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THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRAEL'S ANNUAL FEASTS

The wisdom and sovereignty of God may be nowhere more manifestly displayed in Scripture than in the giving and fulfilling of the seven annual feasts of Israel described in Leviticus 23. They were neither arbitrary nor purely aesthetic in design, and they were more than channels for expressing religious sentiment. They were God-given object lessons; divinely inspired rituals which served to institutionalize truth, memorialize divine favors, provoke thinking, adumbrate future events, and enable the people of God prior to Calvary to give expression to many of the same essentials of the faith that we in the church have today.

The feasts show that the Cross and other New Testament redemptive truths were in the mind of God from the very beginning. They show His providence in weaving them into Israel's history at precisely the right junctures. They were pedagogical masterpieces designed to stimulate people to remember the past, look to the future and contemplate the future. But perhaps most prominently, they show the marvelous hand of the Lord of history who in His perfect timing and perfect way brought, and will bring about the realization of each feast right according to schedule. The remedy for sin and the fulfillment of the covenants to Israel and the nations are seen progressively unfolding in the plan of God. Not only were the realities of His redemptive plan given tangible expression in these feasts, but also the *exact order* in which they would occur, and the exact *dates* of the Jewish year when they would be accomplished. Four of the seven feasts have already been fulfilled at the first coming of Christ and the events shortly after. By examining how these were fulfilled it is possible to make sounder judgments on how the last three will be fulfilled in prophecy. Lastly, the structure of the feasts show the consummate

skill of a Master Designer in their order, symmetry, and mathematical relationships to one another (mostly built upon sevens). It is my firm conviction that a fuller understanding of these feasts, and our Jewish heritage in general, cannot but enrich our faith and cause us to say with the Apostle Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33).

Israel's Seven Annual Feasts in Leviticus 23:

1. Passover - v. 5
2. Unleavened Bread - vv. 6-8 (seven days long)
3. Firstfruits - vv. 10-14
4. Weeks/Pentecost - vv. 15-21
5. Trumpets - vv. 23-25
6. Day of Atonement - vv. 26-32
7. Tabernacles/Booths - vv. 33-44

Two Hebrew Terms Used for Israel's Annual Feasts:

1. חַג (*hag*) - "feast," "festival;" occurs in Lev. 23:6, 34, 39, 41. It is used primarily of the three Pilgrimage Feasts, Unleavened Bread (associated with Passover), Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 303), but it eventually came to be used exclusively for Tabernacles (Terry Hulbert, *The Eschatological Significance of Israel's Annual Feasts*, p. 24). This word may be related to the Hebrew חוּג (*hoog*) 'circle', and conveys the idea of 'joyful celebration' as when the Jews performed their festive (circle) dances (William Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 260, 263). The cognate חָגַג (*hagag*) 'to dance', seems to bear this out.

The word חַג (*hag*) had the connotation that there was joy on the part of the participant:

It described the feasts in terms of the attitudes of the people who participated in them. Thus the basic reference of *hag* is to "joy," or "rejoicing." It pointed to the celebration as the occasion for the joy which was evidenced in the worshippers. (Hulbert, p. 24)

2. מועד (*moed*) - "set time," "appointed time," "appointed feast." This word is used in Lev. 23: 2, 4, 37, 44. It is a broader term that also includes sabbaths and new moons (TWOT, vol. 1, p. 262). The root idea of this word has to do with appointing (TWOT, vol. 1, p.387). מועד (*moed*) and חג (*hag*) may be contrasted as follows:

. . . moed, did not involve human reactions. It simply expressed the idea of divine appointment or the designating of certain special days or periods for which observances were prescribed. The emphasis was upon the determining of a schedule, the pointing out of days which were "set," i.e. ordained for special purposes. . . . It involves the ordaining of these and no others, as official observances, and the describing of the exact way in which they would be celebrated. In addition, moed implies the arranging of the schedule of observance. (Hulbert, pp. 24, 23)

This being the case, we reject all liberal notions that Israel's feasts came from the imagination of man, evolved, or were syncretistically absorbed from other cultures. Rather, they were distinctly and divinely appointed feast days from hand of Him who knows the end from the beginning.

#### HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

A major factor in the determining of the last three feasts is the matter of interpretation of Scripture, whether literal or allegorical, Dispensational or Covenantal. Amillennialist interpreters want to make all seven feasts apply to: (1) the church instead of Israel, and (2) the first coming of Christ and the results that flow out of it. And while he admits that the first four were literally fulfilled, he spiritualizes the next three to make them fit his scheme (for instance, regarding the Feast of Trumpets as 'sounding forth the Gospel', etc.; so Bonar and others). (Hulbert, 131).

It is also important to our understanding of these feasts that we see their special reference to the nation of Israel. The church participates in certain features of these events, and nowhere in an *inferior* way, but it is necessary to observe that: (1) Israel and the church sometimes have different aspects of fulfillment (especially with the feasts of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement), and (2) the

church participates in her blessings via Israel (in the same way the church participates in the New Covenant made with the "House of Israel" - Hebrews 8:8). We become co-recipients of the blessings by being 'grafted into Israel', Ro. 11:16-21). In other words:

The cycle of feasts had prefigured the course of God's workings on behalf of Israel, not the church. The church did not, therefore, fulfill the first four feasts, but rather became the recipient of their provisions during this parenthetical age.

This fact does not in any way minimize the magnitude of the salvation God provided for all men, but it does relate the redemptive program of God to Israel, with all benefits to others being based on God's fulfilling his commitments to the nation Israel according to the covenants.

