Your parents look forward to them because they teach us more about God's Way of Life. You probably look forward to them because they're an opportunity to spend time with your friends and have fun (especially at the Feast of Tabernacles) - and *also* because you might receive some special Holy Day presents from your parents! But have you ever wondered WHY we celebrate these days?

Well, it's because God tells us to! We find God's instruction about this in Leviticus 23, one of the chapters in the Bible that lists all of 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 God¹ said? These are not our Feasts, or the Israelites' Feasts, or the Jews' Feasts - as so many people believe. These are GOD'S Feasts - and He wants EVERYONE to keep them - not just the Israelites. When God gave these Holy Days He expected them to be kept as a "statute forever" (Leviticus 23:14,21,31,41) so we still keep them today as God commanded, and as Christ and the early Christians did (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 them (Zechariah 14:16).

But WHY does God want us to keep His Feast days? Well, originally it was for two reasons. Firstly, because keeping the Feasts is a SIGN that we are God's people! (Exodus 31:12-13).² And secondly, because God wants His people to rejoice, to learn to fear (respect) Him, and to appreciate that He is God (Deuteronomy 12:7,12,18; Deuteronomy 14:23). However, today we also keep the Feasts for another reason: because we now understand that the Holy Days picture God's Plan to make us part of the "family" He's creating!³ John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Hebrews 2:10-11 and 1 John 3:2 reveal the "family" relationship God wants to have with us - He wants us to be His sons and daughters! 2 Peter 1:4 explains

¹ 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 1st Genesis Lesson and the 4th Teen Lesson.)

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

³ The Holy Days are a shadow (or picture) of things to come - see Colossians 2:16-17.

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that God wants us to share in His *divine nature*. This means that when we become part of God's "Family" we will be composed of spirit just like God is! (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). But NONE of this could happen without Jesus Christ, and the Holy Days reveal His part in God's Plan and the steps that have to take place before we can become part of God's Family. So let's look at each of the Feasts listed in Leviticus 23, discover what they picture,⁴ and find out what has to happen before God's Plan for mankind is accomplished.

The Sabbath

The first part of Leviticus 23 talks about the Sabbath - because it is a weekly Holy Day (Leviticus 23:3). God made the Sabbath by resting on it and He blessed it to make it holy (Genesis 2:1-3). And He tells us to KEEP it 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, but rest and go to Church services instead. This is what God wants us to do on all of the Holy Days.⁵

Keeping the Sabbath points us 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). The Sabbath also looks forward to the Millennium, the time when God's Kingdom will be on this earth. The Bible tells us that at that time, the whole world will enter a kind of "Sabbath rest".⁶

The Passover

The first annual - or yearly - Feast that is mentioned is the Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5). Most of you know that God sent 10 plagues on the land of Egypt and that during the 10th plague the LORD passed through the land and every firstborn child and beast died. But this didn't happen to the Israelites because they obeyed God's instructions to kill a Passover lamb and put some of its blood on their doorposts. When the LORD saw the blood He *passed over* their homes and none of their firstborn were killed. God told them to keep the Passover every year to remind them of this (Exodus 12:21-27).

But what does it mean for us? Well, the Passover is the first step in God's Plan and it reminds us that Jesus is our SAVIOUR. He died to save US from death (John 3:16-17) - and this is something that had to happen for God's Plan to

⁴ The material in this lesson is an overview. To find out more, please study the individual lessons about each Holy Day.

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

⁶ Both Hebrews 4:4-11 and Isaiah 11:1-10 talk about this rest in the context of the Millennium.

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come true. You see, we all break God's Law and do things that are wrong (Romans 3:23) - and God can't have anyone in His Family who sins! In fact, the Bible tells us that the penalty (or punishment) for sin is DEATH (Romans 6:23a). So Jesus died to PAY the penalty for our sins. He died so our sins can be FORGIVEN and death can PASS OVER us. That's why the Bible calls Him OUR Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Three days after Jesus died, He was resurrected - brought back to life as a Spirit Being who will live forever - and because of that we can have the opportunity to live FOREVER too. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a VERY important part of God's Plan⁷ - and we'll learn more about it and what it means in future lessons.⁸

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. We keep these days by putting leaven⁹ out of our homes, as God instructed. God tells us to put leaven out because it is sometimes used in the Bible to picture sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) - and God doesn't want us to sin! (Romans 6:12-13). So we put leaven out of our homes to remind us to put sin out of our lives! And we eat unleavened bread to remind us to live our lives God's Way.

The Days of Unleavened Bread also remind us that because Jesus died for us we can now be CLEANSED (or freed) from our sins (1 John 1:7). You see, once we've repented of our sins and are baptised,¹⁰ God will forgive us for ALL of the wrong things we have done. And after He's done that we must strive to walk in "newness of life" - in obedience to God - *without* sinning (Romans 6:4-14; 1 John 2:2-6).

