

The Holy Days and God's Plan

This lesson is lengthy and rather "meaty"- so you may want to study it in stages. Look up the referenced scriptures in your Bible to increase your understanding and prove this material for yourself.

Most of you have grown up keeping the Feasts - or Holy Days - with your parents, but have you ever wondered whether it really matters which days you observe or when you keep them?

This might seem like a silly question because of course you know it matters - you've been taught about these days, and why you should keep them, all your life! But you are now entering a period of time when you may be challenged about what you believe - from school, your friends, and the world. You may even be challenged by your *own* thoughts and feelings as you begin to make the transition from simply believing something because it's what your parents believe, and believing it because it's what *you* believe. So it's very important for you to understand *why* we believe what we do and *what* it all means. This will help you remain grounded as you internalise God's truth for yourself.

So why do we keep the Holy Days? Well, it's because God¹ tells us to! You can read about this in Leviticus 23. (This is a good chapter to remember, by the way, because it's one place where all the Feasts are listed together.) God begins His instruction to Moses by telling him something very important. Read **Leviticus 23:1-2** to see what it is.

Did you notice what God said? They 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! In fact, they are so important that God appointed the sun and moon as the means of calculating *when* to keep them.² When God gave these Feasts He expected them to be kept as a "statute forever" (**Leviticus 23:14,21,31,41**), so we still keep them today as God instructed, and as Christ and the early Christians did (**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 they are a *sign* between us and God that we are His people (**Exodus 31:12-13**)³ and secondly, because God wants His people to rejoice - and to learn to fear (respect) Him and appreciate that He is God (**Deuteronomy 12:7,12,18; 14:23**). However, today we also keep the Feasts for another reason: because we now understand

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 See Genesis 1:14 & Psalm 104:19 — the Hebrew word for "seasons" in these verses is *moed*, meaning "appointed times", referring to God's appointed festivals.

³ God's people today are *spiritual* Israelites (Romans 2:28-29; 1 Peter 2:9).

The Holy Days and God's Plan

that God's Holy Days are full of important meaning and symbolism - and that they teach us about His great plan of salvation for mankind!⁴

God's Plan For Mankind

Most of you know that God is creating a "family" and that His Plan is to make each one of us part of that family. 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. 2 Peter 1:4 explains 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,⁵ 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's a weekly Holy Day (Leviticus 23:3). God made the Sabbath by resting and blessed it to make it holy (Genesis 2:1-3). And He tells us to *keep* it holy by resting on it and not doing our normal work (Exodus 20:8-11). So that's what we do. We don't go to work on this day, but we rest and go to Church services instead. This is what God wants us to do on all of the Holy Days.⁶

Keeping the Sabbath points us back to Creation and reminds us that God began His Plan by creating everything through Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16). The Sabbath also looks forward to the Millennium when Christ will rule the earth and the whole world will enter a kind of "Sabbath rest".⁷

The Passover

The first annual 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 killed every firstborn child and beast. 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 their firstborn were spared. God told the Israelites to keep the Passover every year as a reminder of this (Exodus 12:21-27).

⁴ The Holy Days are a shadow - or picture - of things to come - see Colossians 2:16-17.

⁵ The material in this lesson is an overview. To find out more, please study the individual lessons about each Holy Day.

⁶ 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).

⁷ Hebrews 4:4-11 and Isaiah 11:1-10 discuss this rest in the context of the Millennium.

The Holy Days and God's Plan

But what does it mean for us today? Well, the Passover is the first step in God's Plan and it pictures something that had to occur before anybody could have the opportunity to become part of God's Family. You see, we all *sin* and do things that are wrong (**Romans 3:23**) - but the Bible reveals that the penalty for those sins is *death!* (**Romans 6:23**). So if death is the penalty we deserve for sinning, how can we live forever as part of God's Family? The answer is revealed in the last part of Romans 6:23 - it's through Jesus Christ!

Jesus became our Saviour and *died* to *save* us from the penalty of death (**John 3:16-17**). He *paid* the penalty for our sins so we don't have to! The Bible calls Him *our* Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**) because when He was killed, *His* blood was shed so our sins can be forgiven and death can *pass over* us (**Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7**). Three days later God resurrected Him to eternal, spiritual life and because of that we now have the opportunity to live forever too (**John 11:25-26; Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was an important part of God's Plan⁸ of salvation - and we'll learn more about it and what it means in future lessons.⁹

The Days of Unleavened Bread

Right after the Passover are the Days of Unleavened Bread (**Leviticus 23:6-8**), the second step in God's Plan - and we keep these days by removing leaven¹⁰ from our homes as God instructed. We do this as a reminder that we are to remove *sin* from our lives. You see, *leaven* is sometimes used in the Bible to picture sin (**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**) and God does not want us to continue in sin! (**Romans 6:12-13**). He wants us to *repent* of our sins - to change.