It is concluded, then, that the basis of the church's relationship to the festal cycle was the same as that of the relationship of Gentile salvation to the Abrahamic Covenant. The festal antitypes were of the Jews, for "salvation is of the Jews." The church was not a fulfillment of types but the beneficiary of the provisions which they foreshadowed. (Hulbert, pp. 152-153)

#### THE ORDER OF THE FEASTS: THE CYCLE AS A PROGRESSION:

It is important further to note that the feasts of Leviticus 23 are all in proper sequence and they form a progression of redemptive events that move toward a goal (the Feast of Tabernacles). They are not isolated rituals, but an outline of successive stages of God's special dealings with Israel (which in turn have far reaching affects on the Gentiles). (David Barron, *Types, Psalms and Prophecies*, p. 5). Hulbert elaborates on this theme:

From the basic concepts pictured in the individual feasts it is evident that each one depends on the others. If each feast stood alone in its significance and involved no prerequisites, as for example the cleansing of the Day of Atonement before the joy of Tabernacles, it might be argued that they did not form an organic whole, but were isolated rituals. . . .

Interdependence also implies progression, for as each feast builds on the preceding ones, it also moves forward the theme which is being presented. Progression necessitates a planned sequence. The historic ideas of the feasts would have been completely confused if they occurred in any other order. The Feast of Unleavened Bread could not have preceded Passover, for instance, nor Pentecost the Feast of Firstfruits. (Hulbert, 89-90)

Consequently we may only look for the prophetic fulfillments of each feast according to its proper order. Conversely, no interpretation of any feast is sound that seeks a complete realization before a previous one has been accomplished.

## SIGNIFICANCE TO OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL:

While it seems apparent that ancient Israel could hardly have known the full prophetic import of these feasts, nonetheless, there was much meaning that was fully within their grasp. The feasts brought them: (1) retrospective, or memorial significance of past divine favors, (2) valid teaching lessons concerning the character of God, the nature of sin, and principles for living, and (3) anticipation for some sort of Messianic fulfillment in the future. McQuaid summarized the feasts in the following way:

1. *Historical.* Israel was to remember what God had done in the past and to rejoice in His power to deliver.
2. *Agricultural.* The major feasts were touched by some application of the fruits of husbandry and the soil, which kept the realization of the Lord's sustaining benevolence ever before them.
3. *Sacrificial.* Central to all the feasts was the bringing of the sacrifice to lay before the Lord. The priestly, intercessory ministry of the Temple worship drew spiritually hungry Jews to Mount Moriah like a magnet.
4. *Prophetical.* All of the feast days held tokens of future prospects. Israel's sweeping covenantal promises stood in the foreground of the annual assemblages of the Jewish people. At the heart of it all lay the anticipation of messianic fulfillment. (Elwood McQuaid, *The Outpouring*, p. 23)

## \*\*\*\*\* ISRAEL'S SEVEN ANNUAL FEASTS \*\*\*\*\*

### THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

#### a. The First of the Months.

It is significant that God deliberately set the beginning of the spiritual calendar on the month of Abib (later called *Nisan*) on which the Passover occurred. This is the first indication that there is *order*, a *beginning* and an *end* to the cycle of feasts described in Leviticus 23. It requires that Passover be the first feast of the set (and Tabernacles the last); and indeed it was foundational to all the rest. If there had been no Passover to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they would not have been able to have the officiating priesthood, days of ceremonial

rest, crop harvests, and Tabernacle institution necessary for observing subsequent feasts.

#### b. Redemption:

The grand theme of the Passover is *redemption*. The Passover and resultant crossing of the Red Sea, as A. W. Pink states, "occupies a similar place in the O. T. scriptures as the *resurrection* of the Lord Jesus does in the New; it is appealed to as a standard of measurement, as the supreme demonstration of God's power (cf. Eph. 1:19, etc.)." (Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus*, p. 107) God literally bought the nation and they were under special obligation to serve Him. Exodus 6:6:

I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

This forms the basis for:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. . . (Exodus 20:2-3ff.)

Members of the covenant throughout all ages were to consider themselves part of that community God redeemed out of Egypt. Consequently, the inner motivation for a life of obedience was to arise from a heart grateful for this deliverance. The Passover Memorial was to refresh their memory and rekindle their sense of devotion to God.

#### c. New Beginning.

Passover was also the celebration of Israel's birth as a nation. Prior to this, God had dealt with individuals and families, but now He was to enter into a special relationship with Israel as a national entity. Their departure from Egypt allowed them the autonomy and divine leadership requisite for the formation of this national identity. As the sons of Israel crossed the Red Sea and left North Africa for the Sinai, they were leaving one sphere of existence for another (antitypical fulfillment: Col. 1:13; John 5:24).

d. The Centrality of the Lamb.

The center of attention throughout this feast is undoubtedly the (unblemished) lamb that would be with the family for a little over three days, and then killed and its blood applied to the doorposts of the house. This motif is rich in typology relating to the death of Christ on the cross (which some expositors, and even the Jewish Talmud, place on the eve of the Passover, concurrently with the slaughter of lambs inside the Temple in Jerusalem). The New Testament alludes to Christ in Passover language so as to make the connection all but unmistakable:

Exodus 12:

"Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and *slay the Passover (Lamb).*" (v. 21)

"Your lamb shall be an *unblemished* male" (v. 5).

