

The LORD's Educational Program

An Invitation to Re-examine the LORD's Sacred Festival Seasons

by Gerald Brown

Long before Creation Week, when God drew up the design for this Earth and its inhabitants, every aspect of human life was planned for. Part of God's design included the opportunity for the new pair to engage in a pattern of learning that would lead them ever closer to their Maker and confirm their ever growing value in His eyes. Generous opportunity was included in the design for this new order of being to interact with their Creator in that certain days would be designated as special festival times to learn of His gracious and holy character, be fascinated by His knowledge and wisdom, be awed by His power and glory, and become comfortable in His presence as a friend. Each festival would have its own theme to focus attention on various aspects of God and His desire for the welfare of all His creatures. Through these festival times new worlds of understanding would open to them regarding the marvelous forethought and care which their Creator had exercised on their behalf, and His vision for their eternal security and happiness. As they would grow into His likeness, the Father would be evermore proud of His children.

God designed people for work and play, and the LORD's sacred festival seasons are to be intertwined with our work and play in a pattern intended to help us learn about the awesome God of the universe. This system of celebration and study is designed to establish and strengthen the bonds of loyalty between God and man. God's design had to be flexible and comprehensive enough so that His plan would work for the benefit of the new pair and their descendants whether they maintained their sinless state or turned against Him in rebellion. We know very little about the themes for all the festivals while Adam and Eve were still in the Garden of Eden, but we do know that the LORD's festivals were planned before sin entered the hearts of Adam and Eve.

The record of the LORD's festivals first appears in scripture on the fourth day of Creation Week. On the fourth day the LORD made the sun and moon to mark the time for days, nights, and His sacred festival seasons (Heb. מועדים = *moedim* = appointed times). Genesis 1:14. This Hebrew word has been variously translated as the LORD's seasons (KJV), fixed times (Goodspeed), sacred seasons (Moffatt), and religious festivals (GNB, GW). This word is stated in the plural indicating that the LORD's festival plan involves more than just a single festival; *moedim* requires a variety of religious festivals. *Moedim* is the word in Leviticus 23:2 where the LORD tells Moses to instruct the people about His festivals. There we find a brief description of the weekly Sabbath plus all the annual festivals. Thus, before Creation Week is barely half over, the LORD foreshadows His plan to have multiple opportunities for His new creatures to spend time with Him on a regular, multi-cyclical basis. The announcement of the LORD's intention to have multiple religious festival seasons was made before Adam and Eve were created. This indicates that His festivals are intended for all people in a sinless society and have an enduring and permanent value even after the fall of Adam and Eve. The LORD's festival seasons and new moons will be celebrated throughout eternity in the New Earth. The people of all nations are to observe the LORD's appointed festival seasons even in this sinful world. Leviticus 16:29 & 34; 23:14, 21, & 31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; Isaiah 66:23, Zechariah 14:16-19, Galatians 3:29, Revelation 22:2.

The festivals constitute the LORD's community educational and socialization program. Each one of the LORD's festival seasons serves as an educational opportunity to learn about the Creator of the universe. All the festivals are intended to be seasons of learning, fellowship, and bonding. Festival keeping is our opportunity to learn about this marvelous, majestic God, embellish our understanding of His character and how He interacts with His creatures, and strengthen our relationship with Him and with each other. Isaiah

52:6 and John 17:6.

God's plan for our learning is far different from our modern concept of assigning children to a classroom full of nearly same-age children with one adult as the teacher. God's plan was that He would teach the leaders of Israel (Psalm 25:4-12; 27:11; 34:11; 51:13; 86:11; 90:12; 105:22; 119:12, 26, 33, 64-68, 108, 124, 135; 132:12; 143:10; Isaiah 2:3; 28:9, 26; Jeremiah 31:34, Ezekiel 44:23; and Micah 4:2), that the priests and Levites would teach the people of Israel (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 4:14; 5:31; 6:1; 17:8-11; 24:8-9; 33:8-10; 2 Kings 17:27; and Ezra 7:10, 25), and that parents would spend time teaching their own children at every opportunity (Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:4-9, 20-25; 11:18-23). This plan places children under the direct authority of their parents for all instruction. In order for parents to teach the truth about a certain topic, they must learn it for themselves. If there was something they didn't understand, they were to go to the priests and Levites and ask questions until they did understand it. In the alternative, if there was something they didn't comprehend and they failed to learn the truth, they would risk giving their children bogus information and teaching something as true that God had not authorized. So too, the priests, Levites, and the king were to inquire of God for anything they did not understand so that God would give them wisdom. Thus, the home and the community, even the entire world would be the classroom, everyday experiences would be the curriculum, nature and the law of the LORD would be the textbooks, parents would be the teachers, and the LORD would be the source of information. School would always be in session, learning would always be engaging and relevant, children could always look to their parents for wisdom, and the LORD's festivals would be the high points of the spiritual and social calendar.