After we have repented of our sins, accepted Christ as our personal Saviour, and accepted His sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins, we can then be baptised¹¹ and God will forgive ALL of our sins. From then on we must walk in "newness of life" - in obedience to God - without sinning (**Romans 6:4-14; 1 John 2:2-6**). Indeed, God now considers us *without sin - unleavened* (see **1 Corinthians 5:7**) - so we must strive to live the rest of our lives that way (**Hebrews 9:13-14; 1 John 3:5-10**). Eating unleavened bread during these seven days reminds us of this (**1 Corinthians 5:7-8**). Of course, we won't be able to live that way perfectly and there will be times when we do sin. But if we are repentant (sorry) and determined to overcome our sins - and confess them to God

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

⁹ See "The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread" and "The Day of Pentecost" lessons in the Holy Day Series.

¹⁰ Bread, cake, cookies, etc - anything containing a leavening agent (yeast, baking soda, baking powder) to make it rise.

¹¹ 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. Therefore, 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.

The Holy Days and God's Plan

and ask for His forgiveness - then He will continue to cleanse us from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

You may think that it's only those who are baptised who need to obey God and live His Way of Life, but that's not true. God wants all of us - however old we are - to obey Him (Deuteronomy 6:5-7, 17-18a; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 19:16-17). The Bible tells us that even children are known by their deeds - by whether the things they do are right or wrong (Proverbs 20:11). So even though you may still be too young to be baptised, you are not too young to stop sinning and commit yourself to living God's Way of Life. This is part of the natural process that will lead to baptism when you are an adult - and it's what God desires and expects you to do.

Pentecost

Seven weeks after the Days of Unleavened Bread is the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:9-22). This is the third step in God's Plan and it pictures God giving us His Holy Spirit, which He does after we have repented of our sins and are baptised (Acts 2:38). We then become *His* people - and only those people who have God's Spirit in them can become part of God's Family (Romans 8:9-11).

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in a dramatic fashion on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It gave these men the strength and power to deliver God's message (Acts 4:31) and it will do the same for us today (2 Timothy 1:7). The Holy Spirit also enables baptized members to live God's Way of Life and to make the kind of behavioural changes they could not normally do themselves (Romans 8:5-8, 12-13; Galatians 5:22-25). At this time, you young people don't have the Holy Spirit *in* you because you aren't baptised, but if you are willing to obey God, then His Spirit will be *with* you to give you the extra help you need to live His Way of Life (John 14:15-17).

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 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 (see, for example, Luke 10:2; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; John 12:48; Revelation 14:14-15). This connection makes the meaning and symbolism behind Pentecost, the day of the firstfruits, clear. During the smaller, early harvest, the first crops - or firstfruits - were gathered in, and this pictures the fact that God isn't calling the whole world to understand His truth at this time. He is only calling a relatively few people now¹² - the "firstfruits" (1 Corinthians 16:15, NKJ; James 1:18) - who are being

¹² 1 Peter 2:9 refers to our calling; Luke 23:32 describes the people of God as a LITTLE flock (or few in number).

The Holy Days and God's Plan

prepared to help Jesus Christ, the first of the "firstfruits" (1 **Corinthians 15:20**), when He returns (**Revelation 5:10**; **Revelation 20:6**).

The Feast of Trumpets

The next Holy Day is the Feast of Trumpets (**Leviticus 23:23-25**). This is the fourth step in God's Plan and it pictures Jesus Christ returning to establish God's Kingdom on this earth (**Matthew 24:30-31**). Before this momentous event occurs there will be a time of trouble like this world has never seen before. The Bible calls it a time of GREAT tribulation (**Matthew 24:21-22**).

When Jesus Christ returns, all those who have lived God's Way of Life and have God's Spirit in them (the "firstfruits") will be changed into spirit beings and become part of God's Family. The Bible tells us that the "dead in Christ" will be resurrected first, followed by those who are still alive (1 **Corinthians 15:21-23, 51-52**; 1 **Thessalonians 4:15-17**). They will all be gathered up to meet Jesus Christ as He returns to stop Satan's world¹³ from completely destroying itself (**Matthew 24:22, 31**).