New Testament:

"For *Christ our Passover* also has been *sacrificed.*" (1 Cor. 5:7)

"but with precious blood, as of a *lamb unblemished and spotless*, (the blood) of Christ." (1 Peter 1:19)

There are many points of resemblance between the Passover lambs and the Lamb of God:

1. An innocent, unblemished lamb must die to secure redemption and avert God's judgement.
2. The lamb was to appear at the house on the 10th (corresponding to the Truimphal Entry (of Christ), and then be killed between the 14th and 15th (corresponding to the day when Christ was crucified).
3. The blood of the lamb must be applied to be rendered effectual (faith was required).
4. The lamb was to be roasted.
5. It was to be eaten as food.
6. No bone was to be broken.

Various other features relating to the Passover have symbolic meaning corresponding to New Testament redemptive truths:

1. Egypt = the world.
2. Pharoah (the enemy of God and His people) = Satan.
3. Slavery in Pharoah's service = slavery to sin.
4. Firstborn sons (Egyptian and Jewish) = representative of all mankind, under the threat of judgment.

Hulbert summarized the imagery of the Passover well when he wrote:

As they appeared in the sin and slavery of Egypt, Israel illustrated the state of the citizens of Satan's counterfeit Kingdom. When brought into the land, where they lived in peace and plenty, the nation portrayed the normal condition of those in God's eternal Kingdom as it will be demonstrated during the millennial age.

The first step in the progression from the one kingdom to the other was the breaking of the bonds which tied Israel to Satan. The historical counterpart to this was the exodus. Just as Satan is never willing for a sinner to slip from his grasp, so the Pharoah of Egypt did not willingly give up his sovereignty over this people. Their release could only be accomplished by the effective intervention of God.

But this intervention, if it were to imply more than just the physical release of three million people from life in Egypt, had to be marked in a very special and didactic way. The exodus was more than a migration, it was itself a type of spiritual deliverance. The immediate physical event was the release of Jscob's descendants from a life of slavery. The ultimate purpose of what took place on the night of that 14th of Nisan was the prediction of a release from the sovereignty of Satan. Just as the exercise of faith was necessary to obey God's command to apply the blood that night, so faith is the means of appropriating deliverance from Satan's hold in all ages. . . .

It is to be noted that the first and immediate issue at the Passover was deliverance from the death which threatened the firstborn. This danger reflected the fact that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The connection between sin and slavery was made by Christ as he said, "Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin" (John 8:34). . . . The selection, examination, and offering of the passover lamb, with the appropriation of its blood, was the basic essential to deliverance from death that night. Similarly, the parallel death of Christ on the cross was essential to the rescue from the second death and release from the sovereignty of Satan" (Hulbert, pp. 175-178).

e. Uniqueness of the Egyptian Passover.

It should be pointed out that there were several unique features of the Egyptian Passover that differentiated it from all subsequent Passover memorials. Edersheim makes mention of the fact that, "Jewish authorities rightly distinguish

between 'the Egyptian' and the 'Permanent Passover.'" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* p. 211.)

f. Christ, the One Who Brought Israel Out of Egypt:

It is important to realize that according to Judges 2:1, it was Christ, the pre-incarnate 'Angel of YHWH', who Himself brought the children of Israel out of Egypt in the Passover:

Now the *Angel of the Lord* (= Christ) came up from Gilgal to Bochim And He said "I have brought you out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and said, I will never break My covenant with you. . . ." (Judges 2:1)

How ironic that the Jewish leaders in John 11:47-57 were seeking to kill Jesus while preparing to celebrate the very deliverance that He Himself wrought!

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD:

Closely associated with the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately followed it. The two were so related that they were sometimes referred to as a single feast (Luke 2:41; 22:1, 7). They not only occur in succession, but the Passover itself involved unleavened bread, and a ritual in which it was searched out. J. D. Hannah gives a good brief description of the Feast of Unleavened Bread with its duties and relationship to the Passover:

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be for seven days (Ex. 13:6-7), from the 15th to the 21st of the month (Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17). Of course no bread with yeast (leaven) was to be eaten on the Passover either (Ex. 12:8). Homes were to be cleansed of yeast (vv. 15-16), a symbol of sin (1 Cor. 5:8). The absence of yeast suggested that those who were under the safety of shed blood were free from the corruption of sin before a holy God. If anyone ate anything with yeast in those feast days he would be cut off from . . . Israel (Ex. 12:19) . . . Also on the first and seventh days of the feast the people were to gather together for special services. And no work other than food preparation was to be done all week. Like the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be a lasting ordinance (v. 17; cf. v. 14). (John Hannah, Exodus, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT*, p. 128)

a. The Meaning of Leaven; What Does the Unleavened Bread Signify?

Leaven is a difficult symbol to interpret here because: (1) its nature of

permeation can illustrate the expansion of something either good or evil, and (2) while it represents evil in all subsequent passages of Scripture where the meaning is certain; still, leaven was a desirable and necessary substance for the Israelites to have in everyday life. Is it a symbol of good because of its desirable characteristics, or is it a symbol for evil because of the meaning attached to it in later revelation? Numerous views have been put forth regarding the meaning of 'unleavened bread', and because many of them are so interrelated, it is quite possible have more than a single meaning (in which one view logically follows another).

