

Yahweh's Annual Holy Feasts

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A Guide to Biblical Revelation By The Grace of Yahweh !

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Christmas: Curious Origins of a Popular Holiday

What do evergreen trees, reindeer, mistletoe and yule logs have to do with the birth of Yah'shua the Messiah? And was He really born on Dec. 25? Discover the real history of Christmas!

Every year around the middle of November, the decorations are going up, the parties are being planned, the presents are being bought. People around the world will again be celebrating what they perceive to be "Christmas". More than any other religious holiday, Christmas is associated with the name of the Messiah. The word *Christmas* is short for "the Christ's mass," instituted by the Catholic Church and continued by many Protestant churches.

Yet, curiously, the Bible records nothing about the apostles or early Congregation observing Christmas. History shows that it wasn't celebrated until hundreds of years after Yah'shua the Messiah lived on earth, and long after the apostles had passed from the scene.

Even more curious are the surprising circumstances under which Christmas came to be observed, and the many aspects of today's Christmas celebrations-including the date, Dec. 25-that have nothing to do with Yah'shua's birth, but *do* have a lot to do with ancient pre-Christian religions. What does history show us about the origins of the world's most popular holiday? It's quite an eye-opening story!

New Catholic Encyclopedia on Christmas:

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, in discussing the unlikelihood of a Dec. 25 date for Yah'shua the Messiah's birth and how that particular date was chosen, gives some insight into the holiday's origins:

"Why, then, were December 25 and January 6 chosen for the celebration of the Messiah's birth? Several theories are offered in explanation. Some actually believed December 25 was the birthday of the Messiah and tried to prove it by arguing from the conception of St. John the Baptist. Assuming, gratuitously, that Zachary was high priest and that the Day of Atonement fell on September 24, John would have been born on June 24 and the Messiah 6 months later, on December 25. *This theory is now considered completely untenable.*"

Continuing in the same source: "L. Duchesne suggested that the date of Christmas was determined from March 25, the traditional date of the Crucifixion. If He died on March 25, He must also have been conceived on this date and thus have been born 9 months later on December 25. More recently H. Engberding has tried, unsuccessfully, to defend a comparable position.

"According to the hypothesis suggested by H. Usener, developed by B. Botte, and accepted by most scholars today, the birth of the Messiah *was assigned the date of the winter solstice*, because *on this day*, as the sun began its return to the northern skies, *the pagan devotees of Mithra celebrated the birthday of the invincible sun.*

"Christmas originated at a time when the cult of the sun was particularly strong at Rome. This theory finds support in some of the Church Fathers' contrasting the birth of the Messiah and the winter solstice. Though the substitution of Christmas for the pagan festival cannot be proved with certainty, *it remains the most plausible explanation for the dating of Christmas*" (1967, Vol. 3, p. 656, emphasis added throughout).

This encyclopedia admits that arguments for a Dec. 25 birth of Yah'shua the Messiah simply aren't credible (see "Biblical Evidence Shows Yah'shua the Messiah Wasn't Born on Dec. 25 - below). It acknowledges that this date was chosen because of popular existing festivities honoring the ancient sun god Mithra and celebrating the winter solstice.

Ancient origins of Christmas:

Man, Myth & Magic is an illustrated encyclopedia of mythology and religion. In its article on Christmas, we uncover a treasure trove of research material on this holiday's origins and history.

"Christmas has its origin in *two ancient pagan festivals*, the great *Yule-feast of the Norsemen* and the *Roman Saturnalia*. Extending from Advent, which begins on 30 November or the Sunday nearest to it, to Candlemas Day on 2 February, it was close enough to the winter solstice to acquire many of the associations of the Norse ceremony: the Yule-log, the evergreen decorations in houses and churches, even the Christmas feast itself. *These elements were combined with the Saturnalia of the Romans to provide the basis for the early Christian festival.*

"During the Saturnalia, gifts were made by the wealthy to the poor in honor of the golden age of liberty when Saturn ruled the known world, and slaves were allowed to change places and clothing with their masters. They even elected their own mock king who, for the period of the festival, ruled as a despot. The Saturnalia involved the wildest debauchery, and was a festival worthy of Pan himself.

"Naturally it came under heavy censure from the early Congregation and despite the fact that Yah'shua the Messiah and the saints gradually replaced the pagan deities *it was long considered completely out of character with the Christian ideal*. However, *the festival was far too strongly entrenched in popular favor to be abolished*, and the [Catholic] Church finally granted the necessary recognition, believing that *if Christmas could not be suppressed it should be preserved in honor of the Christian God*" (1995, Vol. 3, p. 418).

Do you grasp what this is telling us? We saw earlier that the Dec. 25 date for Christmas came from ancient pre-Christian festivals. Here we see that the same ancient pagan celebrations honoring other gods were continued, with the Catholic Church simply relabeling the festivities and customs as Christian!

Christmas banned for its paganism:

The *Man, Myth & Magic* encyclopedia reveals more of the strange story of Christmas as it continued after the ancient celebrations were adopted by the Catholic Church:

"Once given a Christian basis the festival became fully established in Europe *with many of its pagan elements undisturbed*. It was only in the 4th century that 25 December was officially decreed to be the birthday of the Messiah, and it was another 500 years before the term Midwinter Feast was abandoned in favor of the word Christmas.

"Even then on the Continent the festival continued to show many features inherited from the Saturnalia. In particular, the Feast of Fools was a wild debauch reminiscent of the pagan past. The Normans when they invaded England in 1066, introduced a Master of Ceremonies into the English Christmas. Known as the Lord of Misrule, his counterpart in Scotland was called the Abbot of Unreason.

". . . The *undisguised pagan element in Christmas* had often provoked criticism from extreme Protestants but the festival was not really affected by their beliefs until the Puritans came to power in the 17th century. Christmas was attacked as 'the old heathens' feasting day to Saturn their god' and carols were forbidden. Finally, 25 December was proclaimed a fast day in 1644. The new rule was enforced by the army, which spent much of its time pulling down the greenery that festive 'pagans' had attached to their doors.

"In Scotland the prohibition was enforced with great rigor. This anti-Christmas attitude spread to Puritan territories in America. The Church established special services for Christmas in Boston during the 1690s, but many civil authorities strongly opposed this move. And it was not until some 150 years later that Christmas first became a legal holiday in the United States, in Alabama in 1836" (pp. 418-419).

Of course, Christmas has long been accepted throughout much of the world. Now it's so popular-not to mention commercially important-that it's almost inconceivable to realize that at one time it was outlawed for its pagan associations and practices!

An ancient nativity celebration reborn:

The noted British anthropologist and scholar Sir James Frazer wrote a classic work on ancient myths and religious practices titled *The Golden Bough*. His findings on the ancient origins of our Christmas practices and customs are revealing:

". . . There can be no doubt that the Mithraic religion [the worship of Mithra, the Persian sun god, popular in the Roman Empire] proved a formidable rival to Christianity, combining as it did a solemn ritual with aspirations after moral purity and a hope of immortality. Indeed the issue of the conflict between the two faiths appears for a time to have hung in the balance. An instructive relic of the long struggle *is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the [Catholic] Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival*.

"In the Julian calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning-point of the year.

The ritual of the nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt, was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, 'The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!'

"The Egyptians even represented the newborn sun by the image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great Oriental [i.e., Middle Eastern] goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte [also known as Easter].

"Now Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the Unconquered Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December. *The Gospels say nothing as to the day of the Messiah's birth, and accordingly the early Congregation did not celebrate it.*

"In time, however, the Christians of Egypt came to regard the sixth of January as the date of the Nativity, and the custom of commemorating the birth of the Savior on that day gradually spread until by the fourth century it was universally established in the East.

"But at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century the Western [Catholic] Church, which had never recognized the sixth of January as the day of the Nativity, adopted the twenty-fifth of December as the true date, and in time its decision was accepted also by the Eastern Church. At Antioch the change was not introduced till about the year 375 A.D." (1993, p. 358).

Sir James Frazer studied the thread of Christmas customs and practices through ancient times and reached an inescapable conclusion: Christmas is but a relic of the worship of the pagan god known by the Persians and Romans as Mithra or Mithras, relabeled with a Christian name.

A pagan festival relabeled:

Why did the early Catholic Church adopt and relabeled this ancient pagan celebration? Frazer explains:

"What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas?

The motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. 'The reason,' he tells us, 'why the fathers transferred the celebration of the sixth of January to the twenty-fifth of December was this. *It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December the birthday of the Sun,* at which they kindled lights in token of festivity.

"In these solemnities and festivities the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the [Catholic] Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January. Accordingly, along with this custom, the practice has prevailed of kindling fires till the sixth.'

"The heathen origin of Christmas is plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that solemn day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner [Pope] Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnized because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the nativity of the Messiah.

"Thus it appears that the Christian [Catholic] Church *chose* to celebrate the birthday of its Founder on the twenty-fifth of December *in order to transfer the devotion of the heathen from the Sun to him who was called the Sun of Righteousness*" (1993, pp. 358-359).

The truth about Christmas's origins is simple: One of the ancient world's most popular celebrations—a festival that originated in sun worship and honoring pagan gods—was renamed and reborn as traditional Christianity's most popular celebration.

What would Yah'shua say?

Today, would Yah'shua the Messiah recognize the religion that professes to follow Him? Think about it: If you lived in the Holy Land in the time of Yah'shua and you observed Christmas, *you would be alone*, for no true Israelite ever kept Christmas during Yah'shua's life on earth. Further, if you saw Yah'shua or the apostles walking through the narrow passageways of Old Jerusalem or the dusty roads of Judea and

you invited them to join in your Christmas celebration, what would they say?

Since Yah'shua the Messiah is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and all Scripture is inspired by Yahweh (2 Timothy 3:16), they might remind you of what Yahweh's Word says about incorporating pagan customs into your worship:

". . . Do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *You shall not worship Yahweh your God in that way; for every abomination to Yahweh which He hates they have done to their gods . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

Yah'shua Himself might repeat to you what He said to the Pharisees, who considered their traditions and customs more important than obeying Yahweh's Word: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And *in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matthew 15:8-9). Christmas, mentioned nowhere in the Bible, is a "commandment" of men.

The apostle Paul might remind you of the words he wrote to Congregation members in Corinth, a city steeped in pagan religious practices: ". . . What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has the Messiah with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

"And what agreement has the temple of Yahweh with idols? For you are the temple of the living God . . . Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says Yahweh. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of Yahweh" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17;7:1).

Does it really matter?

Sadly, for the bulk of modern Christianity these scriptures-which help define what true New Covenant Israelite faith is and is not-mean very little. Most of the 2 billion professing Christians on earth today observe Christmas and other extra

biblical holidays without ever giving them a second thought.

Most will never take the time to look into their beliefs to learn their true origins, though information such as that found in this article can be found in virtually any modern library or on the Internet. Though the basic facts about the origins of Christmas are spelled out in almost any reputable encyclopedia, most people will not look long and hard at their traditions and customs to see if they square with the Bible.

It's especially ironic to see the articles that appear in many newspapers each year -often written by well-intentioned but misguided clergymen-who recite the pagan origins of Christmas and its trappings but conclude that it doesn't matter because it's now celebrated for a good cause. We have to wonder how they can reconcile that view with the clear scriptures quoted above.

What about your beliefs? Yah'shua the Messiah says that those who worship Yahweh "must worship [Him] in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Are your beliefs and worship firmly grounded in biblical truth, or in ancient fables?

Biblical Evidence Shows Yah'shua the Messiah Wasn't Born on Dec. 25:

History convincingly shows that Dec. 25 was popularized as the date for Christmas, not because the Messiah was born on that day but because it was already popular in pagan religious celebrations as the birthday of the sun.

But is it possible that Dec. 25 could be the day of the Messiah's birth?

"Lacking any scriptural pointers to Yah'shua's birthday, early Christian teachers suggested dates all over the calendar. Clement. . . picked November 18. Hippolytus . . . figured the Messiah must have been born on a Wednesday . . . An anonymous document[,] believed to have been written in North Africa around A.D. 243, placed Yah'shua's birth on March 28" (Jeffery Sheler, *U.S. News & World Report*, "In Search of Christmas," Dec. 23, 1996, p. 58).

A careful analysis of Scripture, however, clearly indicates that Dec. 25 is an unlikely date for the Messiah's birth. Here are two primary reasons: First, we know that shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks at the time of Yah'shua's birth (Luke 2:7-8). Shepherds were not

in the fields during December. According to *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays*, Luke's account "suggests that Yah'shua may have been born in summer or early fall. Since December is cold and rainy in Judea, it is likely the shepherds would have sought shelter for their flocks at night" (p. 309).

Similarly, *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary* says this passage argues "against the birth [of the Messiah] occurring on Dec. 25 since the weather would not have permitted" shepherds watching over their flocks in the fields at night. Second, Yah'shua's parents came to Bethlehem to register in a Roman census (Luke 2:1-4). Such censuses were not taken in winter, when temperatures dropped below freezing and roads were in poor condition. Taking a census under such conditions would have been self-defeating.

Given the difficulties and the desire to bring pagans into Christianity, "the important fact then . . . to get clearly into your head is that the fixing of the date as December 25th was a compromise with paganism" (William Walsh, *The Story of Santa Klaus*, 1970, p. 62).

If Yah'shua the Messiah wasn't born on Dec. 25, does the Bible indicate when He was born? The biblical accounts point to the fall of the year as the most likely time of Yah'shua's birth, based on the conception and birth of John the Baptist.

Since Elizabeth (John's mother) was in her sixth month of pregnancy when Yah'shua was conceived (Luke 1:24-36), we can determine the approximate time of year Yah'shua was born if we know when John was born. John's father, Zacharias, was a priest serving in the Jerusalem temple during the course of Abijah (Luke 1:5). Historical calculations indicate this course of service corresponded to June 13-19 in that year (*The Companion Bible*, 1974, Appendix 179, p. 200).

It was during this time of temple service that Zacharias learned that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child (Luke 1:8-13). After he completed his service and traveled home, Elizabeth conceived (verses 23-24). Assuming John's conception took place near the end of June, adding nine months brings us to the end of March as the most likely time for John's birth. Adding another six months (the difference in ages between

John and Yah'shua) brings us to the end of September as the likely time of Yah'shua's birth.

"EASTER" and "CHRISTMAS" and Yahweh'S HOLY DAYS

Christians generally, accept and celebrate the "Good Friday" - "Easter Sunday" concept of the Messiah's crucifixion and resurrection. Was it really a Friday - Sunday event? What about 3 days and 3 nights? Does it Matter to Yahweh?

The Bible says "prove all things", and just as every other part of the Bible is alive and meaningful in our daily lives, so is the phrase "prove all things". The Bible provides all of the necessary resources to prove all things, to help motivate us to search the Scriptures diligently, and to meditate on them. In other words Yahweh really does want us to know the truth, not to simply "accept" what is palmed off as the truth by others - even (and especially) so-called "religious experts" and the "tradition of men" promoters, that call themselves "Christians"!

Yah'shua was asked point blank by the doubting Pharisees for a sign - proof of his Messiahship. Yah'shua answered, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS in the heart of the earth". (Matt. 12:39-40)

Yah'shua's statement has tremendous import - the significance is overwhelming. He declared that THE ONLY SIGN He would give to prove He was the Messiah was that He would spend "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". The Pharisees demanded proof - Yah'shua offered but one evidence, which was not the fact of the resurrection itself, but the length of time He would remain in His grave, before being resurrected. Yah'shua staked His claim to being your Savior and mine upon remaining exactly three days and three nights in a tomb. If He failed in this sign, He must be rejected as an impostor! No wonder Satan has caused unbelievers to scoff at the story of Jonah and the "whale" and set up a tradition that denies Yah'shua as the Messiah.

This one and only supernatural proof ever given by Yah'shua for His Messiahship greatly bothers "traditional" Christians. Any attempt to explain away this sole proof for the Messiah's

divinity - deity - are ludicrous in the extreme, but explain them away they must, or their "sacred Good Friday - Easter Sunday" tradition collapses. Yah'shua does not lie - He said clearly there shall be no other sign for this proof, "but the sign of the prophet Jonah". And that's all that is really needed, because when read into context with all other scripture on the matter, it convincingly "proves all things" as it should.

Some "experts", according to various encyclopedia etc, imply that Yah'shua was only in the tomb half as long as He expected - or that three days and three nights really only means three "periods" of day or night - or that being placed in the tomb "Friday" at sunset and rising "Sunday" morning, is 2 nights and 1 day, but that's what Yah'shua really meant! The Bible proves that Yah'shua knew exactly how long a "day" was and exactly how long He would spend in the grave. In John 11:9-10, Yah'shua said; "are there not 12 hours in a day - but if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth", and in Genesis 1:4, Yahweh, "divided the light from the darkness, and Yahweh called the light day and the darkness he called night. And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the first day...and the evening and the morning were the second day...and the evening and the morning were the third day". The Bible defines the time required to fulfill "the third day". It ought to be conclusive - to anyone who actually READS the Bible!

How then do so-called wise and prudent "theologians" know that Yah'shua was crucified on "Good Friday" and rose "Easter Sunday"? They don't! Because it is not true. It is merely tradition, which we have been taught from childhood and excused throughout our adult years as something that's okay and really doesn't make any difference as long as we celebrate the "event" not the date. What poor Israelites we are when we have to "excuse" our Christian traditions. Yah'shua clearly and simply warned against "making the word of Yahweh of no effect through your traditions" in Mark 7:13.

Friday to Sunday just does not make 3 days. 3 days must be important or Yah'shua would not have said so. In Mark 8:31, Yah'shua, "began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things ...and be killed, and AFTER 3 days rise again". And in Mark 9:31; "they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the

third day". And in Matthew 27:63 "After 3 days I will rise again". And in John 2:19-21; "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up".

The Crucifixion day was called "the preparation" or day before the Sabbath. This day ended at sunset according to Bible reckoning - Lev. 23:32. Yah'shua cried out soon after the "ninth hour" or 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the preparation day - Matt. 27:46-50, Mark 15:34-37, Luke 23:44-46. Yah'shua was laid in the tomb just before this same day ended - just before sunset - Matt. 27:57-60. And John 19:42 adds, "There laid they Yah'shua Therefore because of the Jew's preparation day". The Jewish custom was all dead bodies had to be buried before the beginning of a new day, and, according to the Bible He was - just barely before sunset as the scriptures prove.

This leads to an intriguing conclusion. Three full nights and three full days after that preparation day sunset, brings us to sunset. Which means the resurrection occurred at sunset not sunrise! If Yah'shua rose at any other time of day He could not have been 3 days and 3 nights in the grave and He would have failed to prove by the sign He gave, His Messiahship. The "preparation day" for the Sabbath is defined by John 19:14,31: "...for that Sabbath day was a high day...It was the preparation of the Passover".

Any Jew can tell you what a "high day" is. There are seven each year - all called Sabbaths, and each year they fall on different days of the week. (Leviticus 16:31, 23:24, 26-32 and 39 refers to all these annual holy days as Sabbaths.) Matthew 26:2; "Ye know that after 2 days is the feast of the Passover and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified".

All Bible texts say Yah'shua was crucified on the Passover. The Bible in Num.28:16-17, defines the Passover; "And in the 14th day of the first month [called Abib] is the Passover of Yahweh. And in the fifteenth day of the month is the Feast". The Hebrew calendar shows that in A.D. 31, the year Yah'shua was crucified, the 14th of ABIB which was the Passover, which is always the preparation day for the annual high day Sabbath, was on Wednesday, and the High Sabbath was on Thursday.

There were 2 Sabbaths that week - the annual high Sabbath, and the weekly Sabbath which was the day of the resurrection. (Saturday using standard weekly Roman traditions.)

Yah'shua rose from the dead as He said He would in John 2:19, 3 days and 3 nights later, at or near sunset on the 2nd Sabbath of that week - to bring light into darkness. It was Saturday night, not Sunday morning. I Corinthians 15:3-4; "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that the Messiah died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures". If we look at a calendar for that year, it is quite easy to figure out that the preparation day; the crucifixion day was on Wednesday, and that 3 days and 3 nights after that, was near sunset on Saturday.