Revelation 11:15-18 describes the establishment of God's Government and Way of Life over the whole earth following the sounding of the seventh trumpet; Revelation 14:1-4 and Revelation 20:4-6 describe the resurrected saints (the "firstfruits") who will rule with Jesus Christ for 1000 years and help Him as He sets up God's Kingdom on this earth.¹⁴

Day of Atonement

Before Jesus establishes God's Kingdom, Satan will be bound so that he can't influence people any more (**Revelation 20:1-3**), and that's what the next Holy Day, the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 23:26-32**), pictures. This is the fifth step in God's Plan. Once Satan is removed, all the suffering and misery so prevalent in this world today will end (see **Revelation 21:4** for example) and people can be "at-one" with God.

God commands us to keep this day holy and specifically requires us to 'afflict our souls' from sunset to sunset (**Leviticus 23:27, 32**). We afflict our souls by fasting (see **Psalms 35:13**; **Isaiah 58:3**). God wants us to fast because it helps us realise how dependent we are on food and drink (which come from God) and how much we need *Him*

¹³ Satan is the god of this world - see, for example, 2 **Corinthians 4:4**; **Luke 4:5-6**; **John 14:30**.

¹⁴ The Bible doesn't specifically tell us what happens to the unbaptised children of those who are resurrected when Christ returns, but because children of believers are sanctified (considered holy by God - see 1 **Corinthians 7:14**) we can be sure that God has made plans to look after them as their parents rise in the air to meet the returning Christ. After Jesus has intervened to stop the world from destroying itself, those children will live on into the Millennium, most probably with their parents looking after them. See "The Feast of Tabernacles" lesson for more information about this.

The Holy Days and God's Plan

to sustain our lives. Fasting also gives us the opportunity to draw closer to God and become "at-one" with Him - to have the same mind and way of thinking.

The Feast of Tabernacles

Next we come to the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the sixth step in God's Plan (**Leviticus 23:33-43; Deuteronomy 16:13-15**).

The Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to Christ's 1,000-year millennial rule on this earth. It will be a wonderful time of peace and happiness (see **Isaiah 35**), when even the aggressive nature of wild animals will be changed (**Isaiah 11:6-9**). These scriptures tell us that people will not want to make war with each other any more. Crops will grow in abundance and everyone will live by the laws of God. For the first time people will experience how to live happy, productive, healthy and constructive lives with their families and society around them.

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, will take His place as King and ruler over the earth in place of Satan (**Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 11:15; Revelation 12:10**). He will govern with judgement and justice - and God's Kingdom and Government will be established forever. At that time, those of us who are already spirit beings will be helping Jesus Christ prepare the world for what the final step in God's Plan - the Last Great Day - pictures.

The Last Great Day

In 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 (**Leviticus 23:36, John 7:37**) pictures the large spiritual harvest that will take place after the Millennium.

During this time of judgment (**Revelation 20:11-13**), all those who weren't called to understand God's Plan during their lifetime will be resurrected back to physical life. God wants all people to have the opportunity to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (**1 Timothy 2:3-4**) - and this will be their chance to learn about God's Way of Life and the offer of salvation that is available through Jesus Christ.

Hopefully most *will* decide to take up this offer, 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 live His Way of Life, and accepts Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King, will be changed from a human to a spirit being and become part of God's Family and His Kingdom. To find out what happens next, read the encouraging words of **Revelation 21:1-7**. This is what God wants all of you to be a part of!

The Holy Days and God's Plan

Conclusion

The Holy Days teach us about the purpose of life and why man exists, and they outline the plan God has for mankind. And, as we've seen, the Holy Days all revolve around Jesus Christ. The first three looked forward to His first coming and picture that part of God's Plan that would not be possible without Christ's death and resurrection. The last four picture the events that will take place when Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom on this earth.

It is only by keeping the Holy Days that God has instituted that we can honour and worship Him, and understand His Plan correctly. He admonishes us in Deuteronomy 12:29-32 not to keep the world's holidays because they have their origins in paganism. This is why we don't celebrate Halloween, Christmas and Easter.¹⁵ We cannot worship God or understand His Plan by keeping the world's days!¹⁶ But if we faithfully celebrate God's Holy Days we will never be confused about, or forget, His wonderful plan of salvation. And this will motivate us to submit to God and live His Way of Life as we look forward to the glorious time when God's Plan has been completed and we can all be together in God's Kingdom and be part of His very own family!

¹⁵ More information about the origins of these holidays can be found in *Related Topics*.

¹⁶ This is why the world as a whole doesn't understand God's Plan and is confused about what happens after death.