Possible Meanings for the Unleavened Bread:

1. Discontinuity. (Hulbert, BKC)
2. Haste. (Gispen, Payne, Edersheim)
3. Fellowship/Sustenance. (Baron, Van Ryn)
4. The Person of Christ—His sinlessness. (Van Ryn)
5. The Sanctification of the believer. (Baron, Payne, Unger, Gispen, Rosen, Edersheim)
6. Dependence upon God/Emphasis upon God's miraculous provision in the wilderness. (Hulbert)

While there are cogent arguments that can be put forth for any of these possibilities, views one and five seem most naturally to represent the true intent of the feast. The Discontinuity view takes into consideration another aspect of leaven's permeating characteristic: the fact that a leaven from a previous batch of dough was always needed in the making of the new. Thus there was a visible perpetuation of the original leaven in the cycle of baking bread. Rosen writes:

The ancient Hebrews used the sourdough method of leavening their bread. Before the housewife formed the dough into loaves ready for baking, she pulled off a chunk of the raw dough and set it aside in a cool, moist place. When it was time to bake another batch of bread, she brought out the reserved lump of dough. She then mixed the old lump into the fresh batch of flour and water to leaven the next loaves, again setting aside a small lump of the newly mixed dough. Each "new generation" of bread was organically linked by the common yeast spores to the previous loaves of bread. (Moishe and Cecil Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*, p. 29)

The authors then go on to apply this principle in terms of redeemed man repenting of his sin:

Thus, for the Hebrews, the putting away of all leaven symbolized breaking the old cycle of sin and starting out afresh from Egypt to walk as a new nation before the Lord. They did not put away leaven *in order* to be redeemed, they put away leaven *because* they were redeemed (Ibid.).

Hulbert agrees with the aspect of continuity, but does not attach any significance of evil to leaven which is to be removed. Instead, he sees an emphasis upon separation from Egypt and dependence upon God for miraculous provision in the wilderness. However, the former interpretation appears stronger, especially in view of the severity with which the leaven issue is dealt with (punishable by death), and later revelation which not only employs leaven as a symbol for evil, but actually applies the leaven in *this feast* as evil to be removed from the lives of believers.

Clean out the *old leaven*, that you may be a *new lump*, just as in fact *unleavened*. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore *celebrate the feast*, not with the *old leaven*, nor with the *leaven of malice and wickedness*, but with the *unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*." (1 Cor. 5:7-8)

An interesting aspect of the symmetry of these feasts is that the cycle begins and ends with a seven day feast (each of which is in conjunction with festivities on an additional day). Hulbert sees the seven day length of Unleavened Bread as an accentuation of the break Israel made with Egypt (Hulbert, p. 54). But most other commentators view this seven day period as emblematic of "the entire span of the believer's life. . . to be lived in fellowship with Christ in separation from sin (Merrill Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 173). Ritchie believes that the seven day duration of the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles speak of the enduring effects of God's acts rather than a one time event (John Ritchie, *The Feasts of Jehovah*, p. 34).

#### THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS:

Three of Israel's feasts, Firstfruits, Pentecost (Weeks), and Tabernacles were harvest feasts, and as such, necessitated a new geographical setting. Implicit in all three was the imagery, not of Egypt, nor of the wilderness, but of Canaan. Only there could Israel grow and harvest crops necessary for celebrating the feasts. Each festival was associated with the harvest of different crops; Firstfruits with barley, Pentecost with wheat, and Tabernacles with grapes and olives (luxury crops of the rich for the production of wine and oil--emblematic of great joy--Ps. 4:7).

Firstfruits was the only feast that came at the *beginning* rather than end of a harvest. On the practical side, this feast taught Israel a valuable lesson that God was to get the *first* portion of their first crop, and as such this barley was representative of the the preeminence that God should have in all of their lives (cf. Prov. 3:9). They were not to eat any of their barley crop until God was first given the firstfruits grain offering. But the Feast of Firstfruits had far wider ramifications. Prophetically, Firstfruits spoke of Christ Who rose from the dead as "*firstfruits of them that sleep*" (1 Cor. 15:23).

The proscribed ritual was as follows:

That offering was a sheaf reaped from the waving fields of ripened harvest, and carried to the priest, to be waved before the Lord to be accepted for them, followed by a burnt-offering, meat-offering, and drink-offering--notably, no sin offering (Ritchie, p. 40)

The *waving* involved the priest's moving the offering up and down, forwards and backwards, and commonly, to the east. (Edersheim, p. 265). These first sheaves were a precursor of the coming harvest, a guarantee of more of the same kind in due time. There is profound meaning to this analogy when applied to the resurrection of Christ:

In that Sheaf of Barley God demonstrated that there were many more sheaves of the same quality yet to be harvested. When Christ fulfilled this type He guaranteed a similar resurrection for all who

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evidence of God's design in linking these two feasts in an inter-dependent relationship. Just as the Feast of Unleavened Bread depended upon the Feast of Passover, so the Feast of Pentecost depended on the Feast of Firstfruits. . . . The period of exactly seven weeks which separated them actually joined them, for the number of completion, seven, indicated that what had begun at Firstfruits was to be completed at Pentecost. (Hulbert, pp. 58, 199)

Hulbert then builds a case for Pentecost being an  $\text{atseroth}$  (meaning "convocation" NASB *at the end of a cycle*; used in Scripture of the seventh day of Unleavened Bread and the day immediately following the seven days of Tabernacles) from Jewish tradition. He views Pentecost not so much as a new beginning distinct from the past, but as the completion of the provisions of the New Covenant, and the end of God's work of preparing Israel before the arrival of the intervening Kingdom age.

Prior to the day of Pentecost God had prepared Israel for the covenanted Kingdom in three ways. He had provided redemption from the bondage of sin and the counterfeit Kingdom; He had demonstrated that the results of this release was a life to be lived in eternal independence from the former sources of supply in bondage; He had reversed the effects of sins's bondage [i.e., through the resurrection of Christ--P.W.]. These three provisions constituted the antitypes of the first three feasts.