But this doesn't mean we can keep doing the wrong things until we're baptised! The Bible says that even children are known by their deeds - by whether the things they do are right or wrong (Proverbs 20:11). God wants all of us - however old we are - to obey Him.¹¹ And it's by obeying Him that God knows we really DO want to live His Way of Life - the way of life that will lead to eternal life in His Family!

⁷ Pictured in the Holy Days by the wave sheaf offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:11-12).

⁸ See "The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread" and "The Day of Pentecost" lessons in the Holy Day series.

⁹ Bread, cake, cookies, etc - anything containing a leavening agent (yeast, baking soda, baking powder) to make it rise.

¹⁰ 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.

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

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Pentecost

After the Days of Unleavened Bread comes the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-22; Acts 2:1-4), which pictures God giving us His Holy Spirit.¹² God's Spirit will give us the power to live His Way of Life (2 Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:5-8, 12-13; Galatians 5:22-25;) and He will give us His Holy Spirit after we have repented of our sins and are baptised (Acts 2:38). We then become *God's* people - and only those people who have God's Spirit in them can become part of God's Family (Romans 8:9-11).

In the Old Testament, Pentecost was also referred to as the day of the firstfruits (Numbers 28:26) because it fell at the time of the smaller, early harvest in the spring (as opposed to the larger, main harvest in the late summer/early autumn). The celebration of the Holy Days was linked to these harvest seasons (see Exodus 23:14-16) and the Bible reveals a connection between these physical harvests and a future "spiritual" harvest to come.¹³ During the early harvest, the first crops - or firstfruits - were gathered in, and the spiritual symbolism for us is clear. Pentecost, the day of the firstfruits, pictures the fact that God isn't calling the whole world to understand His truth at this time - He's only calling a relatively few people now¹⁴, the "firstfruits" (see 1 Corinthians 16:15, *NKJ*; James 1:18), who are being prepared to help Jesus Christ when He returns (Revelation 5:10; Revelation 20:6).

The Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement

The next Holy Day is the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25). This pictures Christ returning to this earth to set up the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 11:15-18; Revelation 19:11-16). At this time, everyone who lives God's Way of Life and who has God's Spirit in them (the "firstfruits") will be changed into spirit beings and become part of God's Family (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). They will help Jesus Christ as He sets up God's Kingdom on this earth (Revelation 20:4-6). But before Jesus does this, He will remove Satan so he can't deceive people any more (Revelation 20:1-3), and that's what the next Holy Day, the Day of Atonement¹⁵ (Leviticus 23:26-32), pictures. Once Satan is bound so he can't influence anyone, people can be "at-one" with God.

¹² A simplified explanation of God's Spirit is that it is His power. You'll find more information about the Holy Spirit in "The Day of Pentecost" lesson in the Holy Day series - and in the series of lessons for older teens.

¹³ See, for example, Luke 10:2; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; John 12:48; Revelation 14:14-15.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:9 refers to our calling. Luke 12:32 describes the people of God as a LITTLE flock (or few in number).

¹⁵ The Day of Atonement is the one Holy Day that God tells us to fast on - to go without food and drink.

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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; John 7:37). The Feast of Tabernacles pictures Christ's 1,000 year millennial rule as King over the earth. 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 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. During this harvest, the farmers gathered in all of their remaining crops. Symbolically, the Last Great Day pictures the large spiritual harvest that will take place after the Millennium. At this time, all those who weren't called to understand God's Plan in their lifetime¹⁶ will be resurrected back to physical life. This will be their opportunity to learn about Jesus and the salvation that is available through Him. It will also be their opportunity to learn about God's Way of Life and decide whether they will obey Him or not (Revelation 20:11-13).¹⁷

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 submit to God and obey Him, and accepts Jesus as their Saviour and King (Acts 4:12; Isaiah 45:22-23; Philippians 2:9-10), will be changed from a human to a spirit being. They will then 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 God's Family. And that's why God commands us to keep these days. It's only by keeping His Holy Days that we can understand what His Plan is¹⁸ - and He doesn't want us to lose that understanding! If we continue to keep God's Holy Days we will never be confused about, or forget, His wonderful plan of salvation. And as we celebrate these days, we can look forward to the GLORIOUS time when God's Plan has been completed and we can all be together in God's Kingdom and part of His very own family!

¹⁶ All those born from the time of Adam to Christ's return who weren't called to be "firstfruits" in their own lifetime.

¹⁷ God wants all people to have the opportunity for salvation (1 Timothy 2:3-4). See "The Last Great Day" lesson for a detailed explanation of this Holy Day and what it pictures.

¹⁸ This is why the world as a whole doesn't understand God's Plan and is confused about what happens after death.