But God's plan for the educational enrichment of His children and the opportunity for fellowship and bonding has gotten a bad rap. Traditional Christianity has promoted the notion that these festivals were intended only for the Hebrew people during the days of the sacrificial system, that they have only a temporary, local, ceremonial application within an agricultural society, and that they were abolished after the death and resurrection of Jesus. While all Christian groups promote a weekly time for worship, most denominations reject the LORD's weekly Sabbath as well as the remainder of the LORD's festivals and Sabbaths as being Jewish in nature, and irrelevant and superfluous to the New Testament era. Having inherited their traditions from their religious ancestors without having studied God's design, most Christians have rejected God's plan for education, fellowship, and bonding that He sought to establish as part of the dynamics and architecture of human society on planet Earth.

Is there a biblical basis for this rejection? Does scripture imply that some festivals or Sabbaths are temporal, local, or ceremonial in nature, while others have a more enduring, permanent value? Is it possible that the festivals of the LORD are not part of anything we commonly think of as the "ceremonial law"? What is the history behind the development of this position? Where is your heart and what is your vision for a future with God?

Shortly before the end of his life, Moses wrote his vision of what Israel would become if they were obedient to all the commandments of God. Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The blessings promised to set them high above all the nations of the Earth, that their crops would be bountiful, their herds and flocks would be prolific, they would be treated with dignity and honor, their children would be successful, and the LORD would surrender their enemies to them. The LORD would make it clear to their neighbors that they were His people, grant them an abundance of goods, cause them to become a lender nation, and make them the head and not the tail. All they had to do to be given all these blessings was to obey *everything* that the LORD commanded them.

Jesus confirmed the writings of Moses by quoting them many times. In the parable of the Rich Man

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and Lazarus, Jesus concluded that those who would not believe and follow the writings of Moses would not believe even if one were to rise from the dead and teach them. Luke 19:29-31. Similar blessings will be given to the new covenant believers who have the law of God written in their hearts and obey all that the LORD commands. Paul writes that if we are Christ's, we are Abraham's seed. Galatians 3:29. Being part of God's people, whether in ancient or modern times, is a matter of faith and spirituality, and not heredity or chronology.

So if God threw a party and sent you a personal invitation to attend, would you accept the invitation and go to His party? If God threw a block party for your neighborhood, would you get out and mingle with your neighbors and enjoy the opportunity to get better acquainted with them during the celebration? If God invited everyone in the world to reserve a certain time to celebrate a specific theme in His honor, would you honor His invitation and reserve that time to participate in the world wide celebration which He planned? The LORD's sacred festival seasons are designed to provide for these opportunities.

Have you ever wished that your closest family members or best friends could take their vacations at the same time as you so you could spend some of your vacation time together? If God invited you to vacation with Him, would you consider it a privilege to take a vacation with God? Have you ever wished you could have two or three major vacations in a year? Do you enjoy taking time to reminisce about the most important experiences of your life? The LORD's sacred festival seasons are designed to provide for these opportunities.

If God offered to mentor you in the various ways of life so that you would have all the skill to pursue and accomplish all your dreams, would you accept His offer? If God offered to lead a seminar for your community to become a model of excellence for the world, would you participate in the training? If God offered to show you how to mend broken relationships and maintain healthy relationships with family and friends, would you take advantage of the opportunity? The LORD's sacred festival seasons are designed to provide for these things.

Have you ever longed to live in a society that was secure from deceit, theft, violence, and injury? Have you imagined living in a society where personal freedom based on the principles of God's law was the supreme law of the land? Can you imagine living in a land where the government of God resides in your own heart and the heart of every other person there, and all are in perfect harmony with the will of God? The LORD's sacred festival seasons are designed to provide for all these things.

The LORD's Festivals

Each of the LORD's festivals has its own educational theme, separate and distinct from each of the others. The themes are relevant for the LORD's people in every age, whether the context is the sinless Garden of Eden or after the fall, before or after the cross of Jesus. God designed that instruction about Himself would be varied to keep our learning fresh. Following is a brief summary of the major themes for each of the LORD's festivals. The question that must be addressed is this: If the Christian teaching that the LORD's festivals and Sabbaths have been abolished is true, which of these sacred seasons truly has no application to us, or offers no benefit for society or for God's New Testament covenant people? Which of these festivals is society better off by not following its principles? Which of these teaching tools does God direct His New Testament believers to reject?