Of the four prerequisites for life in the Kingdom only one remained to be realized. . . . This remaining deficiency was the personal presence of the Spirit in men to empower them to participate in the New Covenant. . . . what was begun by the antitype of Firstfruits was completed by the antitype of Pentecost. Translated into specific events, this means that the resurrection of Christ began a cycle which the coming of the Holy Spirit completed. . . . Thus the cycle of preparing Israel for the millennial Kingdom was completed at Pentecost. (Hulbert, pp. 196-202)

However, the use of the term  $\text{atseroth}$  for Pentecost comes only from Jewish tradition (though it is ancient); Scripture never applies the word *atseroth* to this feast. There may be an analogy in which the seven sevens are capped off by an additional day in the way that the seven days of Tabernacles are in Lev. 23:36, but it does not follow that the fiftieth day from Firstfruits (Pentecost) is symbolic of completion. It seems more natural to regard the  $7 \times 7 + 1$  formula as indicative of a break with the past; something new. If it were merely  $7 \times 7$ , it would seem more contiguous with the past, but the extra day jumps out of synchronization and seems to propound the

arrival of something new, discontinuous with the past. It may be helpful to review some of the details concerning Firstfruits and Pentecost:

The Feast of Firstfruits:

1. Associated with the *barley* crop.
2. Celebrated the *beginning* of this harvest.

The Feast of Pentecost:

1. Associated with the *wheat* crop.
2. Celebrated the *end* of this harvest.

At His resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits, Christ marked the beginning of a new kind of harvest to come (involving glorified resurrection bodies), while the Feast of Pentecost (with the 3,000 souls that were *spiritually* resurrected in response to Peter's sermon) signalled the end of the Old Testament era and the beginning of the New. On this day the Spirit came, the church was born, the partition between Jews and Gentiles would be obliterated (in Christ), and men and women were baptized into the Body of Christ. The ritual involved at Pentecost is described by Unger:

The two wave loaves (a loaf, not a sheaf of separate grains) baked with leaven, anticipate the Holy Spirit's ministry of baptizing the Jew (Acts 2) and Gentile (Acts 10) into union with one another in the risen, glorified Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). This was made possible by the Holy Spirit's advent at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; John 14:20; 16:12-13). The loaf was baked with leaven because evil crops up in the church, because it is not yet glorified. (Unger, p. 174)

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS:

This feast, literally 'A Memorial of Blowing' is the first of the unfulfilled feasts and occurs on the first day of the seventh, or sabbatical month. It appears to have been the Jewish New Year's Day ('*Rosh-hashannah*') in antiquity; but in Exodus 12:2 God commanded the New Year to begin on the first of 'Abib', the month on which the Passover occurred. For centuries (possibly millenia) they celebrated two New Year's Days: a spiritual New Year's in 'Abib', and a civil or secular New Year's in the Tishri (the seventh month). During the Middle Ages, Judaism dropped their spiritual New Year (in 'Abib') entirely, and now only celebrate one New Year's Day on the Feast of Trumpets.

participate in the first two festal antitypes, that is, those who have been released from Satan's sovereignty and as a result are enabled to live independently of him. One sheaf did not constitute the harvest; Christ's resurrection was a sample of the many resurrections to take place before the whole harvest is brought in. Above all, the representative sheaf waved before the Lord gave assurance that there would indeed be a harvest (Hulbert, p. 190).

The procedure for determining which day Firstfruits should be celebrated is disputed. It arises from the use of the word "sabbath" in Leviticus 23:11:

". . . on the day after the *sabbath* the priest shall wave it."

Which sabbath is in view? The *festival sabbath* of the first day of Unleavened Bread or the normal *weekly sabbath*? If it was the normal weekly sabbath, it would always place firstfruits on a Sunday. The Sadducees believed the sabbath to be the normal weekly sabbath, the Pharisees took it to mean the festival sabbath (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 523), as did Josephus and Edersheim (Edersheim, p. 257). Wenham comments:

Orthodox Judaism and most commentators favor the second suggestion. Some Jewish sects, however, and a few modern writers favor the first suggestion. The exegetical arguments are finely balanced. It seems slightly more natural to equate "the sabbath" with Saturday than with the first day of the feast. (Wenham, p. 304)

Since, in all probability, Christ died on Friday, Nisan 14th, the next day was both a weekly and a festival sabbath. Firstfruits would have fallen on the day after this double sabbath, and in either case would have been celebrated on the "day after the sabbath, or Sunday, when Christ rose from the dead! The priest stood waving the firstfruits (of the barley crop) before the rent veil in the Temple to typify the grand fulfillment of that feast. This 'set feast' involved more than *coincidence*:

The Lord Jesus honoured the day of the killing of the paschal lamb, by presenting Himself to God in death, "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." He honored the day of the waving of the sheaf of first-fruits, by presenting Himself to God as the First-born from among the dead. Israel's priest no doubt waved the sheaf in empty form, before a rent veil in the temple at Jerusalem, but outside the city's gates, God had reaped the Great Wave-sheaf from Joseph's tomb early that same morning. The substance had come, and the shadow passed away. (Ritchie, p. 41)

The institution of this feast was also a prophecy in that it presupposed Israel would enter Canaan, "'When you enter the land which I am going to give you and reap its harvest. . . ." (Lev. 23:10). Belief that this feast would be celebrated required belief that Canaan would be possessed; the two stand together. The Jews rejected the reality of Firstfruits when they despaired, saying, "'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! . . . And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? . . . would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?'" (Num. 14:2-3).