It is also significant that as Daniel's prophecy in 9:24-27 says, Yah'shua was to be cut off "in the midst of the week". This prophecy uses the day for a year symbolism so that the "70 weeks" became a literal 7 years, with the Messiah being "cut off in the midst", (after only 3 1/2 years of teaching) and also in the middle day of a literal week. There is one more final proof in the Bible. In Mark 16:1, Mary Magdalene and her companions did not buy their spices to anoint Yah'shua until after the Sabbath was past. They could not prepare them until after this, yet after preparing the spices they rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment (Luke 23:56).

These scriptures seem to contradict themselves unless you accept the only possible explanation: After the annual high Sabbath, which was Thursday, the women purchased and prepared the spices on Friday, and then they rested on Saturday - the weekly Sabbath.

The fact is that Yah'shua was crucified on a Wednesday (14th of ABIB, A.D. 31) and was resurrected on a Saturday (17TH of ABIB, A.D. 31), placed in the tomb near sunset, and rose out of the tomb near sunset. "Good Friday" and "Easter Sunday" are pagan myths; traditions of men, adopted by the early Roman Christian church and accepted as "okay" by almost all Christians today.

Centuries old documents exist that evidence the Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday resurrection. A document entitled the "*Didascalia Apostolorum*", dating from around the year 200 A.D., mentions the last Passover Supper of Yah'shua and His disciples was on a Tuesday evening. It should be noted that the timing mentioned in the document also corresponds with

the Biblical method of reckoning the week as starting with Sunday as the first day with the days beginning at sunset. The document states: "*For when we had eaten the Passover on the third day of the week at even [Tuesday evening], we went forth to the Mount of Olives; and in the night they seized our Lord Yah'shua. And the next day, which was the fourth [day] of the week [Wednesday], He remained in the house [arrest] of Caiaphas the high priest*". Clearly He was crucified that following Passover day of Wednesday.

"Easter", from the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian goddess "Ishtar" is from old Teutonic mythology where it is known as "Ostern". The Phoenician name of the goddess was "Astarte", consort of Baal, the sun god, whose worship is strictly forbidden and denounced by the Almighty Yahweh of the Bible as the most abominable of all pagan idolatry. Yahweh condemned Solomon and took away the kingdom of Israel from his son for offering sacrifice to Molech - also Baal, the sun god.

Yahweh commanded His people to observe Passover forever in Exodus 12:24. This was commanded to the Israelites prior to the Old Covenant Law of Moses, when they were still in Egypt. Yah'shua did not abolish Passover, He merely changed the symbolism used from the Passover lamb whose blood was shed, to unleavened bread and wine.

It is now a memorial to the Messiah's sacrifice, reaffirming year after year on its anniversary, the 14th of ABIB thru 17th of ABIB, the TRUE Israelite's faith in the broken body of the Messiah for our physical healing, and His blood for the remission of sins.

Satan has deceived all western nations into discarding Yahweh's forever ordained festival to commemorate the death of the true Savior of our sins, and substituting it with the pagan counterfeit Easter! Scores of millions are deceived into observing this heathen idolatry under the delusion they are some how honoring the Messiah, the Son of Yahweh. Like blind sheep they observe the traditions and customs of men. Yahweh says in Acts 17:30; "the times of this ignorance Yahweh winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent". The Bible accurately predicts this in II Thess. 2:7; "The mystery of iniquity doth already work". And that was only 20 years after the Congregation began!

Yah'shua kept the Passover, Yah'shua taught the Passover, and Paul said in I Cor. 5:7-8; "The Messiah our Passover is sacrificed for us; Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". Even Yah'shua commanded; "this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me". We are to do it in remembrance of Yah'shua's death as a memorial. The Apostles all kept the Passover and documented it long after the Messiah had risen.

Does Yahweh care? Can we use ancient pagan festivals to honor the Messiah? Let Yahweh, as He has in the Bible answer the questions.

Deut. 12:30-31: "Take heed...that thou enquire not after their gods, saying; `How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise'. Thou shalt not do so unto Yahweh thy God; for every abomination to Yahweh, which he hateth, they have done unto their gods".

In other words, Yahweh calls these customs abominations because they commemorate false ideas. Can you worship the Messiah or Yahweh in vain? The very words of the Messiah: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of Yahweh, ye hold the tradition of men...Ye reject the commandment of Yahweh that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:7-9).

Assembling for worship of Yahweh under the guise of "Good Friday" and "Easter Sunday" is nothing but the tradition of men - and pagan tradition which Yahweh hates at that. Those who do so, disobey Yahweh's commandment to "worship Him in spirit and in truth" and such worship is utterly in vain - Yah'shua said so!

Yah'shua's New Covenant did not in any way, imply to do away with the Old Covenant Commandments. Yah'shua reassured that we all should keep the Commandments - all of them. Yah'shua did do away with all of the old rituals and traditions in favor of faith - but all of the commandments remain. Yahweh commanded His people to keep His 7 annual high Sabbaths forever. Years later He gave His people (us) the 10 commandments, one of which reaffirmed the keeping of the Sabbath; the weekly Sabbath and the annual high Sabbaths, including the Passover - not Easter.

Christmas: The words "Christ Mass" gravitated into the Congregation in the fourth century in the form of ordinances from the Roman Catholic church, copying former pagan rituals under the new name. The Catholic Encyclopedia says: "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Congregation...the first evidence of the feast is from Egypt. Pagan customs, ancient, centering around the January calends gravitated to Christmas". The Roman church ordered it to be celebrated as an official Christian festival in the fifth century.

The exact date of Yah'shua's birth is unknown, as all authorities acknowledge. Though there are many scriptural inferences suggesting sometime in the early fall, probably September. Encyclopedia Britannica says: "certain Latins may have transferred the birthday of the unconquered Sun from January 6th to December 25th which was then a Mithraic feast. This feast of Sun worship and idolatry is what the Latins [Romans] claimed was invented by disciples of Cerinthus".

Today, we have gotten Christmas from the Romans as set out above. They got it from paganism, originating in ancient Egypt in the days of King Osiris and Queen Isis, about 3000 B.C. After the death of King Osiris, his wife propagated the evil doctrine of the survival of Osiris as a spirit being. She claimed a full grown ever-green tree sprang up overnight from a dead tree stump, which to her symbolized the springing forth of new life from the dead Osiris. On each anniversary of his birth, which was December 25th, she claimed that the dead king would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts on it. Yahweh warns us in Jeremiah 10:2-5; "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; For the customs of the people are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest...they decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it...so that it will not topple".

The queen, through her scheming, became "Queen of heaven" and Osiris became "divine son of Heaven". Through the generations Osiris became known as the "divine sun" and later the SUN GOD of Baal. The Phoenicians referred to them as the "Mother and Child" (Isis and Osiris) as chief objects of worship. The worship of this "Mother and Child" as Baal the sun god spread to many countries and languages.

The Roman Catholic church carried many of these old pagan customs and beliefs along with

them into the new "Christianity", as the people were reluctant to give up their pagan traditions. Even the song "Silent Night, Holy Night" with its "Mother and Child" theme, stems in part from this era. Yahweh commands his faithful ministers; "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression"!

Among ancient pagans mistletoe was used at this festival of the winter solstice because it was considered sacred to the sun, due to its "miraculous" healing power. The pagan custom of kissing under the mistletoe was an early step in the night of revelry and drunken debauchery, celebrating the death of the "old sun" and the birth of the new at the winter solstice (shortest day of the year).

Holly berries were also considered sacred to the sun god. The yule log is in reality the "sun log". "Yule" means "wheel" - the pagan symbol for the sun. Even the lighting of candles and fires as a Christian ceremony is merely the continuation of the pagan custom of encouraging the waning sun god as he reached the lowest place in the southern sky.

St. Nicholas, a Roman Catholic Bishop was a legend for his surreptitious bestowal of dowries on the three daughters of an impoverished citizen, secretly on the "Eve of St. Nicholas" December 6th, subsequently transferred to Christmas day as "Santa Claus", the English phonetic sounding equivalent to "Saint Nicholas". From the Adam Clarke Commentary, volume 5, "The people of the east never approached the presence of kings and great personages without a present in hand. The custom is often noticed in the Old Covenant and still prevails in the east...as a continuance of the ancient pagan customs". The custom of giving presents invariably retards Yahweh's work, often setting it back at the Christmas season every year, rather than honoring the Messiah. If you want to honor someone, would you lavishly buy gifts for everyone else, trading back and forth, while not providing any gift for the honored one?

But even though the exact date of Yah'shua's birth is unknown, should we not select some date and celebrate His birthday? Absolutely NOT! The celebration of birthdays is another pagan custom celebrated by sinners! The Catholic Encyclopedia: "In the scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great

banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners like Pharaoh and Herod who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world".

Many modern Christians still reason that, even though Christmas and all its trimmings are pagan customs, honoring the false sun-god, we don't observe it to honor the false god - we observe it to honor the Messiah. But Yahweh answers in His Word; "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them [the pagans in their customs]...that thou enquire not after their gods. Saying, 'how did these nations serve their gods? Even so I will do likewise', thou shalt not do so unto Yahweh thy God: for every abomination to Yahweh, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods" (Deut. 12:30-31). And Yah'shua says plainly this form of worship is utterly in vain (serves no purpose).

Passover: Detailed Events and Chronology of the Messiah's Crucifixion and Resurrection

- i) **Summary Chronology of the Messiah's Crucifixion and Resurrection**
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Summary Chronology of the Messiah's Crucifixion and Resurrection

Tuesday: Yah'shua the Messiah ate an early-evening Passover meal with His disciples at the beginning of Nisan 14, Hebrew reckoning, and instituted the New Covenant symbols (Matthew 26:26-28). Yah'shua was then betrayed by Judas, arrested and during the night brought before the high priest.

Wednesday: Yah'shua the Messiah was crucified and died around 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46-50). This was the preparation day for the annual,

not weekly, Sabbath, which began that evening (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). The Messiah's body was placed in the tomb at twilight (Matthew 27:57-60).

Thursday: This was the high-day Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:4-7). It is described as the day after the Day of Preparation (Matthew 27:62).

Friday: The high-day Sabbath now past, the women bought and prepared spices for anointing Yah'shua's body before resting on the weekly Sabbath day, which began at sunset (end of Friday) (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56).

Saturday: The women rested on the weekly Sabbath, according to the Fourth Commandment (Luke 23:56; Exodus 20:8-11), which included what we typically think of as Friday evening in Roman terms. Yah'shua rose around sunset, exactly three days and three nights (72 hours) after burial, fulfilling the sign of Jonah and authenticating His Messiahship.

Sunday: The women brought the prepared spices early in the morning while it was still dark (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Yah'shua had already risen (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:2-6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1). He did not rise on Sunday morning, but at sunset the day before.

1. The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

There are several preliminary details that we need to consider before we actually begin to set forth the chronology of the crucifixion week. Although they may seem unrelated on the surface of things, as the study progresses, we will see their importance and relevance.

The Prophecy of Jonah

"Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matt. 12:38-40.

Repeatedly the scribes and the Pharisees refused to accept the Messianic claims of Yah'shua. His words were not good enough for them. They wanted something more. They demanded an unmistakable sign. The Hebrews walked by sight, not by faith.

Yah'shau responded to their demand by quoting Jonah 1:17, which says that the prophet Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. Then He clearly applied this passage to His own coming experience, saying that He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Yah'shau said that three full days would pass between the time of His entombment and the hour He arose from the dead. The Hebrews did not question the literalness of Jonah's three days and three nights in the great fish, and there is no reason to believe that our Messiah did not mean that His own entombment would not be literally fulfilled.

The Typology of Jonah

Jonah's captivity in the great fish and his subsequent deliverance is a type of the death and resurrection of Yah'shua. The death and bodily resurrection of the Messiah after three days in the tomb is the sign that Yahweh is now using to authenticate the Gospel message. That's why the Apostle Paul wrote, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that the Messiah died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." I Cor. 15:3-4.

Jonah was the only Old Covenant prophet who was ever sent away from Israel as a missionary to the Gentiles. He was sent to that great and wicked city of Nineveh. After passing through a death-illustrating experience and being restored to his commission, Yahweh used him to bring repentance to the Ninevites.

At the time our Messiah gave the sign of Jonah to the Hebrews, He was about to depart from Israel. The religious leaders had rejected His Messianic claims and had persuaded most of the people to do the same. But before the Gospel of our Messiah would be carried to the Gentiles, it was necessary for Him to be crucified, buried for three days and three nights as Jonah was and resurrected to newness of life and commission.

The importance of the sign of Jonah is that if Yah'shau did not spend exactly three days and three nights in the tomb, then the Gospel message is not being authenticated; Yah'shua's words are in error and the Bible is not true. No wonder Satan is so eager to perpetuate the "Good Friday" crucifixion and the Sunday morning resurrection.

For in so doing he is attacking Yah'shua, the Bible and the Gospel at the same time.

2. The Passover Pilgrimage

The appropriate point to begin our detailed consideration of the crucifixion week is with an incident that occurred at Jericho. The healing of blind Bartimaeus stands at the beginning of the end of our Messiah's life on this earth.

The Jericho Road

"And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Yah'shua of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Yah'shua, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me." Mark 10:46-48.

There is a significant point in Mark's record that we should not overlook. Bartimaeus called Yah'shua the "Son of David." This is the only place in Mark's Gospel that this title appears. Elsewhere Yah'shua is referred to as the "Son of man." But Bartimaeus called Him the "Son of David," and he was healed of his blindness.

The spiritual blindness of the nation Israel, Yahweh's chosen people, is pictured by Bartimaeus' physical blindness. The Son of David, the Anointed One of Yahweh, had come to give sight to that spiritually blind nation. And in Jericho the Son of David once more showed His gracious power as Bartimaeus, who is a type of the remnant that will someday recognize Yah'shua of Nazareth as David's greater Son, had his vision restored.

The Passover Feast was, by far, the greatest crowd gatherer of all Israel's annual feasts. The pilgrims were young and old. The aged who were unable to walk the entire distance rode upon the backs of donkeys. The crowded road and the plodding asses made for slow progress along the road.

It is approximately 17 miles from Jericho to Bethany. Seventeen miles seems quite a short distance to us today because of our modern roads and means of transportation. But to the pilgrims of Yah'shua's day the distance was not short and the journey was not a minor undertaking. The road was wild, rough and a continuous upgrade.

The Outskirts of Jerusalem

When the pilgrim crowds reached the vicinity of Jerusalem, it was necessary that a camp be made before the sun went down and darkness settled over the land. Historical records indicate that on the eve of the Passover there were vast numbers of pilgrims in and around Jerusalem. Some estimates run as high as a million. The city of Jerusalem certainly did not have accommodations to handle so many people; therefore, it was necessary for the people to camp wherever they could find room. The campsites had to be prepared and the booths (or tents) erected, which served as temporary shelters, after the destination was reached. It would frequently require several hours for a family to find a suitable campsite and to get properly settled down for the night.

The purpose in considering the details of the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem is to help us understand today that it would have been next to impossible for a group of traveling pilgrims to leave Jericho in the morning and arrive in Jerusalem on the same day. It took a minimum of two days to make the trip. And this fact has an important bearing on establishing the day of the week as well as the day of the month on which our Messiah's last journey to Jerusalem was made.

Messianic Expectations

When our Messiah began His journey to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of the Passover as the true Paschal Lamb, a relatively small company followed Him. By the time He reached Jericho, the band of disciples had been joined by other religious pilgrims who also were headed for Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Having seen and heard of the miracles performed by Yah'shua, many in this assorted company expected Yah'shua to openly declare Himself as the Messiah when He reached Jerusalem. They anticipated the Roman yoke being thrown off by a force of arms, aided by a display of supernatural miracles from the Messiah Himself. Thus by the time the group reached Jerusalem, Messianic hopes were running high, and the stage was set for a triumphal march into the city.

Entry into Jerusalem "On the Next Day"

The Apostle John tells us of our Messiah's arrival at Bethany after His long journey along the Jericho road. Leaving most of the traveling party

at the outskirts of Jerusalem, Yah'shua and His disciples went to nearby Bethany.

"Then Yah'shua six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." John 12:1-2.

The last eight miles on the Jericho road were the steepest part of the uphill grade; so we can be sure that our Messiah and His party were quite weary when they arrived at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. They certainly must have appreciated the supper that was prepared as a token of their great love.

Notice, however, John 12:12-15, which reads:

"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Yah'shua was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of Yah'shua. And Yah'shua, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

The basis for what is known by traditional "Christians" as Palm Sunday is found in this passage. It is generally, but erroneously taught that the triumphal entry occurred on the first day of the week, and that by observing Palm Sunday, Christians are commemorating the first significant event in the crucifixion week.

Verse 12 definitely states that the so-called triumphal entry took place "on the next day", after our Messiah's arrival in Bethany. If this occurred on the first day of the week, then the preceding day was the seventh day of the week. In other words, Yah'shua completed His journey from Jericho on the Sabbath.

One thing that was deeply ingrained in the consciences of the Hebrews of that day was the Sabbath. The Rabbinical laws of the Sabbath had been worked out to the minutest detail, one of which pertained to the "Sabbath day's journey."

The Sabbath day's journey is mentioned only in Acts 1:12, where we read, "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey." Davis' Dictionary of the Bible states that the distance between Mount Olivet and Jerusalem,

measured as the crow flies, is about 2,250 feet. The regulation of the Sabbath day's journey had its origin in Yahweh's injunction found in Exodus 16:29, which states that the Israelites on the wilderness journey were not to leave the boundaries of the camp on the Sabbath day. These were reckoned to be about 2,000 cubits, or just under 3/4 of a mile.

We know from secular records that some flexibility was allowed in the length of the Sabbath day's journey to permit Passover pilgrims encamped on the outskirts to come into Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem were considered as extended to encircle the encamped pilgrims during this season. The man-made regulation always permitted travel to any point within the city wall, since the Sabbath day's journey was considered to end at the city gate.

Bethany is fifteen furlongs (about 1 7/8 miles) from the actual walls of Jerusalem. John 11:18. Though this would have been slightly longer than a Sabbath day's journey, travel from Bethany to Jerusalem was permissible on the Sabbath, due to the "extended walls" of the Passover season.

But, a long eight-mile journey toward Jerusalem along the Jericho road by Yah'shua and all who were with Him would have been a clear violation of the Sabbath laws as most Hebrews understood them. Furthermore, the supper that Martha and Mary had prepared for Yah'shua on the day of His journey (if that day was a Sabbath day) would have placed them in violation of the Sabbath. The penalty for Sabbath violation was stoning to death by command of the religious authorities.

These facts lead to only one valid conclusion: the journey from Jericho was not made on a Sabbath day. Therefore, the triumphal entry could not have been made on a Sunday!

3. First Century Hebrew Traditions

The observance of the Passover recalls Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the beginning of her national life. But in a much deeper sense, the Passover foreshadowed the sacrifice of that true, spotless Lamb of Yahweh, slain on Calvary's tree for the sins of the world.

The Law of the Passover

Yahweh's law of the Passover is considered in three books of the Pentateuch: Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Three specific

days are mentioned in conjunction with the observance of the Passover Feast. The first date of importance is the tenth of Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew year, which in Moses' day was known as Abib. This is the date on which the Israelites were to select their Paschal lamb. "In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb." Exodus 12:3.

The next important date is the fourteenth of Nisan. Exodus 12:6 has these instructions: "And ye shall keep it (that is, the Paschal Lamb) up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening."

The Passover lamb was to be slain on the fourteenth. However, God's instructions permitted some tolerance as to the exact time of the slaying of the sacrifice, and this is extremely significant. The literal translation of the last clause of verse 6 is "between the evenings," not "in the evening."

According to Hebrew reckoning, a day begins at sunset. So the fourteenth of Nisan begins at 6 PM on the day we would call the thirteenth. And the fourteenth ends and the fifteenth begins at 6 PM on the following day, the day we would consider as the fourteenth. Therefore, the Passover extends from sunset on the thirteenth to sunset on the fourteenth as Romans reckon it.