Seventh Day Sabbath The weekly day of rest is a memorial to the God who created the universe, the Earth, sea, sky, and all that is in them. The recurrence of this one-day festival every seventh day sets

the weekly tempo or drumbeat for all society. God blessed man by giving him work to do on the first six days of the week so that the weekly day of rest will also be a time of relaxation and refreshment. It is especially dedicated to be a hallowed day of rest, worship, and fellowship. It is a day to reflect on all the blessings of God, to give honor to Him for His great righteousness and mercy, and to recount how He has led His people in the past. The topics to be studied on this day are as wide and varied as the universe itself because this day celebrates the Creator as the God of this Earth, the human family, and all that is in the universe. God is the one who gives us energy, intelligence, and dignity to be thoughtful, resourceful, responsible, and gracious. The seventh day of every new week is a holy convocation day — a Sabbath unto the LORD. The purpose of this weekly Sabbath is to keep our lives spiritually fine tuned on a weekly basis.

God said to remember this day and to guard and protect its holiness (Exodus 20:8, Deuteronomy 5:12), that Sabbath observance is an everlasting covenant between God and His people through all their generations (Exodus 31:16-17), and that the Sabbath will be a perpetual celebration in the New Earth (Isaiah 66:23 and Hebrews 4:9-11).

Passover This early springtime festival, celebrated on the 14th and 15th of the first month, is a memorial to the deliverance of God's people from the slavery of Egypt, as well as the symbolic deliverance from the slavery of sin of every individual whose hope of salvation is in the LORD. The Passover meal is eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs to remind us of the bitter experience of wandering in the wilderness. It also reminds us of the bitter cup of the crucifixion experience of Jesus at Passover. Jesus encouraged His disciples and other followers to observe the Passover meal when He said "Do this in remembrance of Me." Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. Every year we are to renew our connection with the sacrifice made by our LORD and look forward to when we will celebrate this meal with Him in the New Jerusalem. When instituting the communion service as part of the Passover meal, the LORD promised to celebrate the Passover with the redeemed in heaven. Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25.

God said that this day is to be a memorial to be observed as a feast to the LORD through the centuries, an appointed feast forever (Exodus 12:14), that it is to be observed as an institution for God's people and their descendants evermore, and that they are to faithfully guard this worship service when they enter the promised land (Exodus 12:24-25).

Feast of Unleavened Bread This early springtime festival, celebrated from the 15th through the 21st of the first month, reminds us of the importance of removing sin from our lives. Leaven represents sin, and all leaven is to be removed from the home and possession of the covenant believer before the festival begins. Removing the habits of sin from our lives is a natural and necessary part of the healing process of salvation and can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit for one who is contrite. Paul taught the New Testament believers, both Jews and Gentiles, to keep this feast. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. The first and seventh days of the feast (the 15th and 21st of the month) are holy convocation days — Sabbaths unto the LORD. This week-long festival, which includes both work days and Sabbath days, demonstrates that God wants the sin out of our lives every day of the week. Our relationship with this high and holy God is not limited to His holy days.

All the males in Israel were required to go to Jerusalem to observe this festival. Exodus 23:14-17, Deuteronomy 16:16, and 2 Chronicles 8:13. Usually the entire family would attend the festival which would swell the population of Jerusalem for this time period. God promised to cause their enemies

to have no interest in their land while they were gone three times each year to worship the LORD and their property was left unguarded. Exodus 34:24.

God said to guard this festival and observe it as an institution through all your generations forever (Exodus 12:17-18).

Wave Sheaf Offering or Day of First Fruits This festival, celebrated on the day following the Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is a memorial to the LORD for bringing up a crop after the barren winter months and sustaining the people of God by providing a bountiful barley harvest. The waving of the single sheaf of barley grain by the priest is a sign of thankfulness for renewed life and a symbol of the first coming of the Messiah. Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of His yield. Jeremiah 2:3. Jesus represents the first of those who will be resurrected to eternal life. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. We are to be a type of first fruits of His creatures. James 1:18.

God said this ordinance is to be observed for all time to come no matter where you might live (Leviticus 23:14).

Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) This late springtime feast, celebrated 50 days after the Wave Sheaf Offering by waving two loaves of wheat bread before the LORD, is a memorial to the LORD for sustaining the people of God by providing a bountiful wheat harvest. The waving of two loaves of bread is symbolic of the second coming of Christ. Pentecost is the day upon which the early rain of the Holy Spirit was given in power to the New Testament believers. Acts 2:1-8. Paul kept this festival until the end of his ministry. Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8. God's covenant people look forward to the powerful gift of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit that will lead to the conversion of many souls just before the second coming of Jesus. The LORD can only give the latter rain to those who keep His festivals at their appointed times. 2 Chronicles 30:6-9. This is a holy convocation day — a Sabbath unto the LORD.

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God said this festival is to be observed for all time to come no matter where you might live (Leviticus 23:21).

Feast of Trumpets This late summer memorial day is the announcement of the beginning of the purification of God's covenant people — the ten days of awe that culminate in the Day of Atonement. This festival day, the first day of the seventh month, is a holy convocation day — a Sabbath unto the LORD. From this day until the Day of Atonement, the people are to seek out those whom they have offended, make restitution and ask forgiveness for offenses committed, offer forgiveness to those who have offended them, set the captives free, feed the poor, clothe the naked, and restore right relationships with family, neighbors, and enemies. God's covenant people are to become one with each other in preparation for the great Day of Atonement. This is God's antidote for vengeance, violence, terror, and war. God's people are to be the peacemakers that Christ said were so blessed (Matthew 5:9).

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Scripture does not state an unending call to the Feast of Trumpets and the required purification during the days of awe. Presumably, those who are redeemed and live in the New Earth will already be purified.

Day of Atonement This festival day, occurring in late summer or early autumn, is celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month and is the holiest day in God's calendar — a Sabbath of Sabbaths unto the LORD. Of all the LORD's festivals, this is the only one on which the covenant people are required to fast. They are to present themselves to the LORD as a purified people who are *at one* with each other and with the LORD. It is on this day that the High Priest enters the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary to present the lives of the humble, contrite, covenant people to the Most High God at the throne and mercy seat of God. The sins of the congregation are symbolically placed on the head of the scapegoat which is led out into the desert to die. This represents how Yahweh graciously puts the sins of His people forever out of His mind so that His covenant people can be *at one* with Him.

God said to observe this day through your successive generations because it is supremely sacred to the LORD (Exodus 30:10), an everlasting ordinance (Leviticus 16:29, 31), to be observed throughout your generations wherever you may live (Leviticus 23:31).

Feast of Tabernacles (Ingathering) This festival, celebrated from the 15th through the 22nd of the seventh month, is a joyous memorial to the LORD's blessing during the years the people of Israel lived in temporary shelters while wandering in the wilderness. It is also a joyous memorial to the LORD's blessings of the final harvest that included all the remaining crops that ripen through the final months of the summer's growing season. This represents the joy of the final ingathering of souls from all nations before the second coming of Christ. God's covenant people are to live in their own temporary booths during these festival days as a reminder of how God provided for His people in the wilderness and how He will provide all the needs of the remnant people through the time of trouble at the end of the age. It is also a memorial of how God has led His New Covenant believers out of the darkness of this world's corruption and into His precious light. The first and eighth days of the festival are holy convocation days — Sabbaths unto the LORD. This eight-day festival, which includes both work days and Sabbath days, symbolizes that God provides constant care for us on every day of the week and we are to rejoice in His care constantly. Our greatest joy is to have God with us every day of our lives.

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God said this is an ordinance forever in all your generations (Leviticus 23:41), and the families of Egypt and all nations shall go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of booths (Zechariah 14:16-19).

New Moon Festival Monthly consecration is part of the LORD's plan for rededication and renewal. Every new moon marks the beginning of a new month and is celebrated by the blowing of the trumpets. This is a reminder that God's covenant people have experienced another month of God's blessings and are beginning yet another monthly cycle in His care. We offer ourselves personally as well as by our gifts in works and money. Romans 12:1-2. In the New Earth, the New Moon Festival will be

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celebrated by eating the fruit of the Tree of Life which will bear a new fruit with every new month. Revelation 22:2. The New Moon Festival is a memorial to the eternal life the LORD offers His covenant people.

David said he should not fail to sit at the king's table for the New Moon feast. 1 Samuel 20:5. God said this festival was ordained for Israel eternally (2 Chronicles 2:4), and will be kept in the New Earth throughout eternity (Isaiah 66:23).

The New Testament Era

While traditional Christianity has rejected keeping the LORD's festivals because they were part of a system of worship that was abolished at the cross or because they were Jewish, the LORD repeatedly says about His festivals that they are to be remembered, observed, guarded, protected for every generation, for all centuries, for all time to come, by the people of all nations, wherever you may live, and will be observed in the New Earth. The command is given in the plural to keep "all My Sabbaths" (Leviticus 19:3, 30, Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 20:12, 16), and to keep "all My festivals" (Ezekiel 44:24). The festival seasons are the LORD's appointed times when He invites people of all nations to spend time with His people enjoying His presence and learning of His character. Observance of the LORD's festivals is His grand education and fellowship program for the human family. His sacred festival seasons are of universal application and are packed with symbolic meaning to benefit us as we learn more of God's daily care for our lives. In Isaiah's day God did tell the people of Judah to stop bringing their meaningless offerings and sacrifices to Him and that their observance of His Sabbaths made Him sick, but that was because the people were observing the festivals only as a pretense of worship and as empty rituals, rather than from a grateful heart. Isaiah 1:13. Nowhere in scripture is any of the LORD's festivals described as temporary, local, or ceremonial in application, or that they are part of former dispensation or a bye-gone era.

Traditional Christianity has promoted the idea that the Sabbaths associated with the annual festivals were substantially different from the weekly Sabbath. But scripture knows only one type of Sabbath. There are two elements that combine to make an apparently ordinary day into a Sabbath of the LORD. First, the Sabbath is a day of rest and/or a day on which no ordinary work is to be done. Second, the day is declared as a holy convocation day (Heb. **קֹדֶשׁ מִקְרָא** = *kodesh mikraw*) — a day to worship the LORD and fellowship with His people. Any day that has these elements said about it is a Sabbath unto the LORD. The concept of *Sabbath* is not limited to a certain day of the week, but is determined by what the LORD has declared about it. Nowhere does scripture hint that there are different types of Sabbath days. Every Sabbath day is a day of rest and a holy convocation day. Every Sabbath day is just as holy as any other Sabbath day, except that the Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the year. Every Sabbath day is just as valuable, enduring, and of universal application as any other Sabbath day.

It is clear that the term *kodesh mikraw* applies equally to the annual cycle of holy convocation days as well as the weekly holy convocation day of the LORD and all of these are rest and worship days — Sabbaths — unto the LORD. Scripture uses these words interchangeably in a very comfortable way. Because they are consistently identified as Sabbaths of the LORD and originate from the fourth day of Creation Week, in no sense are these festivals or Sabbaths Jewish in origin.

The Sabbath days of the LORD occur according to two cycles: weekly and annually. The weekly Sabbaths occur on the seventh day of every week. The weekly cycle of work and worship is punctuated by a Sabbath day at the end of the week. This is the first of the LORD's festivals and is the one that occurs

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most often. The yearly and monthly Sabbaths occur throughout the year at the LORD's appointed times and provide variety to the annual calendar. The annual cycle of work and worship provides additional opportunity throughout the year for His covenant people to celebrate the LORD's sustaining power to provide all people with the necessities of life and to draw all closer to Him.

The weekly Sabbath is sometimes held up as more blessed than the Sabbaths associated with the annual festivals because it is stated in the Ten Commandments and the annual festivals are not. Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. However, three of the annual Sabbaths are written in the Ten Commandments along with the weekly Sabbath. In Exodus 34:1 God tells Moses to make a new set of stones upon which He can write His commands and bring them up the mountain. Exodus 34:28 closes the written record of the Ten Commandments. In between is a discussion of various attributes of God and what He wants His covenant people to do. Verse 11 specifies that they are to mark well what God is commanding them that day. Verse 14 restates the first commandment and verse 17 restates the second commandment. None of the other commandments from those spoken in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are mentioned in Exodus 34 except the Sabbath command. But in this chapter where God *wrote* the commandments, the Sabbath command consists of four festivals. Verse 18 directs that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to be observed at the appointed time. Verse 21 directs that six days have been given for labor, but the seventh day (the weekly Sabbath) is a day for rest. Verse 22 directs that the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Ingathering are to be observed. These four festivals were previously stated as a group in Exodus 23:12-17, although in that passage the weekly Sabbath is mentioned first, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Harvest Feast, and the Feast of Ingathering. There are four parts to the Sabbath command in the written record of the Ten Commandments.

Christianity has rejected the observance of the LORD's festivals because they were associated with the sacrificial system. It should be noticed that everything Jewish was associated with the sacrificial system in Old Testament times as well as in the Gospels. But there is not the slightest hint that these sacred festival days are in any way dependent on the sacrificial system that was fulfilled with the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross. While the sacrificial system was completed in Jesus' death so that if we sacrifice today we show we do not believe Jesus was the Christ appointed to die only once (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 26), the festivals, His appointed times, were not abolished. The festivals were days of education and were dedicated to the LORD for spiritual enrichment and social interaction among the people of the various tribes. Just as there is a distinction between the festival of the weekly Sabbath day and the additional sacrifices required to be offered on that special day (Numbers 28:9), there is a distinction between the LORD's festival seasons as days of celebration and the special sacrifices that were required to be made on those days before the great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross fulfilled the prophecies of the sacrificial system. While the symbolic meaning attached to the day may have changed at the cross, the sacredness of the festivals and Sabbaths was not abolished nor diminished. Indeed, these days are now filled with new and vibrant meaning for New Testament believers.

Most Americans grow up celebrating Thanksgiving Day on the fourth Thursday of November. The traditional Thanksgiving dinner is built around a stuffed turkey as the main course of the sumptuous meal and many Americans say it wouldn't be Thanksgiving without the turkey dinner. However, if a person decided for health reasons to become a vegetarian, would such a person have to give up celebrating Thanksgiving because of it? Or would it be acceptable to prepare a Thanksgiving meal without the stuffed turkey? While it may feel odd to those who have always celebrated Thanksgiving Day with a turkey dinner, the day itself does not require that a turkey be sacrificed and eaten. Thanksgiving Day can be

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celebrated with a vegetarian dinner. It is not the meal on the day that is important, it is the day itself as a memorial of a heart thankful for blessings.

Substitution of the LORD's Festivals

Christianity has rejected keeping the LORD's sacred festivals under the argument that they were part of an old dispensation that had been fulfilled by the death of Jesus or that these festivals were Jewish in origin. Unfortunately pagan holidays decorated with Christian names and/or symbolism in an attempt to sanitize them enough for nominal Christians to observe them without noticing their true pagan nature and origins have been substituted in their places. The major substitutions have been Sunday for Sabbath, Lent for the days of awe, Easter for Passover, and Christmas for the Feast of Tabernacles. The people needed to be kept away from the scriptures lest they learn the true nature of these substitute festivals and the truth regarding the LORD's sacred festivals. While Seventh-day Adventist, Seventh Day Baptists, and possibly a few other small groups, have accepted the weekly Sabbath as the LORD's sacred time, these groups have largely rejected the other festivals of the LORD and openly advocate keeping some of the pagan festivals instead of the LORD's festivals. The need for education and reformation regarding the LORD's festivals has not reached its completion.

The Protestant Reformation was a revolt against much of the corruption of the Roman Church, which had adopted significant teachings and practices of Mithra in an effort to make Christianity more acceptable to the masses. In a surprisingly short time, the Roman Church stopped celebrating the LORD's festivals and began mixing the teachings of Mithra with the teachings of scripture and the legend of Christ. Both before and after the defeat of Simon Bar Kochba in 135, laws were enacted to end the observance of the LORD's festivals. While Anicetus was bishop of Rome (157-168), the aged Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, paid him a visit to discuss the Paschal controversy. Polycarp and others in the East always kept the feast on the 14th of Nisan no matter on what day of the week it fell, while in Rome it was always observed on Sunday, and the day of the LORD's death on Friday. Nothing was resolved by their meeting as Anicetus did not wish to offend Polycarp who had been a disciple of John, who was a disciple of Jesus Himself, and was taught to celebrate Passover by Him.

In 190, Victor became the Bishop of Rome and subsequently, in a letter to Polycrates, the bishop of Smyrna, demanded that the churches in Asia stop observing Passover and begin celebrating Easter, or be excommunicated. The churches in Asia that had been nurtured by Paul, John, and other apostles, although only a small minority when compared with the many churches under the leadership of Rome, continued to observe the sacred festivals of the LORD for many years and suffered persecution because of it. Celebration of the LORD's festivals in the Eastern churches was eventually extinguished by civil legislation that provided punishment by exile or death. The last such law was issued in 432. (*The History of the Church*, Eusebius, pp. 170-173; Catholic Encyclopedia.com, Anicetus; Orthodox Church in America [www.oca.org], Sermons on the Twelve Festivals, *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop; *The Mysteries of Mithra*, Franz Cumont.)

Conclusion

The LORD's educational program is a powerful agency for learning about the many facets of God. We will never outgrow the need to learn. Lovingly, the LORD has provided a multi-cyclical framework for our

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continued mental, spiritual, and social growth as we enter into the celebration of His sacred festival seasons and examine more fully the holiness of His character and wisdom of His ways. Enormous benefits and blessings have been promised those who keep all the LORD's commandments. The greatest blessing has to be the opportunity to learn more of His character and become more like Him.

The instructions for observance of the LORD's festivals are consistent over time. The LORD indicated on the fourth day of Creation Week that He would have multiple appointment times for religious festivals (Genesis 1:14). He began teaching Adam & Eve to observe the weekly Sabbath on the seventh day of Creation Week (Genesis 2:1-3). He provided explicit instruction to His people on how to keep all of His festival seasons (Leviticus 23), told them that these days are to be kept forever wherever they might live (Leviticus 23:21, 31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; Isaiah 66:23), that keeping His Sabbaths is a sign between Himself and His people (Exodus 13:9; 31:13, 17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20), that the covenant He has with His people is an everlasting covenant (Ezekiel 16:60), that His people were to be peacemakers and keep the festivals even when the Assyrian government was threatening their very existence (Nahum 1:15), that those who believe in Jesus are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29), and revealed to John on Patmos that the God who returns in the clouds of glory is the God of creation—the God who made the heaven, Earth, and sea (Revelation 14:7). Four of the festivals, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the weekly Sabbath, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles, appear in the written record of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:18-22). The Roman church and those churches that followed her leadership rejected keeping the festivals very early in church history and adopted pagan festivals in the place of the LORD's festivals, while those churches that were nurtured by Paul, John, and other apostles kept the LORD's festivals for hundreds of years during the New Testament era. Scripture does not teach that during this New Testament era these holy convocation days have been abolished or diminished by the God who made them holy. Because they all were kept in the past and all will be kept throughout eternity, no Earthly authority can invalidate them for these few years of the New Testament era.

There is no biblical basis for the theory that some or all of the LORD's festivals have been abolished or that any of them has merely a temporal, local, or ceremonial application. The term *ceremonial law* is not found in scripture. This is a term invented by false teachers who misrepresent God's plan for education and fellowship; the purpose of its use is to diminish and nullify the educational benefits and blessings God has in store for His community of faithful followers who continue to observe all the LORD's festival seasons. Expression of this theory demonstrates an ignorance of scripture on this topic or a bias which is contrary to scripture. When individuals interject the notion that the Sabbaths associated with the yearly festivals are less valuable than the weekly Sabbath and thereby lead others to reject what God has declared as His special times for celebration and learning, they short circuit the LORD's invitation for communion.

The LORD's promise of blessings for keeping all His commands is no less true today than it was at any time in the history of this world. The LORD's invitation to learn of Him and fellowship with Him has a longer history and greater evidence of His intentions for our mutual benefit than we've ever understood before. The option to engage in all the LORD's festivals and make the LORD's calendar our calendar of spiritual and social high points is our opportunity to come to know the Lord in ways our current system of worship simply cannot match. God's people will desire to know Him and follow Him in all His ways.

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Scripture references for the various sacred festival seasons of the LORD.

Seventh Day Sabbath

Genesis 2:2-3	2 Kings 11:5-9	Matthew 12:1-14	John 5:2-23
Exodus 16:28	Nehemiah 9:13-14	Matthew 24:3-22	John 7:14-31
Exodus 20:8-11	Nehemiah 10:31-33	Matthew 28:1	John 9:13-16
Exodus 23:12	Nehemiah 13:15-22	Mark 1:21-22	Acts 13:13-15
Exodus 31:12-18	Isaiah 56:1-8	Mark 2:23-28	Acts 26-28
Exodus 34:21	Isaiah 58:13-14	Mark 3:1-6	Acts 42-45
Exodus 35:1-3	Isaiah 66:22-23	Mark 6:1-6	Acts 15:19-21
Leviticus 19:3	Jeremiah 17:19-27	Mark 16:1-4	Acts 16:9-15
Leviticus 19:30	Ezekiel 20:10-24	Luke 4:14-19	Acts 17:1-3
Leviticus 23:1-3	Ezekiel 22:8, 26	Luke 4:31-32	Acts 18:1-4
Leviticus 26:2	Ezekiel 23:38	Luke 6:1-11	Colossians 2:13-19
Numbers 15:32-36	Ezekiel 44:23-24	Luke 13:10-17	Hebrews 3:3 - 4:13
Deuteronomy 5:12-15	Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12	Luke 14:1-6	

Passover

Exodus 12:1-27	2 Chronicles 30:1-5	Mark 14:24	John 13:1
Exodus 12:43-48	2 Chronicles 30:15-20	Luke 2:41	John 18:28
Exodus 34:25	2 Chronicles 35:1-19	Luke 22:1	John 18:39
Leviticus 23:5	Ezra 6:19-20	Luke 22:7-16	John 19:14
Number 9:2-14	Ezekiel 45:21	John 2:13	Acts 12:3-4
Number 28:16-17	Matthew 26:2	John 2:23	Acts 18:21
Numbers 33:3-4	Matthew 26:17-19	John 6:4	1 Corinthians 5:7-8
Deuteronomy 16:1-7	Matthew 26:29	John 11:55	1 Corinthians 11:20-30
Joshua 5:10-11	Mark 14:1	John 12:1	Hebrews 11:28
2 Kings 23:21-23	Mark 14:12-16		

Feast of Unleavened Bread

Genesis 19:3	Leviticus 8:2	Deuteronomy 16:16	Matthew 26:17
Exodus 12:8-20	Leviticus 8:26	2 Kings 23:9	Mark 14:1
Exodus 13:6-7	Leviticus 23:6-8	2 Chronicles 8:13	Luke 22:1
Exodus 23:7-15	Numbers 6:15-17	2 Chronicles 30:6-27	Luke 22:7
Exodus 29:2	Numbers 9:11-14	2 Chronicles 35:1-19	Acts 12:3-4
Exodus 29:23	Numbers 28:17-25	Ezra 6:19-22	Acts 20:5-6
Exodus 34:18	Deuteronomy 16:1-8	Ezekiel 45:21-24	1 Corinthians 5:7-8
Leviticus 6:16			

Wave Sheaf Offering or Day of First Fruits

Exodus 23:18-19	Leviticus 2:11-15	Numbers 28:26	Revelation 1:9-10
Exodus 34:25-26	Leviticus 23:9-14	2 Kings 4:42	

Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

Exodus 23:16	Leviticus 23:15-21	2 Chronicles 8:13	Acts 20:16
Exodus 34:22	Deuteronomy 16:9-16	Acts 2:1-4	1 Corinthians 16:7-9

First Fruits of the Harvest Festival

Exodus 23:16	Exodus 34:22	Leviticus 23:17-20
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Feast of Trumpets

Leviticus 23:23-25	Numbers 29:1	Nehemiah 8:1-2
Numbers 10:10	Ezra 3:4-6	Nehemiah 8:13-15

Day of Atonement

Exodus 30:10-16	Leviticus 25:8-17	Numbers 29:7-11	Acts 27:9
Leviticus 16:1-34	Numbers 5:8	1 Chronicles 6:48-49	Hebrews 9:15-27
Leviticus 23:26-32			

Feast of Tabernacles (Ingathering)

Exodus 23:16	Deuteronomy 16:13-17	2 Chronicles 7:1-10	Zechariah 14:16-19
Exodus 34:22	Deuteronomy 31:9-13	2 Chronicles 8:13	John 7:2
Leviticus 23:33-43	1 Kings 8:2	Ezra 3:3-6	
Numbers 29:12-40	2 Chronicles 5:3-6	Nehemiah 8:13-18	

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First Fruits at Ingathering

2 Chronicles 31:5
Nehemiah 10:35-37

Nehemiah 12:44
Nehemiah 13:31

Proverbs 3:9
Ezekiel 44:30

New Moon Festival

Numbrs 10:10
Numbers 28:11-15
1 Samuel 20:5
1 Samuel 20:18
1 Samuel 20:24

2 Kings 4:23
1 Chronicles 23:31
2 Chronicles 2:4
2 Chronicles 8:13
2 Chronicles 31:3

Ezra 3:5
Nehemiah 10:33
Psalm 81:3
Isaiah 1:13-14
Isaiah 66:23

Ezekiel 45:17
Ezekiel 46:1-6
Hosea 2:11
Amos 8:5
Colossians 2:16

Seventh Year Jubilee

Leviticus 25:1-7
Leviticus 25:20-55

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

Fifty Year Jubilee

Leviticus 25:8-17

Names of the LORD'S Festivals

1. Sabbath, Shabbat
2. Passover, Pesach
3. Feast of Unleavened Bread
4. Wave Sheaf Offering, Day of First Fruits
5. Feast of Weeks, Harvest Festival, Pentecost, Shavuot
6. Feast of Trumpets, Rosh Hashanah
7. Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur
8. Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Booths, Feast of Ingathering, Sukkot
9. New Moon Festival
10. Year of the Jubilee

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July 24, 2004

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Ellen G. White Comments:

1. In Chapter 52, The Annual Feasts

“At these yearly assemblies the hearts of old and young would be encouraged in the service of God, while the association of the people from the different quarters of the land would strengthen the ties that bound them to God and to one another. **Well would it be for the people of God at the present time to have a Feast of Tabernacles--a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to them.** As the children of Israel celebrated the deliverance that God had wrought for their fathers, and His miraculous preservation of them during their journeyings from Egypt, so should we gratefully call to mind the various ways He has devised for bringing us out from the world, and from the darkness of error, into the precious light of His grace and truth.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 540-541. [Bold added.]

2. “**Ancient Instruction to be Studied.**— The instructions given to Moses for ancient Israel, with their sharp, rigid outlines, are to be studied and obeyed by the people of God today (Letter 259, 1903).” *SDA BC I*, p. 1103.

3. “**Become Familiar With Levitical Law.**-- We are to become familiar with the Levitical law in all its bearings; for it contains rules that must be obeyed; it contains the instruction that if studied will enable us to understand better the rule of faith and practice that we are to follow in our dealings with one another. No soul has any excuse for being in darkness. Those who receive Christ by faith will receive also power to become the sons of God (Letter 3, 1905).” *SDA BC I*, p. 1110.

4. In Chapter 72, In Remembrance of Me.

““The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.” 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

“Christ was standing at the point of transition between two economies and their two great festivals. He, the spotless Lamb of God, was about to present Himself as a sin offering, that He would thus bring to an end the system of types and ceremonies that for four thousand years had pointed to His death. **As He ate the Passover with His disciples, He instituted in its place the service that was to be the memorial of His great sacrifice.** The national festival of the Jews was to pass away forever. The service which Christ established was to be observed by His followers in all lands and through all ages.

“The Passover was ordained as a commemoration of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. God had directed that, **year by year**, as the children should ask the meaning of this ordinance, the history should be repeated. Thus the wonderful deliverance **was to be kept fresh in the minds of all.** The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was given to commemorate the great deliverance wrought out as the result of the death of Christ. Till He shall come the second time in power and glory, this ordinance is to be celebrated. It is the means by which His great work for us is to be kept fresh in our minds.” *Desire of Ages*, pp. 652-653. [Bold added.]