It should be noted that the cluster of fruit brought into the midst of Israel's camp from Eschol by the twelve spies, was also in a very real sense, a preview, anticipatory, harvest of firstfruits from Canaan. It is not a coincidence that the final act of rebellion that barred the entire generation of Jews (except for a remnant; Joshua and Caleb), was unbelief in spite of the presence of the firstfruits. And so it was 1500 years later, that their rejection of God's Greater Firstfruits and the good news offered them, barred them from entering into His Greater Rest (Heb. 4:1-9; Num. 13:23-14:24).

#### THE FEAST OF WEEKS (PENTECOST):

The Feast of *Weeks* (Hebrew) or *Pentecost* (Greek - 'fiftieth') stands in close relationship with the Feast of Firstfruits because it was celebrated fifty (7 x 7 + 1) days later, and closed the harvest of cereal crops begun at Firstfruits. Hulbert writes:

The historical significance of this feast is closely related to that of the preceding. Firstfruits began the barley harvest, and Pentecost closed the wheat harvest. It is this close tie between the two crops which provides the clue to understanding the meaning of Pentecost. . . . Pentecost really completed that which was begun at Firstfruits. The harvest of all cereal crops, essential to daily sustenance for the whole year, was accomplished during the seven weeks from the 16th of Nisan to the 6th of Sivan. It was this harvest activity which accounted for the measurement of the period between the two cereal harvest festivals.

There were other links between the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Pentecost. . . . The arrangement of the annual cycle of feasts gave clear



This feast is difficult to interpret; any verse involving a trumpet is a candidate for someone to use to explain it. The problem is compounded by the multiplicity of events that occur in conjunction with a trumpet. Some of the solutions include:

1. The rapture of the church (1 Thess. 4:16)
2. The regathering of Israel (Mt. 24:31)
3. The awakening of Israel, to get her attention for the next two feasts (Lev. 23)

According to Numbers 10, trumpets were used to:

- a. Gather the assembly (vv. 2-4)
- b. Announce that the camp was moving (vv. 5-6)
- c. Serve as a reminder of their sacrificial and ritual obligations (v. 10)
- d. To enlist God's help in time of war (v. 9)

It is surprising how many books on the feasts explain the Feast of Trumpets as the Rapture of the church. But how can that be if all other feasts were fulfilled on the *precise date of the feast*? It goes against the whole tenor of New Testament teaching concerning the Return of Christ to say that it will occur on the day of the Feast of Trumpets, or that it can only happen at a certain time of the year.

Hulbert makes some remarkable observations regarding the fulfillment of the last three feasts in the last three chapters of the book of Zechariah. Noting that the Feast of Trumpets historically alerted the Jews to the next two feasts, and that trumpets had special use in Israel's wars, he sees this festival fulfilled in Judah's great military deliverance in Zechariah 12:1-9 from God which is instrumental in bringing her to the repentance and faith typified by the next two feasts. He writes:

There is considerable reason to believe that this feast will be fulfilled in the divine intervention which rescues the nation from utter destruction by Gentile powers. . . . the sequence of events revealed by Zechariah is significant. Although there are other matters introduced and dealt with in the final three chapters of his prophecy, the sequence of the fulfillment of the last two feasts is clearly stated. In chapters 12:1-13:1 the repentance and cleansing of the Feast of the Day of Atonement are clearly described. The next event in the sequence is the arrival of Messiah and the establishment of his Kingdom as described in chapter 14.

In view of the fact that these two passages quite evidently refer to the fulfillments of the last two feasts, the subject of the preceding prophecy is extremely significant. Climaxing the whole passage of 12:1-9, which describes God's deliverance of Israel from the Gentile invaders, Zechariah predicts in v. 9, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

The apparent continuity between this even and that which follows, the repentance and mourning of the nations, strongly implies a causal relationship between the two. This would explain the beginning of v. 10 with "and" and would relate it to the events of the preceding verses. (Hulbert, pp. 253-254)

There is a special use of Israel's trumpets in this regard, mentioned in Numbers 10:9:

And when you go to war in your land against the *adversary who attacks you*, then you shall *sound an alarm with the trumpets that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies.*

Summary of Hulbert's View of the Last Three Feasts in the Book of Zechariah:

- |                   |                                 |  |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| A. Zech. 12:1-9   | <u>The Feast of Trumpets</u>    | Supernatural deliverance from an otherwise hopeless military annihilation.   |
| B. Zech. 12:10-14 | <u>The Day of Atonement</u>     | Christ reveals Himself to the Jews so that they turn to Him and are saved in mass. It becomes a time of intense national and personal sorrow. Israel is forgiven and restored. |
| C. Zech. 14:16-19 | <u>The Feast of Tabernacles</u> | Christ comes and establishes the Millennial Kingdom upon the earth. Nations come to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.                               |

There are a number of other passages of Scripture that lend credence to the view that the Feast of Trumpets will represent a divine response to Israel crying out for help in a hopeless looking military situation. This seems to be the message conveyed by Psalm 81:3-10; 102:13-22; and Joel 2.

It is noteworthy that Jewish tradition associates the Feast of Trumpets with the remembrance of the story of Abraham offering up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Several Jewish authors allude to this (Victor Buksbazen, *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel*, p. 24.; Theodor Gasten, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, p. 122). How providential it is that one day the Feast of Trumpets will point the way for the Jews to believe in the Son who was offered up by the Father in similitude of Abraham's act of faith in Gen.22!

## THE DAY OF ATONEMENT:

The Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 16, is a vivid portrayal of Christ's redemptive death and the cleansing effect it has upon those who believe. The ninth chapter of the book of Hebrews makes reference to it in order to show the superiority of Christ's once for all, perfect work that is part of the very fabric of the New Covenant. The Day of Atonement, therefore, seems at first glance to have been completely fulfilled at Calvary. If Christ cannot die again, how can this speak of something future? How can the Day of Atonement be considered a feast that will be fulfilled in the future, as part of the cycle of festivals given in Lev. 23 that we maintain are in strict chronological order?