In the observance of the first Passover, Yahweh specifically instructed Moses that the lamb was to be slain in the evening of the fourteenth, which was the evening that ushered in the day of the fourteenth. The Hebrew custom down through the centuries, therefore, was to slay the lamb early in the evening of the fourteenth of Nisan (which actually was done late in the afternoon of the thirteenth) and partake of it at the Paschal supper, which was on the evening preceding the day of Nisan fourteenth. Thus Yahweh made provision for His Son, the true Paschal Lamb, to partake of the symbolic Paschal lamb on the evening of the fourteenth and still offer Himself as an acceptable sacrifice before the setting of the sun on the day of Nisan fourteenth. Yahweh's way is perfect just as His Word is perfect.

Immediately upon the setting of the sun upon the day of the fourteenth of Nisan, the fifteenth of Nisan began. And according to Leviticus 23:6-7 and Numbers 28:18, this was the day that initiated the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In it, the assembly of Israel was to "have an holy convocation" and to "do no servile work therein." Don't miss this point, the day of Nisan fifteenth was always a "High" Sabbath day! It made absolutely no difference on which day of the week it fell.

The nation of Israel was given a number of Sabbath days, among which the seventh-day Sabbath was only one type. The other Sabbaths, such as the fifteenth of Nisan, were considered to be "high" days; that is, they had even more significance than the regular seventh-day Sabbaths.

One of the main reasons the Christian church holds to a Friday crucifixion is because the crucifixion day was followed by a Sabbath. Early church leaders jumped to the conclusion that this was a seventh-day Sabbath without carefully consulting the Scriptures. The Old Covenant clearly teaches that every Nisan fifteenth was a Sabbath--and a high Sabbath at that. But John 19:31 tells us "that Sabbath day was an high day." Therefore, the day of our Messiah's crucifixion did not necessarily occur on Friday. It could have occurred on any day of the week.

Modifications to the Passover

When Israel was finally settled in Palestine, there was a modification in the manner the Passover Feast was observed. For instance, in our Messiah's day the Passover was no longer eaten in a standing position. Instead, it was eaten in a reclining position just as the regular meals.

In the days of our Messiah, it had become customary to kill the Passover lambs on the afternoon of the thirteenth of Nisan rather than on the evening of the fourteenth. Josephus, the Hebrew historian, tells us that there were sometimes as many as 250,000 lambs slain on the occasion of the Passover. It was necessary that the lambs be slain by the priests in the temple. We can imagine the momentous traffic jam that resulted from this and we can well appreciate that several hours of time would be required to sacrifice all these lambs.

So the killing of the Passover lambs began about two or three o'clock in the afternoon of Nisan thirteenth. Then by five to five-thirty in the afternoon, all the lambs were slain. Josephus confirms that in the years just before the time of Titus's destruction of Jerusalem, in 70 A.D., it was customary to slay the lambs between the ninth and

eleventh hour (that is, between 3:00 PM and 5:00 PM).

At sundown on the thirteenth of Nisan, the fourteenth began. The lamb had been prepared, and when the roasting was complete, the participants gathered around the table and ate the Passover supper. Yahweh's law of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread calls the fourteenth of the month Nisan "the Passover." However, by the time of our Messiah, the Hebrews had come to call this day the "Preparation day." To them the major feast day, the "high" day, was the fifteenth of Nisan, the day the Scriptures designate as the first day of Unleavened Bread.

So at the time of our Messiah's crucifixion, the fourteenth of Nisan, the day on which the Passover lamb was eaten, was called the day of "Preparation." The following day (the high Sabbath day, the fifteenth of Nisan) was called the "Passover day," although this was actually the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This modification is confirmed by Matthew 26:17-19. Notice particularly verse 17: "Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Yah'shua, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?" If this passage were to be interpreted in strict accordance with the law of Moses, it would not make any sense. "The Passover" was the fourteenth of Nisan and the Paschal lamb was to be eaten on that day. "The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread" was Nisan the fifteenth. So we can conclude that the terms associated with the observance of the Passover Feast which appear in the New Covenant are used in accordance with popular usage in that day and not strictly according to the definition of the law of Moses.

4. **The Time of the Resurrection**

In developing the chronology of the crucifixion week, there is one event that we can definitely associate with a particular day of the week. That event is the resurrection of our Messiah .

He is Risen

"And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto

the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he said unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Yah'shua of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him." Mark 16:1-6.

This passage records the discovery of our Messiah's resurrection and tells us the time of this discovery. More literally translated, this passage reads as follows: "And the Sabbath being past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the (mother) of James, and Salome brought aromatics, that having come, they might anoint him. And very early on the first (day) of the week, they come upon the tomb, the sun having risen." This account shows that this visit came very early on a Sunday morning.

The same incident is recorded in Luke 24:1-3. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of Yah'shua." So Luke also recorded that the discovery of the empty tomb came very early on a Sunday morning.

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Yah'shua loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away Yah'shua out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him." John 20:1-2.

Note carefully that none of these Gospel reports describe our Messiah's resurrection. These passages tell of the discovery of the empty tomb when the women came to anoint Yah'shua's body very early on a Sunday morning. The resurrection had already taken place sometime prior to this event. The idea that the resurrection took place at sunrise on a Sunday morning is not Scriptural. All three Gospels positively state that as early as the time was--even while it was "yet dark"--Yah'shua had already risen.

The Sabbath is Ended

We could know for certain when the resurrection of our Messiah happened if we had just one definite witness to the exact hour of its occurrence. Well, Yahweh has seen fit to give us this witness in the Gospel of Matthew.

"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of Yah'shua descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." Matt. 28:1-2.

Matthew described an event that seems to have occurred very closely in conjunction with the actual resurrection. This is the earthquake that took place when the angel descended from heaven to roll back the stone from the door of the tomb.

Matthew's emphasis here is upon the descent of the angel and the accompanying earthquake. The time of this event is set by the opening phrase "in the end of the Sabbath." This designates a specific time of the day.

The word translated "began to dawn" in Matthew 28:1 is the Greek "epiphoskousa," which literally means "the coming of the light." Dr. H. A. Griesemer, a Greek scholar, has made the following remarks concerning this word. "The word 'dawn' is very misleading. We speak of the dawn as the opening of the day, the light that comes with the rising of the sun. We always associate the dawn with the sunlight, but the Greek word here is 'epiphoskousa,' which means the shining of the sun or the moon. You will observe that the Passover feast always occurred at the time of the full moon. Just as the sun was setting, the moon would be rising."

Dr. George R. Berry in his Interlinear Greek-English New Covenant translates the opening part of Matthew 28:1 as follows. "Now late on the Sabbath, as it was getting dusk toward the first day of the week..." We can establish the time referred to by Matthew as the time of the setting of the sun on the seventh-day Sabbath. So, just as the sun had set at the beginning of the Hebrew first day of the week (remember, the Hebrew day always began with the evening at the setting of the sun); there was an earthquake, the angel of Yah'shua descended, and he rolled away the stone and sat on it.

The resurrection occurred at the "end of the Sabbath," just as the first day of the week was beginning, which according to Hebrew reckoning would have been sunset on Saturday, or around 6 PM.

Certainly the stone would not have been rolled away from the tomb before our Messiah arose from the dead. Furthermore, Matthew 27:51 tells us that there was an earthquake at the time of our Messiah's death. So it seems reasonable that the second earthquake would have occurred at the moment of our Messiah's resurrection. Therefore, Matthew supplies the definite witness to our Messiah's resurrection at sunset on Saturday afternoon, 72 hours after His burial.

Prophetic Requirements

The requirements of prophecy also help us to pinpoint some of the key events of the crucifixion week. Yah'shua Himself prophesied that He would be resurrected on the third day. Matthew 16:21 says, "From that time forth began Yah'shua to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

According to Hebrew reckoning, the setting of the sun marked the end of the day, but that point in time, sunset, was also a part of that day. However, sunset also marked the beginning of the next day and was part of that day also! So the Messiah was also resurrected on the first day of the week, without this making any conflict with Scripture.

There is another prophecy that required Yah'shua to be resurrected on the first day of the week. The Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:20, "But now is the Messiah risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." in His resurrection fulfilled the law of the firstfruits. Leviticus 23:9-11 contains Yahweh's instructions concerning this law: "And Yahweh spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath this priest shall wave it." The offering of the firstfruits, which typified the resurrection of our Messiah, was to be waved before Yahweh "on the

morrow after the Sabbath"--on the first day of the week!

The evidence that our Messiah was resurrected at sunset at the end of Saturday and the beginning of Sunday is overwhelming. Only this exact point in time permits our Messiah's resurrection to literally fulfill the prophecy for three seemingly incompatible situations: (1) resurrection after "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," (2) resurrection "on the third day," and (3) resurrection on the first day of the week--"the morrow after the Sabbath."

5. Two Key Days

The most important day in conjunction with the crucifixion week is obviously the day of resurrection, which we have seen is the end of Saturday and the beginning of Sunday (Nisan 18). However, there are two other key days that we need to investigate from a Scriptural position before we can unfold the chronology of the crucifixion week.

"Good Wednesday"

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of Yah'shua." Luke 24:1-3.

Since it has been shown from the Word of Yahweh that the resurrection took place at sundown on the day that we would call Saturday, the traditional "Good Friday" myth can be dispelled once and for all. All arguments supporting a Friday crucifixion evaporate when we come to this realization. Furthermore, we can unreservedly apply the prophetic typology of Jonah, who was (according to our Messiah's words) in the belly of the great fish for "three days and three nights." And this definitely fixes Wednesday as the day our Messiah was crucified and buried.

Yah'shua died about three o'clock in the afternoon. Matthew 27:46-50. He was placed in the sepulcher at sunset. Yah'shua was crucified "between the evenings" on Nisan fourteenth in order to literally fulfill the Levitical law of the Passover. Therefore, Nisan the fourteenth began at sunset Tuesday, and that day extended to sunset on Wednesday. Yah'shua partook of the Paschal supper on the evening of Nisan fourteenth end of

Tuesday, and He died as the true Paschal Lamb on the day of Nisan fourteenth, on the Passover. So both the type and antitype were fulfilled. Both were slain "between the evenings" as required by Yahweh's law.

Thursday was Nisan fifteenth, the "high Sabbath" of the Passover. Levitical law called this day "the first day of Unleavened Bread." Friday was Nisan sixteenth, Saturday was Nisan seventeenth, and Sunday (the first day of the week and the day on which the offering of the firstfruits was to be brought) was the eighteenth of Nisan.

"Palm Saturday"

Now, let's count backward from Wednesday, Nisan fourteenth, and see where other significant events of the crucifixion week fit into the chronology. First, we need to recall Yahweh's detailed instructions for the selection of the Paschal lamb. These are given in Exodus 12:1-3.

"And Yahweh spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house."

The Paschal lamb was to be selected and set apart from the other members of the flock on the tenth day of Nisan. Now, if Wednesday was Nisan fourteenth, then Tuesday would have been Nisan thirteenth; Monday, Nisan twelfth; Sunday, Nisan eleventh; and Saturday, therefore, would have been Nisan tenth. The tenth day of Nisan occurred on a regular seventh-day Sabbath.

Many prophecies and types were fulfilled during the crucifixion week; so it only seems natural to wonder what event of the crucifixion week fulfilled the selection of the Paschal lamb on Nisan tenth. Certainly if Yah'shua is the true Paschal Lamb, there must be some event that pointed to His selection and acceptance during the week. The answer seems obvious. Let's notice the words of Mark 11:7-9.

"And they brought the colt to Yah'shua, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed cried, saying,

Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Yahweh."

Hosanna means "Save now!" The triumphal entry was the fulfillment of the prophetic type represented in the law of the selection of the Paschal lamb. It was on this day that the multitude turned out to greet our Messiah and to recognize Him both as the King of Israel and as the Chosen or Anointed One who had come to bring physical salvation from Roman oppression. The nationalistic fervor that had arisen on the Jericho road pilgrimage reached its peak with the entrance of Yah'shua into Jerusalem.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem by our Messiah not only fulfilled the type of the selection of the Paschal lamb, it also fulfilled several Old Covenant prophecies. Some 450 years prior to this event, the prophet Zechariah had written, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Zech. 9:9. Zechariah's prophecy is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15.

But this is not the only prophecy that was fulfilled on that day. About a century earlier than Zechariah's prophecy, the prophet Daniel was chosen of Yahweh to give us the great time prophecy found in Daniel 9:25-26. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall the Messiah be cut off, but not for himself."

Daniel prophesied that Messiah the Prince would be cut off after 69 "weeks of years," which is 483 years (in 360-day prophetic years exactly 173,880 days), after "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." Sir Robert Anderson, in his book *The Coming Prince*, has done a remarkable job of showing that this prophecy terminated on the very day of the triumphal entry.

There is one further piece of evidence that shows that the triumphal entry took place on a Saturday rather than a Sunday. This comes from noticing what our Messiah did after He arrived in Jerusalem on that day. Mark 11:11 says, "And

Yah'shua entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve." So ended the events of that day.

The focal point of the activity of the next day comes in Mark 11:15-16, where we read, "And they come to Jerusalem: and Yah'shua went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple."

On the day of the triumphal entry, Yah'shua entered into the temple, He looked around, and He left. On the following day, He entered into the temple and drove out the money-changers. Why did He not do this on the first day? The answer is obvious. Yah'shua did not cleanse the temple on the first day because it was the quiet Hebrew Sabbath. There was no merchandising on that day! Yah'shua would not have hesitated to cleanse the temple on the first day if the business activities were in progress. And He did not need 24 hours to decide what to do about the disgraceful situation there. This passage is powerful circumstantial evidence that the triumphal entry did indeed occur on the seventh-day Hebrew Sabbath.

6. Chronology: Friday Through Sunday

"Then Yah'shua six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Yah'shua, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with odour of the ointment." John 12:1-3.

We are now ready to consider the details of the chronology of the crucifixion week. We have developed a number of time-points, and the basic structure of the events during this week has emerged. But now it's time for us to begin at the day that our Messiah made the final part of His journey to Bethany from Jericho and step-by-step carefully go through the details of the Scriptural record that will take us event-by-event to that

early Sunday morning when the empty tomb was discovered.

Friday, the Ninth of Nisan

Our starting point is John 12:1-3. You'll recall that there had been several changes in the observance of the Passover since Yahweh had given this feast through Moses at the time of the Exodus.

Originally, Scripture referred to the fourteenth of Nisan as the "Passover" and the seven days of Nisan fifteenth through the twenty-first as the "Feast of Unleavened Bread." However, in the days of our Messiah, the Hebrews referred to the entire eight-day celebration as both the "Passover" and the "Feast of Unleavened Bread", or "The Unleaveneds", interchangeably. The high point in the celebration was the Passover Sabbath, which was then observed on Nisan fifteenth. To the Hebrews of our Messiah's day, like modern "Jews", this was the focal point of the entire celebration, and it was incorrectly referred to as the "Passover." And the day previous, Nisan fourteenth, which is Yahweh's Passover, was incorrectly referred to as the Preparation day.

Therefore, when John wrote that "Yah'shua six days before the Passover came to Bethany," he was using the term "Passover" as it was used at that time. He had in view the high Sabbath of the Passover celebration, which was Nisan fifteenth. So we can identify the day on which our Messiah arrived in Bethany. That was Friday, Nisan the ninth. It was on this day that our Messiah arrived at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, in the little village of Bethany, which was fifteen furlongs (1 7/8 miles) from Jerusalem.

Yah'shua arrived in Bethany sufficiently early on Friday afternoon to permit Martha and Mary to prepare a supper for Him. We can be sure that the preparation of the food was finished before sunset, which would be the beginning of the weekly Sabbath. However, the supper was not eaten until after the sun had set and a new day – the weekly Sabbath, had "dawned". When Mary took the pound of ointment of spikenard and poured it on Yah'shua's feet and then wiped them with her hair, the evening of the tenth of Nisan, a seventh-day Sabbath, had already begun. This act of Mary's was the first phase of the selection of the Paschal Lamb, which Yahweh's law said must be done on the tenth day of the month.

Scripture does not tell us whether or not our Messiah spent that entire evening in the home of Martha and Mary. The inference is that He did. It is significant that after our Messiah's arrival in the vicinity of Jerusalem to keep His appointment with the stake, He never spent a night in the city of Jerusalem. In Scripture Jerusalem represents the fold of the Old Covenant Israelites, the housing place of the sheep of that nation. After our Messiah's selection as the true Paschal Lamb who was to die, not only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but for all peoples, it was necessary for Him to remain separate. The law required that the selected Paschal lamb be set apart from the rest of the sheep. Bethany represents the position of separation "outside the camp."

Saturday, the Tenth of Nisan

"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Yah'shua was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of Yahweh." John 12:12-13. This was the next day, the day following that evening on which our Messiah was anointed by Mary for His burial. It was Saturday, Nisan tenth, a seventh-day Sabbath, and the day on which Yahweh's law said that the acceptable "lamb without blemish" must be selected and set apart. The Messiah began the day by presenting Himself to Israel as her King. He was recognized as such. But then He was rejected, and the people of Israel selected Him as a Lamb for slaughter instead.

And what did Yah'shua, Lord of the Sabbath do when He reached the temple? Mark tells us that "Yah'shua entered into Jerusalem and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve." Mark 11:11.

It was the Sabbath. All was quiet. There were no money-changers or merchants at work in the temple. Yah'shua, Yahweh's agent in the flesh, simply inspected His Father's house. "He looked round about on all things."

Herod's temple was a beautiful structure. But despite the beauty of this magnificent edifice, our Messiah saw a great deal of ugliness, too. The evidence of a sinful and disobedient people was all around. But on this particular day, Nisan the tenth, the temple area was quiet, for it was a Sabbath.

Thus our Messiah simply inspected His Father's house and then withdrew Himself to Bethany as the sun began to sink in the west, closing the day on which the true Passover Lamb had been selected.

Sunday, the Eleventh of Nisan

"And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Yah'shua answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it." Mark 11:12-14.

This day was Sunday, Nisan the eleventh, the first day of the week. It was just one week prior to that time when our Messiah would come forth from the tomb in resurrection life, "the firstfruits of them that slept." It is most appropriate that the incident of the cursing of the fig tree took place on this day. This incident is a living parable which predicts the setting aside of the nation Israel during the present inter-advent age. The fig tree is a figure used in Judges 9, in Jothan's "parable of the four trees," but it has continued throughout the Old Covenant record.

On the first day of the week, Sunday, the temple area was a beehive of activity once again. Only two days remained until the fourteenth of Nisan which ushered in the eight-day celebration that the Hebrews referred to interchangeably as the "Feast of Passover" and the "Feast of Unleavened Bread", or the "Unleaveneds".

To the temple merchants, Nisan fourteenth was a time of business--big business. There were many thousands of pilgrims present in Jerusalem. They had come from all over the Roman Empire. Many of them had only Roman money or money from their homeland, and this money had to be exchanged for the "shekels" of the temple in order to be useful for the buying of sacrifices and for giving in offerings. Those who had traveled far were unable to bring animals for sacrifice; so these had to be purchased.

This was like "Christmas" for the temple merchants. The business that they did during the Passover season often determined whether their fiscal years were successes or failures. In the same way, many businesses of our day have to depend on their volume of business at Christmas for financial "success."

So on this first day of the week, the money-changers and merchants were in their booths early. No doubt they were calling out to the pilgrims who passed into the temple courts, hawking their merchandise and services. It is no wonder that Yah'shua, in righteous anger, said to them, "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves." Mark 11:17. And in this we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 3:1. "And the Messiah, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of hosts." And as we have seen, this occurred on Sunday, Nisan the eleventh.

7. Chronology: Monday and Tuesday Monday, the Twelfth of Nisan

When the disciples saw the withered fig tree, Peter, who remembered the incident of the previous morning, called Yah'shua's attention to it.

"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Yah'shua answering saith unto them, Have faith in Yahweh." Mark 11:20-22.

Our Messiah used this object lesson of the withered fig tree to deliver a great dissertation on faith and prayer.

This occurred on the second day of the week, Monday, Nisan twelfth. We have no way of knowing whether the dawning of this Monday was the proverbial cloudless one or not. But we can know that it was a fateful day. It was the last day that Yah'shua of Nazareth, the Son of Yahweh, would offer Himself to Yahweh's chosen people, Israel, as their King and Messiah. This was a day full of dramatic incidents. It was a tiring day and from the viewpoint of those unable to see Yahweh's divine plan, it was a day that ended in failure.

Yah'shua and His disciples entered again into Jerusalem, and went into the temple court. Here there were a long series of encounters with those who sought to discredit our Messiah's testimony. The chief priests and the scribes attacked Him in an effort to entrap Him in His own words. They first asked Him on the source of

His authority to do "these things." And by this, they doubtlessly referred to His cleansing of the temple the day before. Immediately Yah'shua brought out clearly His source of authority when He asked, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me." Mark 11:30.

That ended that line of questioning, but it did not end the encounter. Yah'shua then related the parable of the hedged vineyard and the wicked husbandmen, in which the chief priests and scribes clearly saw themselves portrayed in the roles of the wicked husbandmen. They were humiliated in front of the people, and they were put into confusion. "And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way." Mark 12:12.

Next it was the Pharisees' turn, and they joined forces with their old enemies, the Herodians--which was a strange combination indeed. They concocted a brilliant scheme to place Yah'shua at odds with the Roman authorities and thus remove Him from the scene. But the little coin with Caesar's image on it sent them crashing down in defeat. Then the Sadducees came and tried their hand. The result was the same. The day finally drew on toward sunset after all had their turn to try to entrap the Messiah. All comers had been silenced. But their hatred had now crystallized. Yah'shua's hour was approaching. Things were moving rapidly toward that rendezvous with the Stake.

Evening, the closing of that fateful Monday and the dawning of Tuesday, was rapidly drawing near. It was probably with reluctance that Yah'shua, with the twelve, left the temple courts and passed beyond the walls of the city to the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The evening sun was sinking low over toward the west side of the city, and it would soon be lost to view behind the hills. "And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" Mark 13:1. This enthusiastic remark, probably made with the intent of cheering up Yah'shua after that trying day, set the stage for that great prophetic revelation that Bible scholars call the "Olivet Discourse." This discourse came at the close of the day on Monday, the twelfth of Nisan.

Now, let's turn our attention to a passage of Scripture that allows us to check our chronology.

The passage is found in the opening verse of Mark 14. Here Mark wrote, "After two days was the feast of the Passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death."

This verse not only gives us a time mark to check our chronology, but it also verifies the records that have come down through secular channels concerning the terminology used by the Hebrews in our Messiah's time. Although Yahweh's Word designates the fourteenth of Nisan as the Passover and the fifteenth of Nisan as the first day of Unleavened Bread, the Hebrews used these terms interchangeably. The fifteenth of Nisan, the high Sabbath of Passover, had become the focal point of the entire celebration; and it was the day commonly, but nonetheless mistakenly called "the Passover", as many modern Jews still do. Mark identified the day of Nisan fifteenth when he used the combination expression "the Passover, and of unleavened bread" to refer to a single day.

Tuesday, the Thirteenth of Nisan

Yah'shua and the twelve had climbed the slopes of the Mount of Olives at the close of Monday, Nisan twelfth. While they were there, the Master had delivered His discourse, which included the prophecy of the coming destruction of the temple and the city. The sun had set on Nisan twelfth, and the evening of the thirteenth day of Nisan had just dawned. And apparently, after the discourse, they went back to Bethany for the night. At this point Mark wrote, "After two days was the Passover, and of unleavened bread." Mark 14:1. The evening was Nisan thirteenth, and the next day was to be Tuesday, Nisan thirteenth. Two days later would be Thursday, Nisan fifteenth, the day that Mark designated as "the feast of the Passover, and of unleavened bread."

"And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people." Mark 14:1-2. Notice that the word "feast" is not used in Mark 14:1. The verse literally says, "After two days was the Passover, and of unleavened bread." The King James Version inserts the words "the feast of" in italics, but there is nothing in the Greek text corresponding to these words. The expression in Mark 14:1 refers to Nisan fifteenth. And the

expression "on the feast day" in Mark 14:2 apparently refers to the same day, that is, the high day of the Passover celebration, Nisan fifteenth.

So the plot began to take form. Yah'shua was to be apprehended and slain before Nisan fifteenth. Yahweh used the modifications of the Hebrews – their “traditions”, to take Yah'shua to the cross on Nisan fourteenth, Yahweh's true Passover.

It was on the evening of the thirteenth of Nisan, a Tuesday, after our Messiah had delivered the Olivet Discourse, that Yah'shua and His disciples came down off the mountain and once again headed toward Bethany. This time they went to the house of Simon the leper.

Many Bible teachers have tried to establish that the evening meal in the house of Simon the leper was the same meal as that with Martha, Mary and Lazarus, reported by John in the opening verses of chapter 12. The reason for this is that the incident of the anointing of Yah'shua by the woman, described both in Mark 14:3-9 and in Matthew 26:6-13, does have many similarities to the incident of the anointing by Mary described in John 12:3-8. But careful reading also shows a great many differences. Mary anointed Yah'shua's feet (John 12:3), but the woman in the house of Simon the leper anointed His head. Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:7. The Scripture seems clear that the incident mentioned by Matthew and Mark occurred on a different day and in a different house and that the anointing was performed by a different woman from that in the incident mentioned by John. This second anointing of our Messiah occurred on Tuesday evening, after the setting of the sun and the closing of Nisan twelfth.

"And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?" Mark 14:12. This brings us to the day of Tuesday, Nisan thirteenth. This was our Messiah's last day of freedom before His arrest and crucifixion. It is confusing because Mark prefixed this record with "And the first day of unleavened bread." But we should keep in mind that the Gospel writers, and most certainly the early translators used terms according to the contemporary usage in their day, not strictly according to the definition of Mosaic law. Josephus recorded that in those days the Hebrews celebrated "eight days of Unleavened

Bread." They included the fourteenth of Nisan, the day that Moses designated as the "Passover," in the feast of Unleavened Bread (which was only seven days long).

Josephus also said that it was customary to kill the lambs between three o'clock and five o'clock in the afternoon before the Passover Supper, which then were roasted and eaten in the evening. The Hebrews of Mark's day still ate the Passover on the evening of Nisan fourteenth, but they often referred to this meal as the "first Chagigah." Alfred Edersheim in his book, *The Temple--Its Ministry and Services*, tells us that "the Chagigah which was strictly a peace offering might be twofold. The first Chagigah was offered on the fourteenth of Nisan, the day of the Paschal sacrifice, and formed afterwards part of the Paschal Supper. The second Chagigah was offered on the fifteenth of Nisan, or the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread." It is this second Chagigah which the Hebrews were afraid they might be unable to eat, if they contracted defilement in the judgment hall of Pilate. John 18:28.

Yah'shua ate the "first Chagigah," which was the true Passover Supper, with His disciples. Since the Hebrews included the fourteenth of Nisan in their designation "the Feast of Unleavened Bread," and since they allowed the hours after three o'clock in the afternoon on Nisan thirteenth to be considered as a part of Nisan fourteenth for the purpose of the slaying of the lamb, then it seems that Mark was designating the late afternoon of Nisan thirteenth in his prefix to this exchange between our Messiah and His disciples.

So it was on Tuesday, Nisan thirteenth, that the disciples asked Yah'shua where He wished to eat the Passover. Evidently Judas was present when this question was put to Yah'shua; and since Yah'shua knew of Judas' plot to betray Him, He replied in a guarded way. Instead of naming the place, Yah'shua sent Peter and John to find and follow the man bearing a pitcher of water. (By the way, this instruction was not so ambiguous as it might seem to us because men normally did not carry water in those days - it was considered 'women's work'.) This was evidently a clever method of delaying the betrayal by Judas until after the Paschal Supper. Judas would not know until the time of the supper itself where it

was to take place. This arrangement assured an uninterrupted evening following Tuesday, Nisan thirteenth. This brings us to the evening of Nisan fourteenth, the Wednesday on which our Messiah would die.

8. **Chronology: Wednesday and Thursday**

Wednesday, the Fourteenth of Nisan

Immediately after sundown on Tuesday afternoon, the fourteenth of Nisan began. The lamb had been slain and roasted and was now ready in the upper room. Yah'shua and His disciples arrived early after sunset and partook together of the Passover Feast. "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of Yahweh." Luke 22:14-16. It was on the occasion of this evening that the disciples' feet were washed, Yah'shua's Supper was instituted, and that wonderful discourse of our Messiah was given beginning with the words "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in Yahweh, believe also in me." John 14:1.

Yah'shua knew that Judas was anxious to bring the soldiers to arrest Him. So when the supper had progressed to a certain point, Yah'shua said to him, "That thou doest, do quickly." John 13:27. This gave the betrayer an opportunity to get away and carry out his unholy purpose.

It is not the intent of this study to go into the details of those events of the crucifixion day. The point that is important to our study of the chronology of the crucifixion week is that the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, Nisan fourteenth. Yah'shua's body was placed in the tomb just as the sun was setting on that day. And with the placing of His body in the tomb, the fulfillment of Yah'shua's own prophecy that He would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" was begun. Three days later, again at sunset, He would come forth in resurrection to His eternal life.

"The Hebrews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." John 19:31. This verse establishes that the day following (or beginning the sunset of)

our Messiah's crucifixion was a "high day." That in turn established that it was Nisan fifteenth, the great Passover Sabbath, the day that Yahweh had designated as "the first day of unleavened bread." The Passover Sabbath was the greatest Hebrew Sabbath of the year. It was not only a day of rest and worship like Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath; but, unlike that day, this Thursday Passover Sabbath was a "high day." The fifteenth of Nisan fell on a different day each year, and that particular year it fell on Thursday as the Scriptural "time-points" clearly affirm.

Thursday, the Fifteenth of Nisan

What happened on this particular day? Scripture provides us with a record of only one specific event. And this record is found in Matthew 27:62-66. "Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation (true Passover), the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

One thing of significance should be noted here. The chief priests and Pharisees said, "After three days." They were perhaps the very ones who were present when Yah'shua had spoken of the sign of the Prophet Jonah. And they remembered well what He had said.

It is quite likely that these events (which transpired on the day of Thursday, Nisan fifteenth) were in the minds of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when they said, "And beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done." Luke 24:21. To those looking on, the sealing of the tomb and the placing of the Roman guard were very much events that were to be included in the burial of Yah'shua. Since these words were spoken on Sunday, and since the final steps of the putting away of Yah'shua took place on Thursday, the two disciples were absolutely correct in their statement of time.

9. Chronology: Friday Through Sunday

To conclude this study of the chronology of the crucifixion week, let's direct our attention to a passage from the Gospel of Mark. In his description of these events, Mark provides final verification of the chronology that we have established:

"And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulcher. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid. And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great." Mark 15:46-16:4.

Our Messiah was placed in the sepulcher, but it was necessary that those looking on hasten home because the High Passover Sabbath had arrived. Mark 15:47 tells us; "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid." This verse refers to the events that took place late in the afternoon of Wednesday, Nisan fourteenth. The wording of this verse seems to infer that the women observed Yah'shua's body being placed on the shelf in Joseph's new tomb, but that they did not remain on the scene as the heavy stone was rolled in place.

Now the very next verse in Mark's Gospel, Mark 16:1, says, "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him." The word "Sabbath" as used in this verse is singular. The reference is to the High Passover Sabbath, which occurred on Thursday, Nisan fifteenth. The bringing of the sweet spices, described in Mark 16:1, was a separate visit from the coming of the women to the tomb--that visit which took place early on the first day of the week, as described in Mark 16:2. Mark 16:1 describes an event that took place on Friday, Nisan sixteenth.

Friday, the Sixteenth of Nisan "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses

beheld where he was laid." Mark 15:47. Again, the inference of this statement is that the women saw Yah'shua's body placed in the sepulcher but that they left before the stone was rolled in place to seal the door. Therefore, it is possible that they did not realize the impossibility of gaining access to Yah'shua's body without outside help. The Roman seal and the Roman guard were established on Thursday morning. The seal and the guard were to insure that the tomb was not opened until the three days were definitely past. It is entirely possible that the women were not aware of the Thursday development.

After the High Sabbath, the women (on Friday, Nisan sixteenth) "bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him." But on arriving at the tomb they found the heavy stone in place, the official Roman seal on it, and the Roman guard posted to make sure that no one touched that seal until after the third day had passed. So the women found it necessary to return to their homes to await the passing of three full days (which included the seventh-day Sabbath) before they could again attempt to anoint Yah'shua's body.

The Gospel of Luke also confirms that there were two visits to the tomb by those faithful women. The two visits are seen in the passage contained in Luke 23:55-56. "And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

The statement of verse 55 indicates that the women did observe the body of our Messiah placed in the tomb at sundown on the day of His crucifixion. Then verse 56 says, "And they returned and prepared spices and ointments..." This speaks of that first visit to the tomb on Friday, Nisan sixteenth. The women were unable to anoint Yah'shua's body because of the stone with its affixed seal and the Roman guard that had been set by Pilate. Unable to complete the task that they had attempted on that Friday, Luke says that they "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

Saturday, the Seventeenth of Nisan

Notice that the statement of Luke 23:56, that they "prepared spices and ointments," comes before the statement of the same verse that they "rested the Sabbath day according to the

commandment." The spices and ointments were prepared on Friday, Nisan sixteenth, but they were not used that day. The statement about the Sabbath day refers to the seventh-day Sabbath, which occurred on Saturday, Nisan seventeenth. The second visit, as recorded in Luke 23:1, occurred on Sunday, Nisan eighteenth, the first day of the week.

Recall that Matthew 28:1-2 tells us that "in the end of the Sabbaths, as it was dawning toward the first day of the week," came the angel and the earthquake. The word "Sabbaths" here is plural, and by using this plural form Matthew indicated that both the High Sabbath of Nisan fifteenth and the seventh-day Sabbath of Nisan seventeenth had passed. Yah'shua broke the bonds of death and came forth from the tomb. All prophecy concerning His death, burial and resurrection was literally and precisely fulfilled!

Sunday, the Eighteenth of Nisan

Mark 16:2-3 tells us of that second visit of the women to the tomb, which Mark asserted was early in the morning on the first day of the week. "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?" This passage definitely indicates that the women had knowledge of the presence of the stone before they arrived at the tomb early on Sunday morning. And it also infers that the time limit set by Pilate as to how long the tomb must be sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers (three full days) had passed. The women felt sure of access to the tomb if only they could find someone with adequate physical strength to roll away the stone.

The record of the second visit to the tomb by the women is confirmed by the opening verses of Luke 24. The evangelist wrote, "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher, And they entered in, and found not the body of Yah'shua."

But the absence of His body was not loss. The answer of the angelic beings has been the victorious cry of His true Israelite followers ever since:

"He is not here, but is risen!"

Yahweh's Holy Days Reveal Plan for Mankind!

Introduction

Is it possible to know what the future holds for us? The Creator of mankind does have a plan for us, and He reveals it to us through an annual cycle of festivals described in the Scriptures. It is an astounding plan offering an incredible future to every man, woman, and child who has ever lived. This article will help you understand the incredible truth about what lies ahead for all humanity.

Every nation observes patriotic or public holidays. These special days are reminders of important events in a country's history. They provide continuity between a nation's past and the present.

Usually citizens can understand and explain at least some of the significance of these celebrations. Yet, paradoxically, those same citizens seldom understand much about the days on which they worship and honor Yahweh. The non-biblical roots of these religious practices are quietly ignored in their celebrations.

As a result, people usually assume that popular observances such as Easter and Christmas serve as true representations of the themes of the Bible. Yet the Bible nowhere commands their observance, nor does the Bible record their observance by the early New Covenant Congregation. However, Yahweh does command other, rarely noticed, festivals.

Some people realize that the Bible mentions specific days for religious celebration. But only a few can name any of them or explain their significance.

Those aware of these festivals generally believe they were meant only for ancient Israel and ceased after Yah'shua the Messiah's crucifixion. They assume these days simply pointed toward the Messiah, and they think that, since He lived on earth 2,000 years ago, their importance has long since passed. Most people consider these biblical festivals as nothing more than relics of history with no relevance to the modern world.

Believe it or not, the Bible itself contradicts these commonly held views. An objective look at the biblical record reveals that both Christmas and Easter—the two main observances on the Christian calendar—are nowhere to be found, except where Passover is

mistranslated to Easter in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version. Surprising to many, the New Covenant shows Yah'shua the Messiah observing Yahweh's Holy Days, with Yah'shua the Messiah's disciples and His natural Congregation members following His example many decades and centuries after His death, burial and resurrection.

The teaching of the apostles in the years of the first century after the resurrection also differs from most people's assumptions. The apostles' instructions reveal a God who intended for all Israelites to observe the biblical Holy Days—for a remarkable reason.

What these Holy Days reveal

Why does Yahweh want us to observe the Holy Days? Because Yahweh wants us to know about our future, He reveals to us His great purpose for humanity.

He explains why He puts us on earth, reveals our ultimate destiny and tells us how we can attain it! The observance of Yahweh's Holy Days provides the key to understanding that elusive sense or purpose of human existence. The observance of these days reveals Yahweh's great plan for the future of mankind.

The biblical Holy Days, or festivals, fall during three seasons of the year—the early-spring harvest, late-spring harvest and early-autumn harvest in the land of biblical Israel. The themes these days portray reflect Yahweh's spiritual harvest of mankind to eternal life spoken of by Yah'shua the Messiah (John 4:35-38).

These observances serve as timeless reminders of how Yahweh's plan gives eternal life to mortal man. Our Creator will bring His plan to fruition in spite of man's choices and actions, which have consistently led to separation from Yahweh, suffering and death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Isaiah 59:1-8; Jeremiah 10:23). These festivals reveal the unfolding of Yahweh's plan for humanity and how He will establish His Kingdom on earth. This is the good news, or gospel, Yah'shua the Messiah preached (Mark 1:14-15).

Yahweh's design to grant humanity eternal life has existed since "the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). The Holy Days teach humanity about that remarkable plan. The apostle Paul beautifully summed up its essence in his letter to the Ephesians: "He has made known to us his secret purpose, in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in the Messiah, to be

put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and earth, might be brought into unity in the Messiah. In the Messiah indeed we have been given our share in this heritage, as was decreed in his design whose purpose is everywhere at work" (Ephesians 1:9-11, Revised English Bible).

The Holy Days help us comprehend the master plan—the very purpose for mankind, how we truly become Yahweh's people. Notice this description of our destiny: "Behold, the tabernacle of Yahweh is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. Yahweh Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). Step by step, the Holy Days show us how this beautiful picture will become a reality.

In Leviticus 23 we find a listing of the Holy Days. After discussing the weekly Sabbath, the text describes special observances with unusual names such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. In giving these Holy Days, Yahweh instructed Moses to make it clear that "These are the Feasts of Yahweh" (verses 4, 37, emphasis added throughout).

The Bible teaches that eventually Yahweh will teach everyone to observe these days (Zechariah 14:16). In the pages of this article you will learn the fascinating purpose of each of Yahweh's Holy Days, along with their promise of hope for mankind.

Are Yahweh's Holy Days Relevant Today?

When Yahweh begins something in this present age of mankind, He nearly always starts small. In Matthew 13:33 Yah'shua the Messiah compared Yahweh's Kingdom to both a mustard seed and leaven. Both analogies start with something small that expands into something much larger. Similarly, Yahweh called only a relatively few people in Old Covenant times who were willing to follow His ways.

The biblical record shows that, early in the account spoken of in the Bible, only a few people decided to obey Yahweh. However, early patriarchs including Abel, Enoch and Noah did respond to the revelation of Yahweh's plan of salvation (Matthew 23:35). After the great flood of Noah's time, Yahweh found He could work with Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Of Yahweh's

obedient people of those times, Hebrews 11:13 says they "all died in faith" with the sure knowledge that they would gain eternal life (verse 40).

We should note that the plan for providing eternal life was already at work in the lives of these early people of Yahweh. The plan did not start with a covenant Yahweh made with ancient Israel; nor did it start with Yah'shua's earthly ministry.

Yahweh loved the world so much "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Yahweh's love in giving His Son continued His plan of salvation from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 13:8). The blueprint of the Holy Days would reveal in due time the plan Yahweh had designed from the very beginning. These festival observances were not just a cosmic afterthought.

With Abraham's family we see Yahweh beginning to reveal the good news about His plan of salvation (Galatians 3:8). Genesis 26:3-4 identifies specific blessings Yahweh promised to Abraham and Abraham's descendants. The Creator pledged to bestow them "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (verse 5). Perhaps this is why the Bible calls Abraham "the friend of Yahweh" and "the father of all those who believe" (James 2:23; Romans 4:11; Genesis 18:17-19).

A nation singled out

Abraham's descendants grew into a mighty nation (Genesis 18:18). They were named after Jacob, the grandson of Abraham whose name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). After settling in Egypt, before long they became slaves (Exodus 1). The story of Yahweh's deliverance from their bondage and His delivering of people today is part of the intricately woven fabric of Yahweh's festivals.

In due time the Creator set in motion a series of events that illustrated for the Israelites His plan as depicted in the Holy Day observances and led to their freedom from slavery in Egypt. When Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh, they told the Egyptian ruler that the God of Israel commanded him to "let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1).

Moses and Aaron had earlier called for the elders of Israel to assemble and had explained to them Yahweh's plan to deliver them (Exodus 3:16-18). Then Moses and his brother, Aaron, performed a series of Yahweh-directed miracles in sight of the people (Exodus 4:29-30). As a result, the Israelites (although they later faltered) believed Yahweh would deliver them and fulfill His covenant with Abraham, as He had promised (Exodus 4:31; 6:4-8).

What followed was ancient Israel's first Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Much later the New Covenant Congregation kept these same days as a reminder of Israelites' deliverance through Yah'shua the Messiah. For instance, Paul told members of the Congregation at Corinth—both Jews and gentiles—that they should be "unleavened," or without sin, because "the Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). In the next verse Paul said, "Therefore let us keep the feast," referring to the same festival Yahweh had instituted in ancient Israel many centuries before.

The Holy Days in the New Covenant

From Yah'shua's earliest childhood years, He observed the Holy Days with His parents. "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover," Luke 2:41 tells us. The following verses describe Yah'shua, at age 12, engaging the theologians of His day in a spirited discussion during this festival season (verses 42-48). Clearly, He astonished these religious leaders with His understanding and insight. John writes of Yah'shua continuing to observe the annual Holy Days as an adult during His ministry (John 2:23; 4:45).

In one of the most instructive examples, Yah'shua risked His personal safety to attend two of the festivals, the annual Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day (John 7:1-2, 7-10, 14). "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Yah'shua stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning His Spirit, [which] those believing in Him would receive; for His Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Yah'shua was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

Many false churches believe that the apostle Paul fundamentally changed the way

Israelites are to worship. This notion assumes Paul taught gentiles that observance of the Holy Days was unnecessary. Although some of his writings were difficult to understand, even by his contemporaries (2 Peter 3:15-16), Paul's explicit statements and actions contradict any notion that he annulled or abolished Holy Day observance.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1-2, for example, Paul told his followers to "imitate me, just as I also imitate the Messiah," and "keep the traditions as I delivered them to you." A few verses later he explained: "For I received from Yahweh that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Yah'shua on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me'" (verses 23-24).

If Paul's practice had not been to observe the Holy Days, his comments to the Jews and gentiles in Corinth would have been meaningless. Clearly, evidence is lacking that Paul ever discouraged anyone from keeping the annual festivals; such a notion would have been for him unthinkable (Acts 24:12-14; 25:7-8; 28:17).

On the contrary, the biblical record of Paul's ministry repeatedly depicts the Holy Days as important observances, milestones in his life. For example, he told the Ephesians that "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem" (Acts 18:21). In Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8 we find Paul arranging his travel schedule to accommodate the Feast of Pentecost. In Acts 27:9 Luke, Paul's companion in his travels, referred to the time of year as after "the Fast," a reference to the Day of Atonement.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, in a reference to Acts 20:6, notes that Paul, unable to arrive at Jerusalem for the Passover, "remained at Philippi to celebrate it and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread ..." (Richard N. Longenecker, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, Vol. 9, p. 507). Regarding Acts 20:16, the same commentary notes that Paul "wanted, if at all possible, to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost on the fiftieth day after Passover ..." (p. 510).

Paul's ministry included observing the Holy Days with the Congregation. In defending the gospel he preached, Paul said he brought the same message the other apostles taught:

"Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed" (1 Corinthians 15:11).

Paul and all the apostles taught a consistent message of the Israelite's obligation to follow the example of Yah'shua the Messiah in all matters. The apostle John, who wrote near the close of the first century, summed up this message: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Jewish believers continued to uphold the Holy Days, as did gentile Israelites ("Colossians 2:16 Shows Gentile Israelites Kept the Holy Days"). From all these references we can conclude only that the practice of the early Congregation was to continue the observance of these Yahweh-given festivals, the first of which is the Passover.

The Passover: Why Did Yah'shua the Messiah Have to Die?

Most of us have heard that Yah'shua the Messiah died for our sins, but what does that really mean? Why was His death necessary? What part does the Messiah's sacrifice play in Yahweh's plan for mankind? How is Yah'shua the Messiah's death reflected in Yahweh's holy festivals? This chapter on the New Covenant Passover will address these important questions.

Yah'shua's sacrifice is the pivotal event in Yahweh's plan to save humanity. Speaking of His certain death, the Messiah said He, referring to Himself as the Son of Man, must be "lifted up" (crucified) even as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," so that "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For Yahweh so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:14-16).

We see here that Yah'shua's sacrifice, the central message of the Passover, was a supreme act of love for humanity. This important event laid the foundation for the remaining annual Holy Days and festivals. It is the most momentous step in Yahweh's plan.

Just before the Passover feast that would see His execution, Yah'shua said that "for this purpose I came to this hour ... And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:27, 32).

The day on which this profound event, the crucifixion, transpired was the 14th day of the first month of Yahweh's calendar, the same day on

which the Passover lambs were to be killed (Leviticus 23:5). Paul later wrote the congregation at Corinth that "the Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Now let's look back through the Bible for the instructions and meaning Yahweh gave concerning this day. Doing this will help us understand why Yahweh expects us to continue observing the Passover.

Yahweh's Passover instruction

Yahweh, through Moses, told Pharaoh to "let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1). Through a series of plagues, Yahweh displayed His great power and delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. After nine plagues He gave Israel specific instructions about the imminent 10th in the series of terrifying calamities and the steps each Israelite family should take to escape it.

Yahweh said that, on the 10th day of the first month, each Israelite was to select a lamb or goat large enough to feed each household (Exodus 12:3). It was to be a yearling male, without any sort of defect. On the 14th day of that month at evening, the Israelites were to kill the animals and place some of their blood on the doorposts of their homes. The animals were then to be roasted and eaten along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The Israelites hurriedly ate this meal.

The Creator further instructed the Israelites that on this evening He would kill all the firstborn of Egypt to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. The firstborn of each Israelite family would be protected if the sign of the blood were on the entrance of their homes. Yahweh would "pass over" their homes—thus the meaning of the name of this observance (verse 13).

Yahweh said this day would be to the Israelites a memorial, "and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance" (verse 14). Bible writers later explained that the annual Passover observance symbolized the Messiah. Paul referred to the Messiah as "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7), and John recorded that John the Baptist recognized the Messiah as "the Lamb of Yahweh who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The unblemished male animal represented Yah'shua the Messiah as the perfect, sinless

sacrifice for our sins. Hebrews 9:11-12 tells us that "the Messiah came as High Priest of the good things to come ... not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Yah'shua the Messiah bought us with His blood, pouring out His life as our Passover lamb to become our High Priest, our mediator so that through Him Yahweh could forgive our sins.

The Bible tells us that sin is the violation of Yahweh's law of love (1 John 3:4). We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of Yahweh (Romans 3:23). We have each earned the death penalty for our disobedience (Romans 5:12; 6:23).

Paul illustrated the profound love of Yah'shua the Messiah in giving up His life on our behalf (Romans 5:6-8). All would be doomed eternally had not somehow the penalty for our sins been paid. The Messiah, who lived a perfect life as the unblemished Lamb of Yahweh, substituted His death in the flesh for ours. In fact, His death was the only possible substitution for ours. His sacrifice became the payment for our sins. He died on our behalf so we could share life with Him forever. We can no longer live according to our own desires. We become Yahweh's redeemed, or bought and paid-for, possession (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Both Yah'shua and the apostle Paul made it clear that the Passover is to continue as an Israelite observance. Yah'shua Himself instituted new Passover symbols and practices to teach Israelites important truths about Himself and Yahweh's continuing plan of salvation.

The Passover in the Old Covenant foreshadowed the Messiah's crucifixion. The New Covenant Passover is a memorial of that crucifixion. By observing it, we "proclaim the Messiah's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Now let's examine the Messiah's specific instructions concerning the Passover ceremony and the lessons we should learn from it.

A lesson in humility and service

The apostle John described the events of Yah'shua the Messiah's last evening with His disciples: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Yah'shua knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." During the meal Yah'shua

"rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (John 13:1-5).

Washing guests' feet was normally the job of the lowliest household servant. In the first century it was an act of hospitality. Rather than ask a servant to perform this function for His guests, Yah'shua humbly chose to carry it out Himself to teach an important spiritual lesson. The account continues: "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet'" (verses 12-14).

Yah'shua left His disciples with a lasting reminder of the importance of humble service to others. This reinforced an earlier lesson He had given them that is recorded in Matthew 20:25-28, where He warned His disciples about presuming to rule over their brethren: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This simple example of washing the feet of others teaches us a vital lesson intimately associated with the Passover. He concluded: "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). How many Christians today obey this simple instruction to humbly offer their services to others, and exemplify that attitude in their lives? As the redeemed possession of Yahweh through the Messiah's sacrifice, our lives should be devoted to the service of Yahweh and our fellowman.

The bread: symbol of the Messiah's body

Later, while the disciples were eating, Yah'shua explained that one of them would soon betray Him (Matthew 26:21-25). But notice verse 26: "And as they were eating, Yah'shua took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'"

The Messiah's body was to become a sacrificial offering for sin, for indeed "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Yah'shua the Messiah once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man ... offered one sacrifice for sins forever ... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10-14). Yahweh forgives us through Yah'shua the Messiah's sacrifice, and He "sanctifies" us—sets us apart—for the holy purpose of obedience to Him.

Our decision to eat the Passover bread means we understand that Yah'shua the Messiah has "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). He willingly consented to suffer an excruciating death for us. The Messiah bore in His body mental and physical suffering brought on by sin.

Yah'shua's sacrifice is also intricately associated with our spiritual healing. Peter wrote of the Messiah's suffering that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Isaiah prophesied of Yah'shua's suffering on our behalf: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by Yahweh, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Matthew 8:16-17 depicts incidents of healing in Yah'shua's ministry. Yah'shua helped "many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.'"

Yah'shua the Messiah showed that He was the promised Messiah by miraculous healings. But, besides demonstrating His compassion, such healings showed that the Messiah possessed the power to forgive sin (Matthew 9:2-6). Sin brings suffering! The ultimate spiritual healing made possible by the Messiah's complete sacrifice includes the whole person, alleviating and eliminating the mental, emotional and physical sufferings that result from our sins.

Through the opportunity for the forgiveness of our sins, the Messiah also made possible our receiving eternal life. "I am the bread of life," He said. "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

A relationship leading to a new way of life

The Passover bread reminds us of the close relationship Israelites have with Yah'shua the Messiah. In Romans 6:1-6 Paul shows that, once we are symbolically united with the Messiah in death through baptism, "we should no longer be slaves of sin" but "should walk in newness of life." Eating the bread demonstrates our commitment to allow the Messiah to live in us.

The apostle Paul describes this uniting with the Messiah in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with the Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but the Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of Yahweh, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul understood that pursuing his own ways was no longer his life's focus. His relationship with Yah'shua the Messiah became supremely important to him.

The apostle John tells us what the Messiah expects of us in our relationship with Him: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments ... He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

The Passover bread reinforces our understanding that Yah'shua the Messiah, the true "bread of life," must live within us, enabling us to live an entirely new life. Yahweh forgives our sins to sanctify us—to continue to set us apart for a holy purpose, to redeem us (that is, purchase us for a price). We now belong to Yahweh so He can fulfill His purpose in us.

The meaning of the Passover wine

Why did Yah'shua command His disciples to drink wine as a symbol of His blood during the Passover service? What does this symbolize?

Notice Matthew's account: "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them,

saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom'" (Matthew 26:27-29).

What are we to learn from this symbol? First, the Messiah knew that drinking wine as a symbol of His shed blood would impress deeply on our minds that His death was for the opportunity for us to access Yahweh's forgiveness of our sins. "This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). Yah'shua "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5). Yahweh forgives our sins through our faith in Yah'shua's shed blood – when we repent and ask for that forgiveness. (1 John 1:7).

Many people normally understand this tenet—that Yahweh forgives our sins through Yah'shua the Messiah's blood—but not everyone realizes how it occurs. Paul explained that "according to the Law ... all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin]" (Hebrews 9:22, New American Standard Bible).

The Old Covenant records Yahweh instructing the priesthood to perform certain duties that included a system of cleansing and purification using the blood of sacrificed animals, thus foreshadowing the shedding of the Messiah's blood, the ultimate sacrifice for sin. He commanded the nation of Israel to follow this temporary system of the ritualistic cleansing of sin (Hebrews 9:9-10). Animal sacrifices served as a type of the one and only real and future sacrifice, Yah'shua the Messiah, who would pay the penalty for everyone's sins once and for all. Our only obligations are to believe, repent and ask!

The Bible teaches that one's life is in his blood (Genesis 9:4). When a person loses sufficient blood, he or she dies. Therefore blood, when poured out, makes the atonement for sin, which produces death (Leviticus 17:11). Yah'shua lost His blood when He was crucified (Luke 22:20; Isaiah 53:12). He poured out His blood, dying for the sins of humanity.

In partaking of the wine at the Passover service, we should carefully consider its meaning. That small portion of wine represents the very life blood that flowed from Yah'shua the Messiah's

dying body for the remission of our sins (Ephesians 1:7). With this forgiveness comes freedom from the eternal, or second death.

Not only does Yah'shua the Messiah's blood completely cover our sins upon our belief, repentance and asking, but it makes possible the removal of our guilt. Hebrews 9:13-14 compares the physical sacrifice of an animal with the blood of the Messiah: "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to Yahweh, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living Yahweh?"

The word conscience comes from the Latin word *conscire*, meaning "to be conscious of guilt." Our conscience is our awareness of right and wrong.

Our taking wine in the New Covenant Passover ceremony is an expression of faith that Yahweh really will forgive us. We are free from sin and guilt (John 3:17-18), and our hearts are "made free from the sense of sin" (Hebrews 10:22, Bible in Basic English). We live in newness of life with a clear conscience (Romans 6:14).

Some people, however, feel guilty even after they have repented. Although our consciences should readily convict us when we sin again, we should not continue to condemn ourselves because of sins Yahweh has already forgiven. Instead, we should be fully confident in our Yahweh-given freedom from such guilt (1 John 1:9; 3:19-20).

Access to the Father

The Messiah's shed blood also makes possible our access to the very throne of Yahweh the Father. Under the Old Covenant only the high priest could enter the area of the tabernacle known as the Holiest of All (Hebrews 9:6-10). The "mercy seat" positioned there represented God's throne. Leviticus 16 describes the ceremony that took place each year on another Holy Day, the Day of Atonement. At that time the high priest took the blood of a goat, representing the future sacrifice of Yah'shua the Messiah, and sprinkled it on the mercy seat so the Israelites could be symbolically cleansed of all their sins (verses 15-16).

Because the blood of Yah'shua the Messiah effectively removes sin, making us potentially

pure before Yahweh, we can conditionally enjoy direct access to the Father (Hebrews 9:24). Yah'shua, as our High Priest, entered into the Most Holy Place through His own blood (Hebrews 9:11-12). We can now approach Yahweh the Father through the Messiah as our High Priest, without hesitation or fear of rejection, but with confidence and assurance (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Hebrews 4:16 speaks of the confidence we can have when we approach Yahweh: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Yah'shua the Messiah makes it possible for us to experience this intimate relationship with our Father.

Our covenant with Yahweh

The blood of the Messiah also signifies that He has entered into a covenant, or agreement. When Yah'shua instituted wine for the New Covenant Passover, He said drink it because "this is My blood of the new covenant" (Matthew 26:27-28).

Why is this wine called the "blood of the new covenant"? The writer of the book of Hebrews explains that, after Yahweh enjoined the Old Covenant on ancient Israel, and after the Israelites' response of obedient commitment, the covenant was ratified by the ceremony of the sprinkling of blood. The Bible writers called this the "blood of the covenant" (Hebrews 9:18-20; 13:20; Exodus 24:3-8).

We must understand that belief, repentance, and the acceptance of the sacrifice of Yah'shua the Messiah—along with belief in Yahweh's promise to forgive our sin—constitutes a covenant with Yahweh. Through this covenant, which we gratefully accept and can completely rely on (Hebrews 6:17-20), Yahweh grants us eternal life. By accepting the sacrifice of the Messiah for the remission of our sin, we enter into a covenant relationship with the God of the universe. The terms of this covenant are absolute, because it was sealed with the shed blood of Yah'shua the Messiah (Hebrews 9:11-12, 15). This covenant is renewed every year when we partake of the Passover.

What are the terms of this covenant relationship? "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins

and lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:16-17).

Ancient Israel did not have the heart to faithfully keep Yahweh's commandments (Deuteronomy 5:29). Under the New Covenant, however, Yahweh writes His law in our hearts and minds. His laws are not those of physical purification contained in the system of sacrifices, washings and service in the tabernacle. Instead, they are the holy and righteous laws that define right behavior toward Yahweh and neighbor (Romans 7:12) and lead to eternal life (Matthew 19:17). The Passover wine is symbolic of this covenant relationship that is ratified by the blood of Yah'shua the Messiah.

Annual observance in the early Congregation

The New Covenant pictures Israelites continuing to observe the annual festivals at the times commanded by Yahweh. As a youth, the Messiah kept the Passover annually on the specified day (Luke 2:41), and He continued the practice with His disciples. The early Congregation as well continued to observe the other Holy Days at their specified times. For example, Acts records that Yah'shua's followers met to observe the Feast of Pentecost: "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1).

Scripture gives no hint of the early Congregation adding to or changing the dates Yahweh ordained for His festivals. The phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:26—"for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup"—simply points out that, by observing the Passover each year on the appropriate day, members of the Congregation were proclaiming "the Messiah's death till He comes."

The Bible specifies the yearly observance of the Passover, and history records its annual celebration as the natural practice of the early Congregation. Passover, as a memorial of Yah'shua's death, is to be observed annually rather than whenever or however often one chooses, just as all of the other annual festivals are to be kept once a year. Neither Yah'shua the Messiah nor the apostles indicated that we should change when or how often we observe any of Yahweh's festivals.

Following their example, today we should observe the Passover at the beginning of the

evening of the 14th day of the first month (Abib, or Nisan) of the Hebrew calendar.

During His last Passover with His disciples, Yah'shua explained that this celebration has significant implications for the future as well. In Matthew 26:29 He told them, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Keeping the Passover each year reminds us that Yahweh is the forgiver of sin who grants us eternal life in His Kingdom through the sacrifice of Yah'shua the Messiah, our Passover. This observance is a memorial of our Creator's continuing role in humanity's salvation.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread: The Lesson of Leaving Sin

Immediately after the Passover comes a festival that depicts the next step in the fulfillment of Yahweh's master plan. After Yahweh, through our faith in the Messiah's sacrifice, has forgiven us of our sins, how do we continue to avoid sin, since we must go on living in newness of life? How do we live as Yahweh's redeemed people? We find the answer in the remarkable symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

When Yahweh freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, He told His people that for "seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (Exodus 12:15). Verse 39 further explains: "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves."

The leavening process, which makes bread rise, takes time. The Israelites had no time to spare when they left Egypt, so they baked and ate flat bread. What started out as a necessity continued for a week. Yahweh appropriately named this time the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6), or Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3).

When Yah'shua came to earth as a human, He observed this seven-day festival—sometimes called the Feast of Passover by the Jews because of the proximity of the Passover to the Days of Unleavened Bread. Yah'shua kept it as a child and later as an adult (Luke 2:41; Matthew 26:17). The early natural Congregation, imitating the Messiah in His actions, kept it as well.

Earliest instructions and the Messiah's teachings

Yahweh gave His earliest instructions concerning this festival to the Israelites as they prepared to leave Egypt. "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to Yahweh—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do" (Exodus 12:14-16, New International Version).

Each year as the Israelites observed this feast, it reminded them of Yahweh's deliverance of their forefathers from Egypt. The Creator instructed, "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt" (verse 17, NIV). The exodus from Egypt remains as a foundational reason for observing this feast today. Just as Yahweh delivered ancient Israel, He delivers us from our sins and difficulties.

Now notice Yah'shua the Messiah's teaching about leaven, which expands the meaning of this feast. During the Messiah's ministry He performed two miracles in which a few fish and loaves of bread fed thousands of people. After one of these incidents, when His disciples had gone around the Sea of Galilee, they forgot to bring bread with them. So Yah'shua told them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

The disciples thought Yah'shua was referring to their lack of bread. However, He was using the occasion to teach them by calling on the symbolism of leaven. The Messiah asked them, "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then the disciples "understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:5-12, NASB).

Some of the members of the religious establishment of the Messiah's day appeared to be righteous, yet they secretly practiced sinful

behavior. Yah'shua let them know He knew their hearts. They may have appeared righteous to other people, "but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28).

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that with Yahweh's help we must remove and avoid all types of sin—symbolized by leaven—in all areas of our life.

Continued importance of these days

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the apostle Paul taught the same spiritual lessons as had Yah'shua the Messiah, invoking the comparison of sin to leaven. In the context of reprimanding the Corinthian congregation for its divisions, jealousies and tolerance of sexual misconduct, Paul wrote: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed the Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Yahweh's natural Congregation at Corinth was obviously and unmistakably keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to which Paul repeatedly alluded. However, Paul used the Corinthians' faithful obedience in keeping the feast physically (removing leaven from their homes) as a basis to encourage them to celebrate this feast with proper understanding of its spiritual intent.

Today removing leaven from our homes for seven days reminds us that we, too, through prayer and Yahweh's help and understanding, must recognize, expel and avoid sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is thus a time of personal reflection. We should meditate on our attitudes and conduct and ask Yahweh to help us recognize and overcome our shortcomings.

Paul spoke of this much-needed self-reflection in 2 Corinthians 13:5 when he told the Corinthian assembly of His natural Congregation: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Yah'shua the Messiah is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

Paul explained the significance of the phrase "Yah'shua the Messiah is in you" in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with the

Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but the Messiah lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of Yahweh, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

These seven days of self-examination prove invaluable in helping us to devote our lives to Yahweh and Yah'shua the Messiah. This week-long period also pictures our eventual triumph over sin. As Yahweh delivered the ancient Israelites from enslavement to Egypt, so He delivers us from our enslavement to sin (Romans 6:12-18).

Applying the spiritual lessons

We learn by doing. We learn spiritual lessons by doing physical things. Performing the task of de-leavening our homes reminds us to vigilantly watch for sinful thoughts and actions so we can avoid them. Yahweh knows that, in spite of our good intentions, we all sin.

Many years after his conversion, Paul described the powerful human tendency to sin. "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of Yahweh according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank Yahweh-through Yah'shua the Messiah our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of Yahweh, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:21-25).

Paul knew life itself is a battle with sin. The Bible speaks of "the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1). We have our own part to play in struggling to overcome sin. Yet, paradoxically, we must rely on Yahweh to help us. Paul explained this to the Philippians by telling them to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is Yahweh who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13, King James Version).

Our observance of the Days of Unleavened Bread helps us realize our need for our faith in Yah'shua the Messiah's ability to intercede for us, thereby strengthening our resolve as a help in overcoming our weaknesses. Yet this feast is certainly a time for rejoicing because the Messiah freely gives us the help we need. Yah'shua, the Lamb of Yahweh, was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins, thus unleavening, or

cleansing, our lives. He continues to help us live obediently through Yahweh's Spirit dwelling in us—which brings us to the subject of the next chapter.

The Feast of Pentecost: The Firstfruits of Yahweh's Harvest

In the process of revealing His plan of salvation for mankind, Yahweh established His annual Holy Days around the harvest seasons in the Middle East (Leviticus 23:9-16; Exodus 23:14-16). Just as His people harvested their crops around these three festival seasons, Yahweh's Holy Days show us how He is harvesting people for eternal life in His Kingdom.

The Holy Days have meanings that build upon each other. Together they progressively reveal how Yahweh works with humanity. Earlier we saw Passover symbolizing the Messiah's giving of Himself for us so our sins could be forgiven. We also learned how the Days of Unleavened Bread teach us that we must remove and avoid sin, whether in actions or attitudes. The next Holy Day, Pentecost, builds on this important foundation.

This festival is known by several names, which derive from its meaning and timing. Also known as the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), it represents the firstfruits (Numbers 28:26) gathered as the result of the labor of those who completed the spring grain harvests in ancient Israel (Exodus 23:16).

It is also called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), with this name coming from the seven weeks plus one day (50 days in all) that are counted to determine when to celebrate this festival (Leviticus 23:16). Similarly, in the New Covenant, which was written in Greek, this festival is known as Pentecost (Pentekostos in the original), which means "fiftieth" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Covenant Words, "Pentecost").

Among Jews the most popular name for this festival is the Feast of Weeks, or shavuot, in Hebrew. When celebrating this festival, many Jewish people recall one of the greatest events in history; Yahweh's revealing of the law at Mount Sinai.

But Pentecost doesn't just picture the giving of the law; it also shows—through a great miracle that occurred on the first Pentecost in the

early Congregation—how to keep the spiritual intent of Yahweh's laws.

The gift of Pentecost: His Holy Spirit

Yahweh chose the first Pentecost after Yah'shua the Messiah's resurrection to pour out His Holy Spirit on 120 believers (Acts 1:15). "Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from the sky, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with His Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages], as His Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

The speaking in various languages occurred as a crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem, with each visitor hearing the speech of the disciples in his own native tongue (verses 6-11). These astounding events demonstrated the presence of His Holy Spirit.

At first the people of Jerusalem who witnessed this miraculous phenomenon were astonished, with some attributing the actions of the Israelites to drunkenness (Acts 2:12-13). The apostle Peter, now filled with His Holy Spirit, boldly explained the event to the crowd as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says Yahweh, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28).

Peter explained how his listeners could also receive this Spirit: "Repent, and let every one of you be immersed [baptized] in the name of Yah'shua the Messiah for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of His Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as Yahweh our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Yahweh used these miracles and Peter's preaching to add 3,000 people to His Congregation in one day. These converts were all baptized by His Holy Spirit (verses 40-41). From this pivotal point, Yahweh's Spirit has been available to all who believe and truly repent and are then properly baptized, or immersed in His Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost is an annual reminder that Yahweh poured out His Spirit to establish His Congregation; the group of believers who are led by His Spirit to this very day!

Why we need Yahweh's Spirit

Humanly speaking, no matter how hard we try not to, we still sin (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23). Acknowledging this inherent weakness of humanity, Yahweh lamented in Deuteronomy 5:29, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments that it might be well with them and with their children forever!"

Here Yahweh explains that humankind has a heart problem. Academic knowledge of the law does not enable us to think like Yahweh. Becoming godly in our thoughts, attitudes and actions is beyond the comprehension and ability of men and women without an additional ingredient: Yahweh's Spirit or "will".

Yahweh's way of thinking produces peace, happiness and concern for others. Yah'shua complimented a lawyer who correctly quoted the essence of Yahweh's law: "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind" and "[love] your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). This man cited Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, from two books of the Pentateuch. Yah'shua here confirmed that the Old Covenant scriptures are based on these two great principles of love (Matthew 22:40).

The essence of Yahweh's law is love (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9). Yahweh gave His commandments because He loves us. Writing to brethren who had Yahweh's Spirit, John said, "By this we know that we love the children of Yahweh, when we love Yahweh and keep His commandments. For this is the love of Yahweh, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3).

Because Yahweh's Spirit was now residing in the Congregation, its members could express genuine love. "A new commandment I give to you," Yah'shua had said, "that you love one another; as I have loved you ... By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Yahweh's gift of His Holy Spirit on Pentecost made it possible for the Congregation to fully express Yahweh's commandments of love.

Yah'shua the Messiah: the firstfruits of eternal life

Firstfruits are the first agricultural products to mature and ripen. Throughout the Bible, Yahweh uses the analogy of the harvest—and, particularly on Pentecost, firstfruits—to illustrate aspects of His plan of salvation. Israel observed this day in the late spring after the barley and wheat harvests. A special offering of the first ripe grain during the Days of Unleavened Bread, called the wave-sheaf offering, marked the beginning of these harvests, which continued during the next 50 days and led up to Pentecost (Leviticus 23:11). This spring harvest was the firstfruits of the yearly agricultural cycle.

One of the first harvest lessons of the New Covenant is that Yah'shua the Messiah "is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The wave-sheaf offering represented Yah'shua the Messiah, who was the "firstborn over all creation" and the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:15, 18). He presented Himself to Yahweh the Father as a type, or example, of firstfruits on the Sunday after His resurrection, the same day during the Days of Unleavened Bread on which the first sheaf of grain of the spring harvest was waved before Yahweh.

Early on the first day of the week (Sunday morning), while it was still dark and Yah'shua had already been resurrected (John 20:1), Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and discovered that the rock in front of it had already been rolled away. She ran to notify Peter and John that Yah'shua was no longer in His grave. The two men hurried to the tomb and verified that Yah'shua was gone (John 20:2-10). After Peter and John left for their homes, Mary Magdalene stood outside Yah'shua's place of interment (verse 11). As she wept, Yah'shua appeared to her but would not allow her to touch Him because He had "not yet ascended" to the Father (John 20:17).

The wave-sheaf ceremony Yahweh gave to ancient Israel thus represents Yah'shua the Messiah's acceptance by His Father as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Messiah's Natural Congregation as firstfruits

Romans 8:29 speaks of Yah'shua the Messiah as "the firstborn of many brethren." Yet

the New Covenant Congregation in its natural form as founded by the Messiah, is also considered to be firstfruits. In speaking of the Father, James said, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

Yahweh's Spirit within us identifies us and sanctifies us—sets us apart as Israelites. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of the Messiah," wrote Paul, "he is not His," and "as many as are led by the Spirit of Yahweh, these are sons of Yahweh" (Romans 8:9, 14).

Paul also referred to the brethren as those "who have the firstfruits of His Spirit" (verse 23). He alluded to several first-century Israelites as the firstfruits of Yahweh's calling (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15).

The significance of the Bible writers calling these people of Yahweh firstfruits becomes evident when we consider John 14:6. Here Yah'shua said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

How many, throughout the centuries, have really accepted and practiced the way of life Yah'shua taught? Even today many people have simply never heard much, if anything, about Yah'shua the Messiah. How will Yahweh offer them salvation?

Few people understand that Yahweh follows a systematic plan, symbolized by His Holy Days, to save all humanity by offering all people eternal life in His Kingdom. In this world we are simply at the beginning of the harvest for the Kingdom of Yahweh.

The apostle Paul understood this: "But now the Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... For as in Adam all die, even so in the Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: the Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are the Messiah's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22-23). Anyone who is now called and chosen by Yahweh is included with the Messiah as Yahweh's firstfruits (James 1:18).

The Bible teaches us that Yahweh must call people (John 6:44; 6:63). Our Creator, therefore, controls the timing of His harvest. When Yahweh founded His Congregation by imparting His Spirit to certain believers on the

Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, He was expanding His spiritual harvest. It was the beginning of what Joel prophesied, that Yahweh will ultimately pour out His Spirit on "all flesh" (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:14-17).

His Holy Spirit at work

The giving of His Holy Spirit dramatically changed the lives of these early Israelites. The book of Acts is filled with accounts of the early Congregation's remarkable spiritual impact on the surrounding society. A transformation was so evident that nonbelievers accused the Israelites of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Such was the dynamic, miraculous power of His Holy Spirit.

To fully grasp how Yahweh's Spirit can work with us, we must comprehend what His Holy Spirit is. It is not a person who, along with Yahweh the Father and Yah'shua the Son, forms a "Holy Trinity." In Scripture His Holy Spirit is described as the power of Yahweh at work in our lives (Acts 1:8; Romans 15:13, 19), the same power that was at work in the ministry of Yah'shua the Messiah (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38).

This divine power allows us to be "led by the Spirit of Yahweh" (Romans 8:14). It was this same power that transformed the lives of the early Israelites and is the power working in the natural Congregation today. Paul told Timothy that Yahweh's Spirit is a "spirit of ... power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Pentecost serves as an annual reminder that our Creator still works miracles, granting His Spirit to the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest, empowering them to carry out His work in this world.

The Feast of Trumpets: A Turning Point in History

The Feast of Trumpets introduces the autumn festivals—representing the culmination of the present age of man and the beginning of an incredible time during which Yahweh will play a much more direct part in world events. The previous festivals constitute personal responses to the workings of Yahweh in the people He calls and chooses. But the Day of Trumpets heralds the intervention of Yahweh in the affairs of humanity on a global basis. This Holy Day represents a dramatic turning point in world history.

This particular festival also marks the beginning of the third and final feast season

(Exodus 23:14; Deuteronomy 16:16), which includes the final four Holy Days of the year.

The return of Yah'shua the Messiah!

The Feast of Trumpets depicts nothing less than the return of Yah'shua the Messiah to this earth to establish the Kingdom of Yahweh! The book of Revelation reveals a sequence of earth-shaking events depicted by angels sounding a series of seven trumpet blasts. The seventh angel's sounding of the last trumpet signifies that "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Messiah" (Revelation 11:15). The return of Yah'shua the Messiah stands as the final and most significant event associated with the blowing of the prophetic trumpets. Of all the prophecies in the Bible, this one surely heralds the most exciting news possible for this weary, sin-filled world!

The Feast of Trumpets also marks the future fulfillment of the many Old Covenant prophecies that speak of a Messiah coming as a king who will rule with power and authority. The concept of a conquering Messiah was on the minds of the apostles immediately after Yah'shua's resurrection. When He appeared to them in those early days, they asked questions such as: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Even in His earthly ministry, Yah'shua had spoken of distinctions between His first and second coming. When Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, questioned Yah'shua just before the crucifixion, Yah'shua stated clearly that He had not come to rule at that time.

"My kingdom is not of this world," Yah'shua told the government official. "If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You a king then?" Yah'shua answered in the affirmative: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:36-37).

After the Messiah's resurrection, the apostles excitedly anticipated the fulfillment of Yah'shua's promises. They were aware of messianic prophecies such as Isaiah's that describe a time during which "the government will be upon His shoulder" and "of the increase of His

government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

In answer to the apostles' question when they asked Him if He would soon establish the Kingdom, Yah'shua told them they were not to know "times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Instead, the Messiah told them to focus on spreading the gospel—the good news—throughout the world. Later, in due time, the apostles realized that the Messiah's second coming was not necessarily imminent. Numerous scriptures describe the saints as eagerly looking forward to the Messiah's return. Why the symbolism of Trumpets?

The excitement of this Holy Day, picturing these monumental events, is captured in the symbolism of this festival. Ancient Israel celebrated it with "a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts" (Leviticus 23:24, NIV).

What is the significance of the dramatic sounds accompanying the observance of this day? To help us understand the symbol of trumpets, let's take a brief look at the use of that musical instrument in the Bible.

Yahweh instructed ancient Israel in the appropriate use of trumpets to communicate important messages. The sounding of one trumpet meant a meeting of the leaders of Israel. Two trumpets sounded to call a gathering of all of the people (Numbers 10:3-4). Yahweh also used a trumpet to herald His meeting with Israel when He descended upon Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16).

Trumpets could also sound a warning. Numbers 10:9 states, "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets." In this case the trumpets resounded a warning of impending danger and imminent warfare.

Trumpets could also furnish a festive sound: "Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets ... and they shall be a memorial for you before your God" (Numbers 10:10).

With their ability to transmit sound over great distances, trumpets were excellent instruments for attracting people's attention. In connection with this Feast Day, Psalm 81:3 exhorts: "Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day."

Amplification of trumpets' meaning

The writers of the New Covenant revealed additional understanding of the significance of the blowing of trumpets. Notice Paul's description of the return of Yah'shua the Messiah: "For Yah'shua Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of Yahweh. And the dead in the Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Messiah in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul also spoke of the day when the firstfruits pictured by Pentecost will be resurrected to immortal life. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 he says this will happen "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

The apostle John associated the blowing of a trumpet with the Messiah's return when he wrote, "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15). These passages dramatically attest to the significance of the Feast of Trumpets.

Although the Trumpets festival isn't mentioned by name in the New Covenant, we have no valid reason for assuming that this Holy Day should not be kept. On the contrary, the early Congregation used the Hebrew scriptures as their foundation for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16). Like the Ten Commandments (James 2:10-11), each of Yahweh's festivals is intimately and intricately related to the others and they were all commanded as "everlasting ordinances". By keeping all of them, we can understand Yahweh's remarkable plan for humanity as it unfolds.

Yah'shua's prophetic teaching

Near the end of the Messiah's physical ministry, the apostles asked Him about the end of the present era. Notice Matthew 24:3: "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

Earlier, Daniel had prophesied about the establishment of the Kingdom of Yahweh and how the saints, or Yahweh's people, would inherit

that kingdom (Daniel 2:44; 7:18). Like the disciples, however, Daniel did not understand when the Kingdom would come.

Nonetheless, Yah'shua began to explain the events that would lead up to His return. Yah'shua explained a prophecy that had been "closed up and sealed" since Daniel's day (Daniel 12:9). In Matthew 24 Yah'shua the Messiah described to His disciples religious deception, wars, famines, disease, earthquakes and other calamities (verses 4-13). He characterized the time of His return as an era of hatred and lawlessness. In this setting Yah'shua said, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (verse 14).

More details in the book of Revelation

Later Yah'shua the Messiah revealed many more details about this pivotal time. The book of Revelation is described as "the Revelation of Yah'shua the Messiah, which Yahweh gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). Here the Messiah repeated through the apostle John the same events He had described to His disciples decades earlier. Now, however, Yah'shua used the symbolism of a series of seals He would open one by one (Revelation 6).

After this, at the beginning of Yahweh's wrath against the disobedient nations, Yah'shua prophesied seven plagues to be poured out upon a sinning world, with a trumpet blast announcing each (Revelation 8-9). Finally Yahweh will send two "witnesses," or "prophets," to proclaim His truth to a rebellious world (Revelation 11). Tragically, this godless society will reject witnesses of Yahweh and kill them (verses 7-10).

These dramatic events set the stage for the seventh angel's trumpet sounding and Yah'shua the Messiah's return to assume rulership over the governments of the earth (Revelation 11:15).

Of this same scenario, Matthew 24 says that "immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the the skies will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect

from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (verses 29-31).

Unprecedented events at the Messiah's return

Incredibly, when Yah'shua the Messiah returns to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the nations of the earth will gather to fight against Him (Zechariah 14:1-4). Revelation 19:19 describes this impending battle: "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him [Yah'shua the Messiah] who sat on the horse and against His army." Why would anyone want to fight the Messiah? The armies will try to destroy the Messiah because Satan has deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9). The devil's influence will inspire the nations to fight against the Messiah when He returns.

The Feast of Trumpets also signals a resurrection of the dead. The apostle Paul spoke of this event: "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in the Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: the Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are the Messiah's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

Paul further explained: "For Yahweh Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of Yahweh. And the dead in the Messiah will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16), immediately followed by the people of Yahweh who are alive at that time (verse 17). Revelation 20:5 describes this as the "first resurrection." This change to immortal life was the hope of early Israelites and remains the fervent hope of those who understand Yahweh's plan.

In the book of Romans, Paul describes this resurrection as a glorious deliverance from bondage: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of Yahweh ... because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of Yahweh ... And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of His Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:19, 21, 23).

We see that, even though tragic events lie ahead, the good news is that Yahweh will intervene to save humanity and guide mankind into His way of life. Yah'shua the Messiah will return to establish Yahweh's millennial rule, bringing His perfect government to earth. This is the wonderful, inspiring meaning of the Feast of Trumpets. The Messiah taught us to pray "thy kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10, KJV). How urgently we need the answer to that prayer!

The Day of Atonement: Removal of Sin and Reconciliation to Yahweh

We have already seen—through the symbolism involved in the Passover—that the Messiah's shed blood provides atonement for our past sins. In fact, atonement means reconciliation. The Day of Atonement symbolizes the reconciliation of Yahweh and all humanity.

If we are reconciled to Yahweh through the Messiah's sacrifice, why do we need another Holy Day to teach us about reconciliation? If we are already reconciled, why do we need to fast, as commanded on the Day of Atonement? (Leviticus 23:27; Acts 27:9). What is this day's specific significance in Yahweh's master plan for the salvation of mankind?

The Day of Atonement and Passover both teach us about the forgiveness of sin and our reconciliation with Yahweh through the Messiah's sacrifice. However, although the Passover is personally and (for the time being) individually applied to Israelites whom Yahweh has called in this age, Atonement carries immediate universal implications.

Moreover, the Day of Atonement pictures an essential additional step in Yahweh's salvation plan not to be found in the symbolism of the Passover. This step must take place before humanity can experience true peace on earth. All people suffer the tragic consequences of sin. But sin doesn't happen without a cause, and Yahweh makes this cause clear in the symbolism associated with the Day of Atonement.

Satan the author of sin

The Day of Atonement involves not only the forgiveness of sin; it pictures the removal of the primary cause of sin—Satan and his demons. Until Yahweh removes the original instigator of sin, mankind will simply continue to fall back into disobedience and suffering. Although our human nature has a part to play in our sins, Satan the

devil bears great responsibility for influencing mankind to disobey Yahweh.

Even though many people doubt the existence of a devil, the Bible reveals Satan as a powerful, invisible being who can sway all mankind. Revelation 12:9 tells us that his influence is so great that he "deceives the whole world."

The devil blinds people to the understanding of Yahweh's truth. The apostle Paul explained this to the Corinthians: If "our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of the Messiah, who is the image of Yahweh, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul also teaches us that Satan has influenced every human to walk in the ways of disobedience. He notes that those called into Yahweh's congregation "once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

Paul warned the Corinthians that Satan can present himself as righteous, "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Yah'shua the Messiah plainly stated that Satan introduced sin and rebellion into the world. In John 8:44 the Messiah made this plain to those who were antagonistic to His teaching: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Tying these scriptures together lets us see the power and the influence of Satan. Paul warned us to beware of the deceitful methods of the devil: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to the Messiah" (2 Corinthians 11:3, NIV).

Israelites who struggle to resist Satan and stop sinning fight a spiritual battle against the devil and his demons. Paul explains: "For our

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, NASB).

Paul further explains here that Yah'shua the Messiah will deliver us from the influence of the devil (verses 13-18). Of course, Yahweh is much more powerful than Satan, but we must do our part by actively resisting the devil and the pulls of the flesh. The Day of Atonement looks forward to the time during which Satan's deception will be removed and he will no longer be free to influence and deceive mankind (Revelation 20:1-3).

Old Covenant symbolism

Leviticus 16 describes Yahweh instructing ancient Israel to observe the Day of Atonement. Although, since the sacrifice of the Messiah, no need remains for animal sacrifices, this chapter adds significantly to our understanding of Yahweh's plan.

Notice that the priest was to select two goats for a sin offering for the people, and he was to present them before Yahweh (verses 5, 7). Aaron, the high priest, was to cast lots to select one "for Yahweh"; which he was to offer as a sacrifice (verses 8-9). This goat represented Yah'shua the Messiah, who would be slain to pay the penalty for our sins.

The other goat served a completely different purpose: "But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before Yahweh, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness" (verse 10). Notice that this goat was not to be killed. The high priest was to "lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert" (verses 21, 22, NIV).

The priest chose by lot the "scapegoat," or Azazel, as the word appears in the original Hebrew. Many scholars identify Azazel as the name of a demon inhabiting the wilderness (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 1, p. 326). The Azazel goat represents Satan, who bears

the responsibility for the sins of humanity (verse 22) because of the deception he has foisted upon mankind.

The high priest laid hands on this goat and confessed over it the wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people. Why did he do that? As present ruler of the world, the devil bears responsibility for his perversity in beguiling and coercing humanity to sin. "The sending of the sin-laden goat ... signified the complete removal of the sins of the people and the handing them over, as it were, to the evil spirit to whom they belonged" (The One Volume Bible Commentary, p. 95).

A scapegoat, in modern usage, is someone unfairly held responsible for the mistakes of others. However, the modern English word scapegoat cannot properly be applied to Satan; the devil is not a scapegoat in the modern sense of the term. (Although some Bible versions use the word "scapegoat," Green's Literal Translation more accurately calls it the "goat of departure.") Rather than unfairly bearing the blame for sin, Satan will be held justly accountable for his own deliberate actions by which he has led humanity into sin for thousands of years.

The symbolism of the live goat parallels the fate of Satan and his demons, whom Yahweh will remove before Yah'shua the Messiah's millennial rule is established. The book of Revelation describes this event: "Then I saw an angel coming down from the sky, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished ..." (Revelation 20:1-3).

Thus the devil and his demons, who for thousands of years have led mankind into every evil deed imaginable, will be removed to a place of restraint (verse 4). Complete global reconciliation to Yahweh cannot occur until the source of so much sin and suffering—Satan—is removed.

The modern application of this festival

Now notice specific instructions on when and how we are to keep this festival. "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement," Yahweh says. "It shall be a holy

convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls ..." (Leviticus 23:27).

How do you "afflict your soul" on this day? Afflict comes from the Hebrew *anah*, which means "to be afflicted, be bowed down, be humbled, be meek" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Covenant Words, "To Be Humbled, Afflicted"). The same word is used in connection with fasting in Psalm 35:13 and Ezra 8:21. Fasting means abstaining from food and drink (Esther 4:16).

Why does Yahweh tell us to fast during this specific 24 hours? Fasting expresses our humble desire to draw closer to Yahweh. The Day of Atonement represents a coming time of reconciliation during which, with Satan banished and the world having been devastated by the horrific events leading up to this time, a humbled and repentant humanity will at last be reconciled to Yahweh.

Few understand the proper reasons for fasting. Fasting is not to bend Yahweh to our will. We don't fast to receive anything from Yahweh except to show our appreciation for His abundant mercy and forgiveness of our human weaknesses. Fasting helps us remember how temporary our physical existence is. Without food and water, we would soon perish. Fasting helps us realize just how much we need Yahweh as the giver and sustainer of life.

We should always fast on the Day of Atonement in a repentant frame of mind. Notice Daniel's exemplary attitude while fasting: "Then I set my face toward Yahweh my God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to Yahweh my God, and made confession" (Daniel 9:3-4).

The early Congregation naturally kept the Day of Atonement. More than 30 years after the Messiah's death, Luke still referred to the time and seasons by mentioning this day, stating that "sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over" (Acts 27:9). Almost all Bible commentaries and dictionaries acknowledge that "the Fast" refers to the Day of Atonement.

Yet another important lesson comes to us through the Day of Atonement. We have already seen that the slain goat represented the sacrifice in our place of Yah'shua the Messiah, who took on Himself the death penalty we have earned by sinning. But Yah'shua the Messiah did not stay

dead; He came back to life. What does the Day of Atonement teach us about the Messiah's role after His resurrection?

Leviticus 16:15-19 describes a solemn ceremony that was carried out only once each year, on the Day of Atonement. The high priest was to take the blood of the slain goat into the Holy Place—the most sacred part of the tabernacle—and to the mercy seat. The mercy seat was symbolic of the very throne of Almighty Yahweh. The high priest acted out the function the Messiah performs for repentant Israelites. Having ascended to the very throne of Yahweh by the blood of His sacrifice, the Messiah intercedes for us—as He has since His resurrection—as our High Priest.

The book of Hebrews makes this symbolism clear. "But the Messiah came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this [physical] creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Because of the Messiah's sacrifice, we enjoy direct access to the true mercy seat—the throne of our merciful, loving Creator. This was dramatically and miraculously demonstrated at the moment of the Messiah's death, when "the veil of the temple," covering the entrance to the Holy Place, "was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). This massive curtain over the entrance to the Holy Place was torn asunder in a dramatic testimony to the access we now have to Yahweh's throne through the Messiah.

Many verses in Hebrews mention the Messiah's role as our High Priest and intercessor. Because of His sacrifice for us, we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The Day of Atonement thus pictures the loving reconciliation we have with Yahweh, made possible through the Messiah's sacrifice. It also shows the remarkable truth that Satan, the author of sin, will eventually be removed so that humanity can at last attain reconciliation with Yahweh on a universal and unconditional basis.

The Day of Atonement serves as a vital preparatory step in anticipation of the next milestone in Yahweh's glorious Holy Day plan, beautifully depicted by the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles: Yah'shua the Messiah Reigns Over All the Earth

In his first inspired sermon after receiving His Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostle Peter summed up Yahweh's instruction for mankind: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of Yahweh, and that He may send Yah'shua the Messiah, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which Yahweh has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

What are these "times of refreshing" and "times of restoration" of which Peter spoke? Yahweh's plan for mankind involves restoration. The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the restoration process, which will start with the return of Yah'shua the Messiah, pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, and the banishment of Satan, depicted by the Day of Atonement. Once these events have taken place, as represented by the previous Holy Days, the foundation is in place for the restoration of the creation to peace and harmony with Yahweh.

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:27, 34) pictures the 1,000-year reign of Yah'shua the Messiah over the earth after His second coming (Revelation 20:4). This period is often called the Millennium, which simply means "1,000 years."

This Feast also reflects the "rest" symbolized by the weekly Sabbath (Hebrews 4:1-11) that celebrates the great harvest of humanity when all living people will learn Yahweh's ways. Humanity will at last be restored to a right relationship with Yahweh (Isaiah 11:9-10).

In the beginning, Yahweh created mankind to cooperate with Him in a beautiful relationship characterized by love, peace and obedience to His laws. At the completion of His creation, "Yahweh saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

This time of peace and harmony abruptly ended because of Satan's deception and man's disobedience (Genesis 3:1-6). Disobedience cut

mankind off from Yahweh's way (Genesis 3:21-24). Genesis 6:5 describes the tragic result: "Then Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This broken relationship between Yahweh and man has continued through history to our time. Paul reflected upon this state: "... Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ..." (Romans 5:12). Paul knew that Yah'shua the Messiah would heal the breach created by man's disobedience: "For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [the Messiah] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in the Messiah all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Isaiah prophesied the restoration of the world

Yahweh used the prophet Isaiah to reveal parts of His magnificent plan for restoring the world. Written at a time during which Israel faced punishment for continued disobedience, the book of Isaiah was inspired by Yahweh to give the nation encouragement through the promise of a better world ahead.

Yah'shua the Messiah, after reading in the synagogue one of Isaiah's prophecies, acknowledged the special understanding given Isaiah: "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (John 12:41). Isaiah not only prophesied of the Messiah's earthly ministry; he wrote of the Messiah's return in power and glory (Isaiah 66:15-16).

The basis for the messianic rule of Yah'shua will be Yahweh's law. Again, as Isaiah foretold, "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

A world of peace and abundance

After the Messiah's return, He will bring the creation in its entirety into harmony with Yahweh, and peace will no longer be the exception. King David said, "Great peace have

those who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165).
Imagine what the world will be like when everyone knows Yahweh's law and lives by it!

More than just knowledge is needed to bring about this amazing transformation. A spiritual change will take place among people. Yahweh, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, describes how it will happen: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The Spirit of Yahweh will influence people to willingly and enthusiastically obey Yahweh from their hearts. People will begin to place the interests of others before their own. They will start thinking of others as "better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3, KJV). Instead of exclusive self-concern, their goal will be to help their fellow human beings. Theft will cease. Disregard for others' property and feelings will be eliminated. Because the world will finally be at peace, countries will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).

During this 1,000-year period, Yahweh will change even the nature of wild animals, reflecting the peace that will descend upon society. Describing this idyllic time, Isaiah 11:7-9 says: "The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain ..."

Reversing the effects of sin

Yahweh will heal physical infirmities. Isaiah 35:5-6 prophesies of this time during which "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing ..."

Of even greater importance will be the spiritual healing that will take place. Isaiah prophesied that Yah'shua the Messiah will complete the healing He began during His ministry on earth: "The Spirit of Yahweh my GOD is upon Me, because Yahweh has anointed

Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion ..." (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19). The accumulated results of generations of humans following Satan's sinful ways will begin to be reversed.

The Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16). This name signified the completion of Israel's annual harvest. In this setting, Yahweh said, "you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God" (Deuteronomy 12:12, 18; 14:26). The Feast is a time of celebration for the abundance Yahweh has given.

This same bountiful harvest theme continues in the future fulfillment of this festival. Through Isaiah, Yahweh spoke of the desert becoming productive land, "for waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (Isaiah 35:6-7).

At that time the earth will produce bountiful harvests. "Behold, the days are coming," Yahweh says, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow" (Amos 9:13).

The significance of tabernacles

The name of the Feast of Tabernacles derives from Yahweh's command to ancient Israel to build temporary "tabernacles," sometimes called "booths," [or tents or huts] to live in during the festival. The Israelites left their houses and built temporary dwelling places (Hebrew succah, meaning "hut of woven boughs") to live in while rejoicing before Yahweh. These reminded them of their release from slavery and their dwelling in booths when Yahweh brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:34, 41-43). In stark contrast to the hardship of slavery, this festival emphasizes rest, peace and prosperity as it meets the needs of all people, including strangers, widows and the poor.

The Bible emphasizes that, as with these temporary dwellings, our physical life is transitory. The apostle Paul's writings reflect this theme: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of Yahweh, an house not made with hands, eternal

in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:1-2, KJV).

Hebrews 11 recounts the examples of many of Yahweh's faithful servants down through the centuries. It then concludes that "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (verse 13).

The Feast of Tabernacles is an annual reminder of our temporary state and that we also "seek a homeland" (verse 14). This lesson is reinforced when we travel to a site of the Feast of Tabernacles and stay in temporary dwellings such as hotels and campgrounds. This festival reminds us that, in spite of our material possessions, we are still mortals in need of a literal transformation so we may possess eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

In the accounts of the vision that has come to be called the "transfiguration," Yah'shua gave a glimpse of the Kingdom of Yahweh to Peter, James and John. The Messiah appeared to be talking with Moses and Elijah. Peter's immediate response was to suggest that they quickly construct three tabernacles. He seemed to understand the important connection between tabernacles and our quest for eternal life in Yahweh's Kingdom (see Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 9:27-36).

The role of the resurrected saints in the Millennium

The judgment of the inhabitants of the earth who live during the 1,000 years as pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles (Isaiah 2:4; 51:4-5) begins in earnest as the Messiah brings "many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). These scriptures show that this judgment is a time of universal opportunity for salvation. For this purpose Yahweh has allocated 1,000 years during which the resurrected saints, the firstfruits of Yahweh's harvest, will reign with the Messiah on earth as kings and priests so many others can enter Yahweh's Kingdom (Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Yah'shua promised that "he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26). People whom Yahweh resurrects at the Messiah's return will experience

the unparalleled opportunity to work with Him to help all nations build a relationship with Yahweh.

The foundation for this relationship begins with instruction on Yahweh's law and these very Holy Days. Notice Zechariah's words: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship Yahweh, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16). Other prophets described the time as an era of Yahweh's law covering the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

Many will assist Yah'shua the Messiah in this universal educational program of helping others understand Yahweh's way. Speaking of this time, Isaiah says teachers "will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-21).

The chance to help others understand and be reconciled to Yahweh is a wonderful calling. Each who serves in this way will be called "the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In" (Isaiah 58:12).

Yahweh calls people out of the world at this time to become His chosen people, sanctified and redeemed by Him (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1). They are to live exemplary lives as Yahweh prepares them for service during the Messiah's millennial reign and beyond. "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul," the apostle Peter wrote, "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify Yahweh in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

One final conflict

All through Yahweh's plan for saving humanity, He never forces anyone to obey Him. Every person is free to choose what he or she will do and whether to accept or reject Yahweh's way of life.

After the 1,000 years, Yahweh will allow Satan to test the spiritual convictions of the earth's inhabitants. Revelation 20:7-10 describes this time. Yahweh will loose the devil from his place of restraint and allow him to deceive those who

are not convicted of the perfect righteousness of Yahweh's way. Yahweh will destroy by fire those who follow Satan in this rebellion. Satan's futile efforts will be thwarted. This final, tragic rebellion against Yahweh will come to nothing, and Satan's destructive, deceitful influence over humanity will finally draw to a close.

The stage is now set for the events depicted by yet one more Holy Day. The Feast of Tabernacles offers a marvellous opportunity for salvation to those left alive at the Messiah's return, as well as their physical descendants during the Millennium. But what about the thousands of millions of people of past generations who have lived and died without ever understanding—or even hearing—Yahweh's truth? And what about those who will die in the cataclysmic upheaval preceding the Messiah's return? How will Yahweh offer them salvation?

The Last Great Day: Eternal Life Offered to All

The Bible makes abundantly clear in Acts 4:12 that "there is no other name under heaven" than that of Yah'shua the Messiah by which human beings can be saved.

This particular passage raises troubling questions for anyone who believes that Yahweh is desperately trying to save the whole world in this age. If this is the only time for salvation, we must conclude that the Messiah's mission to save humanity has largely failed. After all, billions of people have lived and died without once hearing the name of Yah'shua the Messiah. Thousands die every day never having heard or fully known of the Messiah.

In spite of the missionary zeal of so many over the centuries, far more human souls have been "lost" than "saved." If Yahweh is truly all powerful, why have so many not even heard the gospel of salvation? The traditional portrayal of conflict between Yahweh and Satan over mankind leaves Yahweh on the losing side of the struggle.

What is the fate of these people? What does Yahweh have in mind for those who have never believed in the Messiah or understood any of Yahweh's truth? How does the Creator provide for them in His plan? Are they lost forever without any hope of salvation?

We should not doubt Yahweh's saving power! Let's examine some common assumptions

and come to an understanding of our Creator's marvelous solution.

Resolving the dilemma

Paul tells us that Yahweh "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter adds that Yahweh is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This is Yahweh's overriding goal in dealing with mankind: He desires as many as possible to repent, come to the knowledge of the truth and receive His gift of salvation!

Yah'shua explained how this will come to pass. John 7:1-14 describes how Yah'shua went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. He appeared publicly and stood in the midst of the people. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

The Messiah's message recorded here most likely was given on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Scholars vary on whether this was the seventh day or the day following, but the weight of evidence and the series of events indicate that John 7 describes incidents on the seventh day while the setting moves to the eighth day in John 8 and 9.

It is also possible that the Messiah's teaching recorded in John 7:37-38 came at the end of the seventh day or the very beginning of the eighth day (Yahweh's Holy Days begin with sunset and end at the following sunset), as the chapter concludes with people returning to their homes after sundown for the night. The theme of the Messiah's teaching then continues in chapter 8 (which is clearly the next morning, verse 2) and includes the offer of salvation to all mankind.

In Leviticus 23:39, we see that this day immediately follows the Feast of Tabernacles but is a separate festival with its own distinct meaning. Based on the Messiah's words and the theme of offering salvation to all mankind, we refer to this festival as "the Last Great Day," although the Bible simply calls it "the eighth day."

Symbolism of the Messiah's teaching

What was the significance of the Messiah's teaching about "living water"? In the Messiah's time, according to tradition, during the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would bring golden vessels of water from the stream of Siloam that had

flowed from the temple hill and pour it over the altar. Joyous celebration along with the sounding of trumpets marked this ceremony as the people sang the words of Isaiah: "... With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3).

Yah'shua stood where all could hear Him and drew a lesson from the water, revealing that all who were thirsty could come to Him and be refreshed-forever. In the Messiah's analogy, the water represented Yahweh's Holy Spirit, which those who believed in Yah'shua would receive (John 7:39). He showed that the basic wants of spiritual thirst and hunger could be satisfied only by Him as "the bread of life" (John 6:48) and the source of living water.

But when would this happen? Within six months the Messiah's own countrymen pressured the Roman authorities to execute Him. Less than 40 years later the temple and all its ceremonies, including those described above, were brought to an end at the hands of the Roman legions.

Humanity still hungers and thirsts for the message the Messiah brought. Yahweh's promise to "pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28) has not yet fully taken place. Thousands of millions have died with their deepest spiritual needs unrealized. When will they be refreshed by the life-giving power of Yahweh's Spirit?

A physical resurrection to a first opportunity for salvation

To find the answer, we must consider a question the disciples put to the Messiah just before He ascended to heaven: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). When the disciples spoke of this restoration, they understood it in the context of the many prophecies of a reunited nation of Israel.

One such prophecy is in Ezekiel 37:3-6. This passage describes Ezekiel's vision of a valley full of bones. Yahweh asks, "Son of man, can these bones live?" To which the prophet replies: "O Lord Yahweh, You know." Yahweh then says to the bones, "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am Yahweh."

In this vision a physical resurrection took place. The account acknowledges the hopeless situation in which these people had found

themselves: "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!" (verse 11).

Their Creator, however, offers them the hope of a resurrection and the gift of His Holy Spirit in the setting of a reunited nation. In this dramatic vision, ancient Israel serves as the model for other peoples that Yahweh will resurrect to physical life. Yahweh said: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves ... I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live" (verses 12, 14). At this future time Yahweh will make freely available the life-giving spiritual water of His Holy Spirit.

Yahweh will "make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them ... My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (verses 26-27).

The apostle Paul also referred to this yet-future event: "I say then, has Yahweh cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. Yahweh has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2). As Paul wrote, "all Israel will be saved" (verse 26).

Not only Israel, but all who have never had a chance to drink from the living waters of Yahweh's Word and His Holy Spirit will at last be able to do so (Romans 9:22-26). Yahweh will freely offer them the opportunity for eternal life during a second, mortal lifetime.

The Great White Throne Judgment

In Revelation 20:5 John writes that "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Here John makes a clear distinction between the first resurrection, which occurs at the Messiah's second coming (verses 4, 6), and the second resurrection, which takes place at the end of the Messiah's millennial reign. Remember that the first resurrection is to eternal life. By contrast, Yahweh raises those in the second resurrection to a physical, flesh-and-blood existence.

John discusses this same second resurrection to physical life that Ezekiel wrote about: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before Yahweh, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book

of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (verses 11-13).

The dead who stand before their Creator are all those who died never knowing the true God. Like Ezekiel's vision of dry bones coming back to life, these people emerge from their graves and begin to know their God. The books (biblia in Greek, from which we get the word Bible) are the Scriptures, the only source of the knowledge of eternal life. Finally all will have an opportunity to fully understand Yahweh's plan of salvation.

This physical resurrection is not a second chance for salvation. For these people it is a first opportunity to really know the Creator. The resurrected are "judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (verse 12). This judgment will involve a period during which they will enjoy the opportunity to hear, understand and grow in Yahweh's way of life, having their names inscribed in the book of life (verse 15). During this time thousands of millions of people will gain access to eternal life for their first time.

This final festival of the year shows how deep and far reaching are the merciful judgments of Yahweh. Yah'shua the Messiah spoke of the wonderful truth depicted by this day when He compared three cities that failed to respond to His miraculous works with three cities of the ancient world: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to the sky, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:21-24).

The inhabitants of ancient Tyre, Sidon and Sodom—cities that had incurred the wrath of Yahweh for their depravities—will receive mercy in the day of judgment. Unlike Chorazin,

Bethsaida and Capernaum, these cities of old had little opportunity to know Yahweh. Yahweh will resurrect these people and include them in the time of judgment that is beyond the 1,000-year reign of the Messiah, when even those who lived in bygone ages will be reconciled to Yahweh.

It will be a time of universal knowledge of Yahweh. From the least to the greatest, all will know Him (Hebrews 8:11). The citizens of these cities, and countless more like them, will experience their opportunity for salvation.

This final period of judgment completes Yahweh's plan of salvation for the world. It will be a time of love, deep mercy and the unsearchable judgment of Yahweh. The chance to drink of the life-giving waters of His Holy Spirit will indeed quench the deepest thirsts of men and women. This time of righteous judgment will bring back to life those long forgotten by humanity, but never forgotten by Yahweh.

What is the fate of those who die with no real knowledge of the Son of Yahweh? What hope is there for the millions who have lived and died without knowledge of Yahweh's purpose? The Scriptures show that these are not cut off without hope. Yahweh will bring them back to life and give them their opportunity for eternal salvation. This is the astounding truth depicted by the Last Great Day, the last of Yahweh's festivals.

Yahweh will see His plan through and bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Yahweh's promise to "pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28) will find its fullest manifestation. The thirst-quenching waters of His Holy Spirit will be available to all in the time depicted by "that great day of the feast." What a marvelous plan these biblical festivals portray. How great would be our lack of understanding without them!

How to Observe Yahweh's Holy Days

After we come to realize that the Holy Days are vitally important to mankind and eminently applicable to our modern world, we naturally want to learn more about how to observe them.

Where should we celebrate them? Should we keep them at home or in some kind of religious service? What should we do on these days? Does Yahweh mind if we do our normal work on these days, or should we reserve them for other

purposes? How will the observance of these days affect our families and jobs?

These are all important questions we must consider upon learning about Yahweh's festivals. Let's examine some biblical principles we should consider in dealing with these real-life issues.

Some of these festivals have designated methods of observance that set them apart from the others. For example, only the Passover involves partaking of bread and wine as symbols of the Messiah's death. The Days of Unleavened Bread are the only feast days during which Yahweh tells us to remove leaven from our homes. The Day of Atonement also stands alone as the one Holy Day observed by fasting. Proper observance of these days includes acknowledging their distinctions, which are designed to teach us spiritual lessons.

Taken as a whole, however, there are principles applicable to observing all of Yahweh's Holy Days. First, we must remember that these days are Holy to Yahweh. They are "the feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be Holy convocations," says Yahweh (Leviticus 23:2).

Yahweh is the only one who can make anything Holy. Yahweh places these days on a plane higher than all humanly devised or artificial celebrations. Men and women can dedicate time to Yahweh for a special purpose, but Yahweh alone can set time aside as His Holy time (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8, 11). When we exercise proper respect and appreciation for these special annual occasions, we also honor Yahweh Himself by acknowledging His authority over our lives. Understanding this principle is important to worshiping Yahweh properly.

Our Creator desires that people willingly and in faith follow all of His instructions (Isaiah 66:2). A cooperative, humble attitude stands in contrast to the frame of mind of those who want only to do as little as possible to get by. The heart of the matter is whether we really believe and love Yahweh. The apostle John illustrated the attitude Yahweh desires when he wrote: "For this is the love of Yahweh, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Yahweh commands annual assemblies

But how does Yahweh want us to conduct ourselves on these days? Consider His basic instruction: "These are Yahweh's appointed feasts,

the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times ..." (Leviticus 23:4, NIV). Other versions of the Bible, such as the King James and New King James, use the phrase "holy convocations," but the meaning is the same. These are annual occasions on which we should gather with other believers. As with the weekly Sabbath, Yahweh commands special sacred assemblies on each of the Holy Days.

Yahweh revealed to the early Israelites the principle of meeting with others of like mind on the Sabbaths and Holy Days: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23-25). What better time to encourage and exhort each other than on the days that depict Yahweh's great plan of salvation!

When we assemble at the times of these annual festivals, we allow ourselves a wonderful opportunity to learn more about Yahweh's plan of salvation. Nehemiah 8 records a striking instance of Yahweh's people gathering to observe the Feast of Trumpets (verse 2). During their religious service, the leaders "helped the people to understand the Law ... So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of Yahweh; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (verses 7-8). The early Congregation continued to keep these yearly feast days according to these same principles, but with much greater spiritual understanding (Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

In Nehemiah's day, because the people had neglected Yahweh's festivals, they needed encouragement. "And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to Yahweh your God; do not mourn nor weep.' For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of Yahweh is your strength'" (Nehemiah 8:9-10). Then, after they were taught Yahweh's law, "all the people

went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them" (verse 12).

These special days are meant to be enjoyed by the whole family, friends, the poor and entire neighborhoods—everyone who attends! Especially at the Feast of Tabernacles, sufficient time is available for proper family and community activities and recreation as well as rejoicing over the knowledge Yahweh reveals.

To properly rejoice on Yahweh's days of celebration, we are not to do our customary work (Leviticus 23:3, 7-8, 21, 25, 35-36). Notice that, even though preparing food for the Holy Days does entail work, Yahweh says that this kind of effort is entirely appropriate. However, on the Day of Atonement we are to forgo all regular work including, of course, food preparation (verses 28, 30-31).

We also demonstrate our obedience and commitment to Yahweh by arranging time off from our jobs so we can observe the Holy Days. With proper planning and respectful communication with employers, most people can work out the details required to be able to take these days off. It is our responsibility to use wisdom and patience when informing family members, friends, neighbors and employers of our decision to observe the festivals.

Living by faith

Responding to Yahweh's instruction is a matter of faith. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." It is, therefore, important for us to start keeping the Holy Days when we learn about them. Even though we may not understand everything at first, we will learn a great deal more as we actually begin observing them.

In summary, the Feast days of Yahweh are a time of happiness, not just because of their meaning for us, but because of the wonderful hope they promise for all mankind. Observing the Holy Days reminds us of Yahweh's great love for humanity. Worshiping Yahweh in this way is a joy and pleasure. These festivals truly are Yahweh's gifts to His people!

If you would like to learn more about observing the annual festivals, please feel free to contact us at your convenience.

Hanukkah



Most of the world considers Hanukkah (HA-noo-ka) to be a “Jewish” holiday, however it is properly a Holy “Event”, celebrated in commemorative manner by people of the Hebrew faith, which coincidentally includes “Jews” (Jews are NOT descendants of the tribe of Judah). Hanukkah is not specifically set forth in the Bible by name or as a Yahweh-appointed Holy Day, but the events that are celebrated at Hanukkah are indeed “Holy”, inasmuch as they are directly related to Bible prophecy.

It is celebrated in late November or early December. The exact date is determined according to the Hebrew calendar. Hanukkah falls on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Hebrew people over King Antiochus Epiphanes, a pagan tyrant from Greece, who tried to destroy the Hebrew faith in 165 BC. It also celebrates the rededication of the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem. To understand Hanukkah, you must be familiar with the history behind it.

Prior to the reign of Antiochus, the Hebrews lived in relative peace under various rulers and kings. Though their rulers changed, their lives were generally unaffected. One tradition that was particularly significant to their culture involved going to their Temple in Jerusalem. They called their Temple "The House of Yahweh" and it was considered a very sacred place. It was decorated with many precious objects. Among those precious items was a lamp that burned continuously, symbolizing the enduring Hebrew faith.

However, when Antiochus came to power, he placed many burdens upon the Hebrews. They had to pay high taxes and he tried to force them to replace their Biblical laws and traditions with Greek ones. He even forced the Hebrews to take a new high priest, Menelaus. The new high priest began to steal from the Temple and send precious gold and silver to Antiochus. This made the Hebrews angry. While Antiochus was fighting a war in Egypt, a small army of Hebrew soldiers surrounded the temple to force Menelaus out.

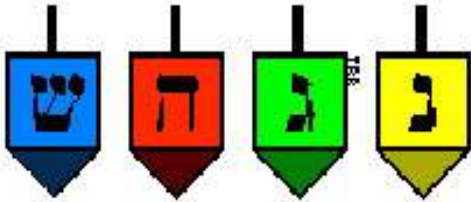
Fearing that the Hebrews were rising up against him, when Antiochus returned, he caused his army to storm the Temple. They tore down the city walls and stripped the Temple of anything they could carry. The soldiers placed a Greek idol upon the golden altar and allowed pigs to run within the sacred grounds. Hebrews were threatened with death if they refused to worship the new idols. The soldiers drank the holy water and set fire to books containing holy writings. Amongst all the chaos, the oil in the lamp was spilled and the light in the Temple went out.

Because Antiochus had his army storm the Temple on the Sabbath, the Hebrews wouldn't fight back. Thousands were either killed or carried off and sold as slaves. However, later, a man named Matthias refused to obey the king's men. He took his five sons and others who would follow him into the mountains where they planned how they might regain their right to worship as they pleased. King Antiochus sent an army after them, but they were unsuccessful in defeating Matthias and his men. Under the direction of Matthias and then later his son, Judah, ordinary farmers and shepherds learned to fight like brave soldiers. Judah was nicknamed Maccabee, meaning "the hammer" because of the way he fought King Antiochus' men.

Finally, after many battles, the king's army was beaten by Judah's men. Hebrew people, including modern Jews consider this to be the first miracle of Hanukkah.

The Maccabees, another name for Judah's army, returned to Jerusalem where they found their Temple abandoned and defiled. The sight made them very sad, but they immediately set forth to cleanse and rebuild the Temple. When it came time for its rededication, Judah and his men looked for oil to re-light the lamp, but they could only find enough for the lamp to burn for one day.

However, the lamp continued to burn for eight days and nights until more oil was made. They considered this to be the second miracle of Hanukkah. The Hebrew people as well as those that call themselves Jews have continued to celebrate Hanukkah ever since.



Symbols that are associated with the celebration of Hanukkah include the menorah (meh NOAR-uh), dreidels (DRAY-dels), potato latkes, and gelt. The menorah is a special candelabrum that holds nine candles. The middle candle is called the shamash (SHAHM-mahs) or server candle because it is used to light the other candles. It usually stands a little bit higher than the others. Candles are lit after sundown on each of the eight nights of Hanukkah. On the first night the server candle is lit as well as the first candle on the far right. On the seven succeeding nights another candle is added from right to left until all eight candles are lit. The family member who lights the Hanukkah candles recites traditional blessings. The menorah represents the miracle of the lamp burning for eight days on barely enough oil for one.

A dreidel is a small top with four sides. Each side is marked with a Hebrew letter (nun, gimel, hey, and shin). The letters stand for "A Great Miracle Happened There," referring to the two miracles of Hanukkah. There are many variations of this game that children enjoy playing as they celebrate Hanukkah.

Potato latkes, similar to pancakes, are a traditional food eaten around Hanukkah time. They are generally made by combining grated potatoes, eggs, onions, flour, and salt. Then they are deep-fried in oil to symbolize the lamp that burned for eight days when it only had enough oil for one.

Gelt is Hanukkah money. In many homes, children are given gifts and Hanukkah gelt, which may be used in dreidel games.

"My Father's House"

When Solomon completed the building of the original Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, he made a simple statement that clearly summed up what that Temple was, and what that Temple was not, and exactly where Yahweh was in relation to it: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built ... hearken Thou to the supplications of Thy servant and of Thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear Thou from heaven Thy dwelling place." (2 Chronicles 6:18,21 RSV)

A Place of Worship, "Consecrated For My Name":

The original Temple was consecrated for Yahweh's Name, and called a Temple of Yahweh, or House of Yahweh, even though Yahweh remained in heaven e.g. "Yahweh is in His Holy Temple, Yahweh's throne is in heaven." (Psalm 11:4). It could perhaps be compared to the principle of a country opening (or closing, temporarily or permanently, whenever a decision is made to do so) an embassy in a foreign land, that is to be treated with the utmost respect and never to be violated, where official diplomatic business is conducted. The Temple of Yahweh was meant in a possessive sense, even though the "Head of State" remained at home.

Regarding the original Temple in Jerusalem:

"I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built, and put My Name there for ever; My eyes and My heart will be there for all time." (1 Kings 9:3 RSV)
 "But if you turn aside from following Me, you or your children, and do not keep My

commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and the house which I have consecrated for My Name I will cast out of My sight." (1 Kings 9:6-7 RSV)

The original Temple of Yahweh was destroyed, that is, Yahweh had it destroyed, not because He turned His back on the Israelites, but because they turned their back on Him. Later however, at the appointed time, the Hebrews returned from the Babylonian captivity because Yahweh had a Persian king release them and allow them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of Yahweh as a sacred place of worship. It was Yahweh's command to rebuild that Temple (or sacred "embassy," if you wish), not something that the Jews took it upon themselves to do: "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia that The Word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may Yahweh be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel - He is the God Who is in Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:2 RSV)

"My Father's House":

From an Israelite point of view the term Temple takes on a much greater meaning: "for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to The Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of Yahweh, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Yah'shua the Messiah Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy Temple in Yahweh; in Whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of Yahweh in His Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 2:18-22 RSV) "Do you not know that you are Yahweh's Temple and that Yahweh's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys Yahweh's Temple, Yahweh will destroy him. For Yahweh's

Temple is holy, and that Temple you are." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 RSV)

Nevertheless, Yah'shua the Messiah, Who we may be absolutely certain knew what He was talking about, had no problem calling that re-built physical Temple in Jerusalem "My Father's House," or Yahweh's House, a sacred place, not because Yahweh lived there, since Yah'shua the Messiah plainly always prayed to The Father in heaven, but because Yahweh was worshiped there. He used the term Temple in a possessive sense. "Did you not know that I must be in My Father's House?" (Luke 2:49 RSV) "You shall not make My Father's House a house of trade." (John 2:16 RSV)

An End-Time Israelite Temple of Yahweh?:

There are a number of groups working toward the construction of an end-time Temple - a physical Temple in Jerusalem. Their preparations are genuine, professional, and well financed. They would begin building today if the political situation permitted it. But will it happen?

Many Christian-professing people reject the thought of any such possibility, or deny Yah'shua the Messiah's own words and say that such a Temple could not be called a Temple of Yahweh, because their own perspective of Temple is now purely spiritual. But unconverted Jews aren't Israelites, who nevertheless worship and are subject to the true and only God. Jews have a religious perspective of their own, and since 1948, the Jewish state of the former (proper) Israel has been a reality.

Israelites and Jews worship the same God; Yahweh the true God, but differently, at different stages of understanding and fulfillment. Is the Hebrew religion now to be considered irrelevant? Most certainly not, according to the Israelite apostle Paul: "Then what advantage has the Hebrew? ... Much in every way. To begin with, the Hebrews are entrusted with the oracles [words] of Yahweh." (Romans 3:1-2)

A great many other Israelites, including this writer, believe that the Hebrew people will indeed construct another Temple of Yahweh (the exact form that it will take is yet to be seen) that will be a focal point of many Israelite prophecies. These Scriptures of Bible Prophecy, among others, can only mean an actual physical Temple, in

Jerusalem, just prior to The Return Of Yah'shua the Messiah.

A Physical Measurement Of A Physical Temple:

"Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: "Rise and measure the Temple of Yahweh and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the Temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant My two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (Revelation 11:1-3 RSV)

Abomination Of A Physical Temple:

"Forces from him shall appear and profane the Temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate." (Daniel 11:31 RSV)

No Physical Human Can Enter Yahweh's Spiritual Temple:

"Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the Temple of Yahweh, proclaiming himself to be Yahweh." (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 RSV)

Yah'shua' Specific Warning About A Physical Temple In Judea:

"So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24: 15-16 RSV)