The answer is that Christ's redemptive work (typified by the Day of Atonement) was fully realized at Calvary, but the ultimate prophetic fulfillment of the Day of Atonement involves the *application* of this work specifically to the *nation of Israel* when she turns to her Messiah and is converted in mass. The Day of Atonement in Lev. 16 dealt with the problem of sin *within Israel as a nation*. It was her day of *national* cleansing and restoral. So too, it will be that one day Israel's *response* towards the finished work of Christ on Calvary will be changed, and the unforgiven sin of millennia will be lifted. That day will be *The Great Day of Atonement* in the history of Israel. Hulbert writes:

The Day of Atonement in its unique and highly revealing ritual foreshadowed the death of Christ. But if this were all it did, it would have been redundant, for this had already been typified in the Passover, which was the first appointed time of the cycle. The emphasis of this sixth feast, however, was upon the *reaction* of Israel to the death of Christ, and the *effect* this reaction would have on the nation. . . . Thus, it is not the *provision* of God in Christ which must be changed, but the *attitude* of Israel toward this provision. (Hulbert, p. 267; emphasis mine)

This event is seen also in a number of other passages of Scripture:

- a. "and I will remove the iniquity of the land in *one day*." (Zech. 3:9)
- b. "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity." (Zech. 13:1)
- c. "and thus *all Israel will be saved*; just as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will *remove ungodliness from Jacob*" (Rom. 11:26).

The full and final fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, as it pertains to Israel, appears to involve four distinct elements:

- (1) A lifting of their temporary and partial hardening: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of *grace* and *supplication*" (Zech. 12:10; cf. Rom. 11:25)
- (2) A realization of the fact that Jesus Christ is (and was) their Messiah: "so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10; cf. Hos. 3:5)
- (3) A time of great national and personal mourning: "and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him" (Zech. 12:10)  
"In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem" (Zech. 12:11)  
"And the land will mourn, every family by itself" (Zech. 12:12)
- (4) A cleansing and restoral of the nation: "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Zech. 13:1)

The great mourning described in Zechariah 12:10-14 may be foreshadowed by the reference to *humbling/afflicting* their souls in Leviticus 16:29. How striking it is that an optional prayer in Modern Judaism for the Day of Atonement reads:

Messiah Our Righteousness has departed from us. We shudder; for there is none to justify us. He bears our load of transgression and the burden of our guilt and is verily pierced for our rebellion. He carries our guilt on His shoulder, seeking forgiveness for our sins. He is wounded for our salvation. O, Eternal One, the time has come that Thou shouldest create Him anew! O, bring Him up from the terrestrial sphere. Raise Him up from the land of Seir, a second time, but the power of Yinnon! [a rabbinic term for the Messiah] (Frederick Aston, *The Challenge of the Ages*, p. 16)

## THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES:

The Feast of Tabernacles was the greatest and most joyful of all Israel's feasts. It was the the last harvest feast, and was a cause of great national thanksgiving. In many ways the Feast of Tabernacles portrays the eternal joy that will be the possession

of all God's people one day. It was a time for gathering with family, friends, and also foreigners in order to rejoice, feast, and recall God's blessings.

The Feast of Tabernacles Looked Backwards and Forwards:

The Feast of Tabernacles had both a retrospective and prophetic significance. In a very concrete way it reminded Israel of her wandering in the wilderness when for forty years God was the sole source of all her provisions. Not only did God redeem Israel out of Egypt, but He took her into His special protective custody.

The Feast of Tabernacles involved more than looking back at the past to commemorate what God had done, it also pointed to the future; the glorious millennial reign of Christ when Israel would prosper in safety, and the resurrected saints would appear in glorified bodies. This appears to have been the view of the Apostle Peter from his response on the Mount of Transfiguration, and it may have been the view generally accepted among devout Jews. Hulbert draws several interesting inferences from it:

During the course of his private instruction of the disciples, the Lord Jesus gave to three of them a unique glimpse of the millennial Kingdom. This period had been described by the prophets and anticipated by the people but never before viewed by mortal man. Yet here was revealed, if only briefly, the King in his glory as He will appear in his Kingdom. . . . From the viewpoint of the literal fulfillment of this final type, Peter's statement of verse 4 is extremely significant. His reaction to this vision of the King and the Kingdom was a spontaneous decision to build three huts. This unplanned response implies several important truths.

First, it showed that Peter understood that the Feast of Tabernacles was intimately related to the Kingdom age. It is quite probable that the prophecies. . . from Zechariah flashed into his mind and his long pent-up expectation of the Kingdom's institution now found satisfaction in the realization that he was beholding the very event. According to Zechariah, the apostle would be required to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles if this were the millennium, and thereby demonstrate his faith in its fulfillment. Peter's statement shows that his immediate reaction was to obey this command.

Secondly, this passage shows that Old Testament saints, as represented by Moses and Elijah, were to be present in the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles in the millennium.

Thirdly, the transfiguration scene showed that the Kingdom, and thus the Feast of Tabernacles' antitype, requires the physical presence of the King with his glorified person visible to his subjects. The fulfillment must be just as literal as the Kingdom which it foreshadowed. (Ibid, pp. 230-231)

Three Distinctive Features of the Feast of Tabernacles:

(1) The construction of booths (or 'tabernacles').

The most distinctive feature of this feast was in all probability the command to construct and live in an actual booth or hut for seven days. This served as a practical object lesson to draw men's thoughts toward the memorial and prophetic aspects that we have described earlier.

(2) The booths were to be decorated with foliage/fruit. (Lev. 23:40)

The Israelites were further commanded to decorate their booths with choice foliage and fruit in order to simulate Paradise-like surroundings. This speaks of the coming age when nature's curse will be lifted and the earth will return to its former idyllic condition (cf. Rom. 8:21-22). The clippings of fruit and branches from this fall harvest season were but a preview of God's provisions in the Millennial Kingdom:

The unlimited provisions, both spiritual and physical, which God will make for his people in the millennium constitute a perfect fulfillment for this typical concept. The plenty of the harvest season at the close of a successful agricultural year in ancient Israel was but a sample of the abundance anticipated in the realization of Israel's redemption. This aspect of millennial conditions was often mentioned by the prophets, as for example Isaiah 35:1-2; 30:23-25. (Ibid, p. 278)

(3) The people were to rejoice for seven days. (Lev. 23:40)

Joy is the dominant theme of this feast; it is commanded, both here and in the parallel passage of Deut. 16:14-15. This foreshadows the day when:

. . . the ransomed of the LORD will return,  
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,  
With everlasting joy upon their heads.  
They will find gladness and joy,  
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:10)

It is important to note that the command to rejoice is given in connection with the seven day duration of this feast. Only two festivals, Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles,

lasted for seven days, and this time period appears to symbolize the permanent nature of what each feast portrayed.

". . . you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the *eighth day*." (Lev. 23:39)

c. The Two Seven-Day Feasts and Their Significance:

- A. Unleavened Bread - Eternal purity from sin.
- B. Tabernacles - Eternal joy.

When put together, they mean that as a result of Christ's redemptive work (as outlined in these seven feasts of Israel) God's people will one day enjoy an eternity of sinless purity and endless happiness!

This important day added to the Feast of Tabernacles acts as a full stop, showing that the cycle is ended and the effects of God's redemptive plan go beyond the millennium and into the expanse of eternity. (Unger, p. 174-175)

Thus all redemptive history will be consummated; the final harvest of souls will have been reaped, and all nature will have been restored. Redeemed men and women of all ages will live throughout eternity in perfect sinlessness and joy, in a perfect cosmos, to the praise and glory of their Maker. All according to schedule!

d. The Numerical Structure of the Feast of Tabernacles:

- (1) It was the last of Israel's annual feasts (it was at the end of the cycle).
- (2) It was the seventh (sabbatical) feast (it pictured the ultimate 'rest of God').
- (3) It came in the seventh month.
- (4) It lasted seven days long.
- (5) It was celebrated on the 15th ( $7 + 7 + 1$ ); the  $+ 1$ , as in the case of Pentecost ( $7 \times 7 + 1$ ), jumps out of the synchronization of the sevens, and may be indicative of the new era which it ushers in.
- (6) It marked the end of the last harvest of the year.

THE "EIGHTH DAY"/'ATSEROTH'/DAY FOLLOWING THE 7 DAYS OF TABERNACLES:

Leviticus 23:36 and 23:39 make reference to an enigmatic day of compulsory rest, assembly, and sacrifices that immediately follows the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. It is both connected with Tabernacles and yet is clearly distinguished from it. The word for 'convocation' used in Lev. 23:36 is used to denote a special meeting in conjunction with the *close of a cycle*.

". . . On the *eighth day* you shall have a holy *convocation* (עֲצֵרוֹת - 'atseroth') and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work." (Lev. 23:36)

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### FEASTS:

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|---|--|--|
| <p>1. <u>Passover:</u></p> <p>2. <u>Unleavened Bread:</u></p> <p>3. <u>Firstfruits:</u></p> <p>4. <u>Pentecost:</u></p> <p>5. <u>Trumpets:</u></p> <p>6. <u>Day of Atonement:</u></p> <p>7. <u>Tabernacles:</u></p> | <p>1a. Man is obligated to serve God because he is redeemed.</p> <p>1b. Pilgrim orientation, sense of expectancy.</p> <p>2a. Conversion means that we are to make a firm break with our old (sinful) way of life.</p> <p>2b. Sin like leaven spreads, corrupts, and puffs up.</p> <p>3a. We are to give to God first; He is to get the firstfruits of all our substance.</p> <p>4a. Christians are to strive for unity in the church. (?)</p> <p>5a. Prophetic watchfulness. (?)</p> <p>6a. Need for periodic self-examination of conscience. Believers need to have sorrow for sin, and regular confession and cleansing.</p> <p>7a. Thankfulness for God's provision.</p> <p>7b. Remembrance of God's gracious dealings in the past.</p> | <p>1a. The Redemptive death of Christ on Calvary.</p> <p>2a. All believers are made positionally righteous at conversion.</p> <p>3a. Christ, at His resurrection, was the Firstfruits of great harvest to come.</p> <p>4a. Coming of the Holy Spirit, birth of the Church, baptism into the Body of Christ, walla between Jews and Gentiles broken down.</p> <p>5a. Judah's great military deliverance (Zech. 12:1-9).</p> <p>6a. Work of Day of Atonement done at Calvary, but this work will be applied to the nation of Israel at the time of her conversion (Zech.12:10-13:1).</p> <p>7a. The establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.</p> <p>7b. Return of the earth to conditions of Paradise.</p> <p>7c. Full and final joy of all believers throughout eternity.</p> |
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### PRACTICAL ASPECTS:

### PROPHETIC ASPECTS: