

Dates of Destiny: Past Perfect

I confess. I get impatient with well-meaning folks who are not only ignorant of certain Biblical principles, they're happy to remain so. I'm not talking about simply not realizing (yet) that some of God's Word has ramifications beyond its plain surface meaning—that Yahweh uses symbols and metaphors to communicate with us. We've all had scriptural epiphanies, where one minute we didn't "get it" and the next minute we did. Our lives as believers are a journey from darkness into light, and we all take the trip at different rates of speed. No, I'm talking about *willful* ignorance, a determination *not* to explore the Scriptures in response to questions that are begging to be answered. And why would someone do this? Because of what they've read *into* a few scattered verses, taken out of context, of course: a perceived admonition against inquiry—don't ask, don't tell, don't even think. Not knowing *everything* may not hurt you, but the fact remains, "**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.**" (Hosea 3:6)

One of these areas of willful ignorance is the subject of Yahweh's schedule. If you're like me, you were taught that God plays His cards very close to the vest: "We can't discern anything about it," they say, because after all, Yahshua told his disciples, "**It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.**" (Acts 1:7) Or, "**But of that day and hour no one knows [literally, perceives], no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.**" (Matthew 24:36) His point (in both places) was that we should not fixate on the hour of His return for His people, but rather that we should live our lives doing His will, serving in joy while remaining watchful. But it is too often taken as a command to ignore the obvious (or semi-obvious) clues Yahweh has left us concerning His schedule, His agenda, His plan, if only we'll open our eyes. Even these "proof texts," recruited to encourage willful ignorance, teach us something significant: the Father *does* have a schedule; He *has* put times and seasons under His own authority. But Yahweh exists outside of the restraints of time. The scriptural information explaining God's schedule, strewn from Genesis to Revelation, is there for *our* benefit and enlightenment, not His.

If you've read my book on prophecy, *Future History*, you know I believe God has given us far more information on the subject of His timing than most of His children realize. However, it is not my intention here to explore Yahweh's schedule *per se*, but rather to examine one of the basic tools He has given us with which to discern that timeline. Our focus in the present work is on the Torah, and more specifically, on those things within it that were not previously addressed in

our survey of Maimonides' supposedly definitive list of 613 Laws. This "tool" we wish to investigate is the incredibly significant annual festival calendar Yahweh instructed Israel to observe, along with other periodic rites. Where the Rambam mentioned these convocations at all, it was invariably in reference to the mechanical bits and pieces he could "safely" list (such as what to present as offerings) while remaining blissfully oblivious to what God was really telling His people. These seven annual holidays, along with the weekly Sabbath, are like God's "to do" list, a schedule of events in Yahweh's personal date planner. Through them He is delineating what He considers the seven most significant milestones in His plan for our redemption, as well as revealing the order of these events. We ignore this information at our peril.

Our first scriptural listing of all these holidays together is in Leviticus 23, but I'm afraid the terminology employed in our English translations to describe their nature leaves something to be desired. **"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of Yahweh in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times."'"** (Leviticus 23:1-4) The word translated "feasts" has nothing to do with food or drink, as we today might expect. (In fairness to the King James translators, the word implied something a bit closer to the correct meaning in the early seventeenth century: it's the English language that has shifted.) The Hebrew noun rendered "feast" is *mo'ed*, which means an appointed time, place, or sign; a meeting or assembly convened by an authority. The Sabbath and each of these seven *mo'edim* of Yahweh, then, are meetings, scheduled and appointed by the authority of God Himself. They were to take place at a particular time and place, and each of them signified something He deemed of the utmost importance. Although these are commonly referred to as "the Feasts of Israel," they're never called that in scripture: they're the appointments ordained by Yahweh. As we'll see, they outline His master plan not only for Israel, but for all mankind, Jew and gentile alike.

Another word we need to examine under a microscope is the one translated (correctly, though the word is seldom used these days) as "convocation." It's the Hebrew noun *miqra*, meaning a calling together into a sacred assembly (which makes it quite similar in meaning to the Greek word we errantly translate "church"—*ekklesia*: a calling out). It also means "a reading" (as in Nehemiah 8:8), that is, the content of a written communication that is publicly uttered aloud—a rehearsal or recounting. It's based on the root verb *qara*, meaning to call, call out, or recite. Since "to convoke" means to call together to a meeting, we can see that the Hebrew words *miqra* and *mo'ed* are almost synonymous. The *mo'ed* stresses the fact of the assembly—its place, time, and significance, while

the *miqra* emphasizes its purpose—the information it is to impart to those who assemble. And of course, when we see the word *qodesh* (holy) used with *miqra* (as it invariably is when referring to these special appointments with God), we are reminded that these days are to be kept set apart from other days—separate, sacred, and consecrated: they’re *special*.

Thus we can now see that the very words Yahweh chose to describe these set-apart days indicate that they were to be more than mere “holidays” to be observed. Each *mo‘ed-miqra* was to be a sign, a prophecy if you will, of a specific momentous event in God’s plan for our redemption. Each one was a recital, a retelling, of something special Yahweh intended to do for us. The things He told Israel to do—and not to do—on these days are not self-serving, pointless religious rituals. They are, rather, a recounting or rehearsal reflecting what Yahweh was promising to do for us on each of these spiritual milestones. Every instruction is, in effect, a pledge made to humanity. God is saying, “Recite these My promises week by week and year by year throughout your generations, for they tell you how I’m going to reverse the very curse of Adam.”

FEASTING BEFORE YAHWEH

(821) *Demand freedom in the name of God.* “**Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’**” (Exodus 5:1) I’ve always found it surprising that Yahweh wasn’t entirely straightforward with Pharaoh here. He didn’t say, “Let My people go, that they may start a new life with Me in another land, free from your tyranny and oppression.” His initial demand was couched in much less far-reaching terms. He gave Pharaoh the opportunity to grant a simple request, one that would not have automatically spelled political suicide for the Egyptian leader: let these people take a holiday, a short break from their labors, so they can honor their God for a season. He didn’t ask Pharaoh to do anything particularly difficult or politically dangerous—convert to the Hebrews’ religion or give them the right to vote. Just let them take a break in honor of Yahweh.

God gave no hint that there was a monumental appointment with destiny awaiting them out there in the desert. He didn’t use the word *mo‘ed* to delineate this “feast” to which they had been called, for this would have been an indication that there was *significance* to the release of the slaves—making this something no rational political leader in Pharaoh’s position could have condoned, no matter how much good will he wanted to show. Rather, the verb Moses used for “hold a feast” was *hagag*, which means to celebrate a festival, to make a pilgrimage to a holy place for worship in a festive atmosphere—in short, to travel to the site of

a big party. Going to Woodstock in 1969 might have been described as *hagag*. Pharaoh *could* have agreed with this request. I can guarantee that Joseph's Pharaoh, four hundred years before this, would have said, "Go, enjoy yourselves. In fact, let me supply some wine and cattle to make your sojourn more enjoyable. And while you're there, please ask Yahweh your God to bless my kingdom." But the times had changed. Yahweh perceived the arrogant hardness of Pharaoh's heart, but He had to ask—He had to give Pharaoh the opportunity to do the right thing, even though He already knew how he would answer.

Egypt, of course, is a metaphor for the world, the place of our former bondage to sin. To this day, the world doesn't wish to release people to go and serve Yahweh, even temporarily. The world feels threatened by our freedom because of their strange mixture of jealousy, denial, fear, and pathological insecurity. They are afraid to be free themselves, so they cower in bondage, making what they can of a bad situation, going so far as to call it "good," or at least normal. *Religion* is tolerated, because it implies (and often personifies) a state of bondage in the guise of piety or faith, but they remain suspicious of anything that even hints that real liberty might be possible through sharing a familial relationship with God. Our freedom in Christ is a constant and uncomfortable reminder to them that they live—by their own choice—in slavery. So they do whatever they can to prevent our bodily escape, though we have already attained liberty in a spiritual sense. But Yahweh says, ever more forcefully as the Last Days approach, "**Let my people go.**"

- (822) *Recognize the holy convocations as Yahweh's. "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'*"

(Leviticus 23:1-2) These "feasts" (*mo'edim*—appointments) included the weekly Sabbath, seven annual "holy convocations" (*qodesh miqrym*), the Sabbatical year, and Jubilee, each of which was prophetic of some significant event or situation in Yahweh's plan of redemption. We will discuss these things in more detail in the following pages.

Christians today often brush off these appointments with God as mere "Jewish ritual," with no particular importance for them in a post-Calvary world. But this attitude is seriously flawed: Yahweh here declares that "These are *My* feasts." We thus ignore them to our own detriment. For generations after these instructions were given to Israel, only two of the seven annual *mo'edim* had any historical basis. To be sure, the object lessons inherent in these two (the initial Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread) marked a turning point, a national epiphany, in the life of Israel.

Before the exodus, they had been a rabble, a loosely organized assembly of Semitic clans with a common ancestral line, enslaved by their former hosts on the basis of biological prejudice and a lust for power. But after forty years under Moses' leadership in the wilderness, they emerged a nation, unified by one thing above all others—the recognition of Yahweh as the One true God. The first two *miqrym* gave them only a rough idea of what these special days on God's calendar were really all about—sacrifice leading to deliverance. Naturally, when they tried to assign historical precedents to the other five *mo'edim*, they obscured the real reason God had instituted them. Truth be told, the basis for *all* of these, even these first two, would be found in their prophetic nature, not their memorial significance. The events of the exodus, as momentous as they were for Israel, were only dress rehearsals for the spiritual drama that would be played out for the benefit of the whole world some fifteen centuries later on the hills of Jerusalem.

The events prophesied by the first four of Yahweh's seven annual *mo'edim* took place in 33 A.D. They are now in the history books (or would be, if historians really understood the world around them). From the way these four were fulfilled, we can confidently predict some things about the last three, those yet to be realized. First, they will be fulfilled on the specific calendar days mandated by scripture—the first, tenth, and fifteenth days of Tishri (the seventh month on the lunar Hebrew calendar, falling in September or October in the solar Gregorian system). Second, if the Levitical Law specifies a Sabbath celebration for a *miqra*, it will fall on a *natural* Sabbath (that is, Saturday) in the year of its definitive fulfillment. (This very thing happened in 33 A.D., when the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on the Sabbath, as required, but Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks did not.) This Sabbath circumstance is definitely the case for the seventh and final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, and it seems to be the case for the fifth *miqra* as well, the Feast of Trumpets, although I can't be dogmatic about that one.

Of more fundamental importance, each of the remaining three *mo'edim* can be expected to fulfill a divine promise of sweeping consequence, something on the same order of magnitude as the first four. To briefly recap these, (1) Passover marked the sacrifice Yahweh made to atone for the sins of mankind; (2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread predicted the removal of our sins from us; (3) The Feast of Firstfruits prophesied the resurrection of Yahshua from the dead, demonstrating His ability and intention to raise us who follow Him into a new life as well; and (4) the Feast of Weeks fulfilled Yahshua's John 14:17 promise (and David's Psalm 51:11 prayer) that whereas He had been *with* His disciples,

afterward He would be *in* them—manifested as the Spirit of God indwelling and empowering every believer. The final three *mo'edim* can be expected to deal with three other subjects every bit as vital to our eternal relationship with our Creator as these first four did.

- (823) *Rejoice in Yahweh's presence.* **“You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite, who is within your gates since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.”**

(Deuteronomy 12:12) God is really *serious* when it comes to our rejoicing. The verb used here (*samach*) occurs 95 times in the Old Covenant Scriptures, the related adjective (*sameach*—joyful) 23 times, and the noun form (*simchah*—joy or gladness) occurs another 94. *Samach* means pretty much what you'd guess—to rejoice, be glad, delight in, be elated, to have a feeling or attitude of joy, mirth, or happiness—including, believe it or not, using alcohol (in moderation, of course) as a mood elevator. If that comes as a shock, you should be aware that the dour, grim-faced Christianity of popular myth—that Puritanical teetotaling killjoy attitude the world loves to hate and ridicule—is every bit as contrary to Yahweh's ideal as a self-destructive lifestyle of revelry and dissipation. God, in short, wants us to be genuinely happy. Who saw that one coming? In fact, as counterintuitive as it may seem, He actually promised to *punish* Israel's joyless, thankless attitude: **“Because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.”** (Deuteronomy 28:47-48) Notice that joy, service, and gratitude are inextricably linked.

The context of our precept is the double-edged sword of instruction concerning where to gather for worship in the Promised Land—and where not to. The Israelites were forbidden in no uncertain terms to adopt the religious practices of the Canaanites, to worship Yahweh in the same way, or even in the same places, that the indigenous pagans worshipped their gods. Rather, they were to periodically gather as a nation in one central location that would be selected by Yahweh Himself—invariably called “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide”—eventually revealed to be the city of Jerusalem. They were *not* to “rejoice before Yahweh their God” in corporate worship anywhere other than this specified location, for this was where the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were. That makes perfect sense, since the pattern of the Tabernacle is an elaborate pictorial metaphor for God's Plan for the redemption of Man. The point is that following Yahweh's plan would give someone ample reason for rejoicing, but do-it-yourself modes of religious

practice—however pleasurable, culturally stimulating, or effective in smothering a guilty conscience, would inevitably lead to death. They were therefore not cause for rejoicing, but for mourning.

And who was to rejoice before Yahweh? Not just the landowner, not just his family, but everyone—rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, those specially set-apart for God’s service, and plain, ordinary folk. In the same way, the joy of Yahweh’s salvation is to be a reality in the lives of every believer, not just “super-saints,” religious professionals, or believers who find themselves especially gifted in some way. The joy, after all, is not a result of our circumstances or status, but is derived from what has happened “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide,” where the Tabernacle tells its eloquent and irresistible story: Yahshua’s sacrifice has atoned for our sins and cleansed our life so that we might enter the Holy Place, see the light of God’s love, taste of His provision, commune with Him, and ultimately enter His very presence as beloved children. If *that* doesn’t put a smile on your face, you’re not paying attention.

THE SABBATH

- (824) *Don’t light a fire on the Sabbath.* “**You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.**” (Exodus 35:3) The rabbis immediately jumped from here to the idea that you couldn’t cook on the Sabbath because it was somebody’s usual work. That sounds reasonable enough until you factor in Yahweh’s instructions for the Passover in Exodus 12. The lamb was to be killed at twilight, when the sun was about to go down, only minutes before the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was due to begin. It was then to be roasted—the whole thing, even the head and the entrails. Do the math: you can’t roast a whole lamb in a few minutes. It takes hours, which means that although the fire would have to have been *kindled* before the Sabbath began, the actual roasting process went on for some time into the night. The Paschal supper would have taken place sometime between the time the Lamb was ready to eat and when the Death Angel came (at “midnight”—verse 29).

Yahweh is very careful in His choice of words, and He doesn’t make dumb mistakes. The point is that there’s something else going on here, and we need to get to the bottom of it. Why did he not specifically prohibit cooking *per se*, but rather the kindling of a fire on the Sabbath day? Why did He say that this prohibition applied “throughout our dwellings,” that is, where we live? The answer is bound up in the symbols—what fire represents, and what the Sabbath predicts. Fire in scripture is that which

judges, i.e., separates the good from the worthless, purifies by melting, and proves by burning. The picture is that of the ore of precious metal being melted in fire, allowing the impurities to float to the top where they are skimmed off and discarded. It is a picture of the means by which we attain holiness, of the process of our being set apart from the worthless dross of our mortal existence. Our works are the issue. Gold, silver, and precious stones survive the fire's trial; wood, hay, and stubble do not.

The kindling of such a fire, then, is a picture of the Judge's authority, His prerogative to instigate the purification process. Thus we read in the Psalms, **"Therefore Yahweh heard this and was furious. So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation."** (Psalm 78:22) Yahweh is the Judge: it is He alone who is worthy to kindle the fire. Why was Yahweh "furious?" Why did He feel it was necessary to "kindle a fire against Jacob?" It was because they "did not trust in His salvation." I'm afraid something's totally lost in the English here—something that's subtle enough in the Hebrew. The word translated "salvation" is (pronounced according to Strong's lexicon) Yâshuw`ah (יְשׁוּעָה), i.e., it sounds identical to the Messiah's name—not "Jesus," but *Yahshua*. Note further that Yahweh rested on the seventh day—the Sabbath rules are meant to teach us about Him. That means, if we follow this to its logical conclusion, that Yahweh's "fire kindling," His judgment and purging of Israel (not to mention the rest of humanity), will take place *before* the Sabbath—before the commencement of the Millennial reign of Yahshua the Messiah. That's why they call the Tribulation "the time of Jacob's trouble."

The Sabbath speaks of the timeframe and the identity of the One doing the judging. From the fall of Adam to the commencement of the Millennial reign of Christ, mankind will have six thousand years (the prophetic object of the six-day "work week") in which to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," as Paul puts it in Philippians 2:12. That is, while we are yet mortals, our job is to exercise faith with reverence, for as Yahshua said, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."** (John 6:29) For the time being, then, our works are like gold in the ground: God may have to process a ton of ore to extract an ounce of pure metal, but He's willing to do that. In the present world (our current "dwelling place"), though we try our best to live pure lives, our success is spotty and imperfect at best. But on the Sabbath—i.e., during the final Millennium—the gold of our lives that was refined in the fires of purification, kindled by Yahshua during God's "work week," will at last gleam for His glory, having been purged and separated from all our worldly impurities.

(825) *Trust Yahweh to provide what is needed for the Sabbath.* **“Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.” (Exodus 16:4-5)**

There are several important lessons to be learned from the manna in the wilderness. It is, in fact, the quintessential teaching tool for instructing us about how Yahweh provides for us, both materially and spiritually.

(1) Manna was unfamiliar and unexpected, but it filled the need to perfection. The word, loosely translated, means “What is it?” The children of Israel were not in a position to plant wheat or barley as they journeyed through the wilderness, so God provided an ongoing 40-year miracle—“bread from heaven” as it were, nutritious, tasty, and fresh every day. The only thing it “lacked” was variety, for **“The blessing of Yahweh makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.”** (Proverbs 10:22) The manna He provided was ideal for its purpose. To add “variety” would have compromised it in some way, making it somehow less than perfect—like adding a hip-hop movement to a Bach concerto. Still, we read that the Israelites complained about the monochromatic nature of the diet Yahweh had given them. We today need to take the hint, and stifle the urge to grumble when God’s provision seems to be falling short. In reality, He always provides exactly what we need. But sometimes what we need *most* is a compelling reason to talk with our Father.

(2) The gift of manna was participatory. That is, Yahweh provided it, but the Israelites also had to *receive* it: they had to go out and harvest it, bring it back to their tents, and prepare it as they would any raw grain. For six days a week, there was work involved: gathering the manna, milling it, getting firewood, kindling a fire, cooking, and cleaning up. On the seventh day, however, God would provide no manna, and man’s involvement would be limited to enjoying what had *already* been provided by God or accomplished by their own efforts. In the same way, our mortal lives in this age are characterized by a partnership, a division of labor. Yahweh does His part, and we are to do ours: that is, receive what He has provided—gather and use the manna. It’s not that our works have any efficacy in effecting our salvation, but what we do in this life confirms what we believe and identifies who we trust—whether Yahweh or ourselves. As James put it, **“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”** (James 2:17, 26) In the sabbatical age to come, our faith will give way to sight, and our works will serve only as confirmation that we did the right thing, and trusted the right God, in this life.

(3) There were choices involved in what to do with the manna. God provided only the raw materials. It was up to the Israelites to decide what to do with it. As with any grain, they could make it into cakes, wafers, flatbread, or leavened loaves. (As an old Keith Green song put it, they could make manna bagels, manna-cotti, or ba-manna bread.) The point for us is that we too have choices concerning what to do with what Yahweh provides for us. Using the ingredients Yahweh has provided, some of us cook up tasty and enjoyable dishes while others concoct dour and tasteless recipes. What makes the difference? Today His manna consists of **“all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us.”** (II Peter 1:3) Some of us seem to be interested only in the things that pertain to “life,” that is, our mortal circumstance, but not with “godliness,” or vice versa. But a recipe made with only half the ingredients isn’t going to taste right. Others try to gather their manna inside their tents or outside the camp—i.e., somewhere other than where God has provided it—which is “through the knowledge of Him who called us”—Yahshua. And then they wonder why the bread they’re baking turns out to be inedible.

(4) There was always just enough. An interesting phenomenon is reported in Exodus 16:16-18. The Israelites were instructed to harvest one “omer,” of manna, about half a gallon, per person per day. But as it turned out, if they gathered more than that, they wouldn’t have too much, and if they harvested too little, that would somehow turn out to be sufficient for their needs as well. God’s provision of what we need “for life and godliness” is like that: He gives us, as individuals, precisely what we need, no more and no less. Therefore, if you find ourselves “gifted” in some specific way, whether materially or spiritually, it should be taken as an indication that Yahweh has a bigger than average job for you to do, and He’s supplying what you need for it up front. It could be money, or the capacity for empathy, or spiritual insight, or any number of things. Conversely, if you find yourself shortchanged in some area, rest assured that’s not where God has asked you to serve. In my own life, I’ve also observed that my areas of gifting shift over time: when I needed money to keep a growing horde of adopted kids in braces, orthopedic shoes, and Christian schools, God made sure I earned a good living; now that my kids are mostly grown and gone, I’m on a short leash financially, but I can see God’s truth more clearly than I ever could before. Ten years from now, it could be something else entirely. A believer’s life is one grand adventure.

(5) You couldn’t ordinarily keep manna leftovers. The Israelites found out the hard way that hoarding manna didn’t work. You couldn’t gather a double ration of manna today if you didn’t trust Yahweh to supply your needs tomorrow, because the stuff would go bad overnight and stink up

your tent. You had to use what Yahweh provided, when He provided it. Yahweh was teaching us to rely on Him day by day: each day's provision was sufficient for that day alone. He would still be there on the morrow with precisely what we needed for that new day. This was why Jeremiah could write during the darkest days of Judah's history, **"Through Yahweh's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness."** (Lamentations 3:22-23) Yahshua was teaching the same truth when He said, **"Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."** (Matthew 6:31-34) But then He turned around and instructed His people to gather and prepare two omers—twice the usual amount—on the day before the Sabbath. And this time it stayed fresh. Read on..

(6) Whatever God provided, He did it during the work week, not on the Sabbath. We should not overlook the fact that Yahweh provides *for* the Sabbath—not *on* the Sabbath. The pattern was established as far back as the creation account: **"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."** (Genesis 2:3) Our salvation, our reconciliation with Yahweh, was accomplished during His "work week." There is nothing else left to be done, nothing we can add to make His work more efficacious. Furthermore, if we wish to avail ourselves of God's provision, we must do it before the seventh day begins. That is, there's a deadline—literally. Fallen mankind will have only six thousand years to "work things out" in faith, for when the Messiah reigns on earth during the seventh millennium, man will instead "walk by sight" in the light of His physical, corporeal presence. For the time being, however, faith is required: **"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."** (Hebrews 11:6) If we didn't believe Him during the first six "days," we can't expect to reap the rewards of faith on the seventh.

(7) The sixth-day provision of manna was said to be a test. If we believe God, we will gather and use the "manna" He's provided now, while it's still available, for He has told us in no uncertain terms that it won't always be there. Call me an alarmist, but look at the prophetic clock: it is now late afternoon on the sixth day. If you haven't yet gathered the manna you'll need to sustain you through the coming Sabbath, if you haven't harvested the "things that pertain to life and godliness" that

Yahweh has freely provided for you, then please, wake up and receive the gift while there's still time! Don't assume it will always be there waiting for you, for it won't. Yahshua said, as He was in the process of doing His part, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4) That hour is almost upon us.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

- (826) *Prosperity will result from obedience to Yahweh's precepts. "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts...You shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother. However, there will be no poor among you, since Yahweh will surely bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess if only you listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For Yahweh your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you."* (Deuteronomy 15:1, 3-6. vs. 4-5: NASB) It's easy to lose the train of thought here. The context is the instruction concerning the Sabbatical year, in which "Yahweh's release" would *by law* free the poor from their bondage and debt. The point, however, is that if the Israelites as a people would "listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh," there would be virtually no debts to forgive, for there would be no poor among them, no hardship, no people living on the fringe of society struggling to get by. This is not a contradiction to the statements both Moses and Yahshua made, saying "The poor you will always have with you," for they both knew that Israel would not "carefully observe the commandments" that Moses was handing down. Poverty was a prophetic *fait accompli*. But it didn't have to be that way.

The lessons here go far beyond the prospect of temporal prosperity for theocratic Israel. The picture being painted is almost beyond human comprehension. Imagine a society finding itself with nothing to forgive. Not just monetary debt, but moral debt as well. If everyone—*everyone*—observed the Law of God (which in practice boils down to "Love Yahweh with your whole being" and "Love your neighbor as you do yourself"), then poverty and crime would disappear. War would be unheard of. Substance abuse, marital infidelity, murder, fraud, and vice would evaporate. Covetousness, dishonesty, and hidden self-serving agendas would become nonexistent. Government budgets would shrink to a tiny fraction of their present bloated reality, for they would no longer be tasked with coping with the aftereffects of sin (or, let's be honest, with the very implementation of iniquity, the institutionalization of wickedness).

Sounds like a pipe dream, you say? Maybe, but this very thing is prophesied to be the prevailing character of the coming Millennial Kingdom of Yahshua the Messiah. The “prosperity effect” of obedience to God’s precepts will be absolute in Israel, but will also be endemic throughout much of the earth for a thousand years. Needless to say, that is not the case today, as a whole different group of prophecies, predicting rebellion, apostasy, tribulation, and turmoil, is being played out on the world’s stage, and will continue to be until King Yahshua returns to take His throne. The contrast between the two worlds is like black and white, night and day. But the only real difference is whether or not we **“listen obediently to the voice of Yahweh your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today.”**

PASSOVER

The first of Yahweh’s seven annual *mo’edim-miqrym* (appointments and convocations) was Passover. We may at first find it odd that the “Law” passages of the Torah offer little instruction concerning this appointment outside of reminding them what day it fell upon (see Precept #834). In its introduction in Exodus 12, however, the Israelites were told to perform a detailed dress rehearsal for an event that would prove to have both near and a far fulfillments. Moreover, they were told to perpetuate this rite in their future generations as a memorial of their emancipation. But Israel’s release from bondage in Egypt was not the essence of the convocation, nor its fundamental reason for being. The historical events defining the original Passover would prove to be, in and of themselves, only a picture, a prophecy, of what the day actually signified—mankind’s release from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Christ.

(827) *Kill the Passover lamb.* **“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb.”** (Exodus 12:21) This is a detail worth noting: Yahweh would not slay the Passover lambs Himself, nor would Pharaoh or one of his false gods. Rather, the very people hoping to be protected by the shed blood of the lambs would have to sacrifice these innocent creatures—lambs who had been living among them like pets for the previous four days, having been specifically selected from among the flock for this “honor.” This act was designed to be personal, purposeful, and painful (not to mention prophetic). The guiltless Passover lamb, of course, was the prototype for the Messianic sacrifice to come: as John the Baptist would put it, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

An offering, by definition, is made by one who wishes to have an effect on—to influence, honor, or appease—someone whom they perceive is greater than themselves in some way. Thus we observe that the Passover lamb was more than just a meal. It was an *offering*, one whose purpose (as directed by Yahweh) was to demonstrate, to bear witness, that the household shielded by its blood was under His protection—because they had requested it. The same principles are true of the Passover lamb’s antitype. For Yahshua’s death to be efficacious in the removal of our sin, Yahweh (though He *provided* the Lamb) couldn’t offer Him up as a sacrifice (that is, it would not have solved our problem if Yahshua had committed suicide), for an offering must be made by the lesser to the greater. Besides, Yahweh had no shortcomings for which to atone. Nor could Satan (whose sins were ubiquitous) offer Him up, for Yahweh’s purpose was not to atone for the rebellion of our adversary, but rather for the sins of man. God therefore withheld His authority: Satan couldn’t touch Yahshua. That left but one possible agent: us, for our sins had separated us from our Maker. We were the ones in need. The atonement was for us. And the death kept at bay by the Lamb’s blood was our own. So we—mankind—would have to kill the Passover Lamb. And we did.

It’s incredibly ironic, if you think about it. The one thing we did right—that is, in accordance with the Torah—was the worst crime imaginable: killing the innocent Passover Lamb, Yahshua. Other, lesser crimes had already condemned us, of course. But Yahweh arranged it so that our blackest deed would shine the brightest light on our need for salvation, at the same time providing the mechanism for our redemption. That’s why Yahshua prayed, “**Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**” (Luke 23:34)

And you thought God was making this stuff up as He went along.

- (828) *Apply the blood of the Passover sacrifice to the doorway of your home. “They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.” (Exodus 12:7) “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.” (Exodus 12:22)* The initial “celebration” of Passover would be the last time they could have observed it *as originally instructed* for the next forty years, for the tents of their wilderness wanderings had no doorposts upon which to apply the blood of the sacrifice. (They did, however, observe a modified form of the feast in the wilderness: see Numbers 9:2-3.) When Yahweh seems to be telling us to do something that’s physically impossible, it should be our first clue that the symbol it represents is what He really wants us to pay attention to.

We have seen that the Lamb ultimately represents Yahshua. What, then, do the “doorposts” and “lintel” of our house represent? It’s the cross of Christ, upon which “some of the blood” of the Lamb of God would be applied as He was sacrificed. It’s interesting that Moses didn’t say, “the doorframe,” but broke it down into its components, vertical and horizontal. Why? Because the Greek word we translate “cross” (*stauros*) doesn’t actually mean a “cross” (i.e., a tee-shaped implement) but rather an “upright stake or pole.” It therefore corresponds to each upright “doorpost,” and is analogous to the pole upon which Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, as Yahshua Himself pointed out in John 3:14. The “lintel,” then, would mirror what the Latins called the “*patibulum*,” the crosspiece hoisted to the top of the *stauros*, upon which the crucifixion victim’s arms would be outstretched. In the Exodus prototype, these two elements comprised the doorway to the Passover celebrant’s home; in the Calvary antitype, they are also a portal, this time to his permanent home—an eternal dwelling place in the presence of the Almighty.

The doorpost and *stauros* speak of the “vertical” connection, the reconciliation that is being established between man and God through Christ’s sacrifice. In contrast, the lintel and *patibulum* refer to the “horizontal” relationship between people of faith that is created through the same Selfless act—the formation of the *ekklesia* (the called-out assembly) of Yahshua the Messiah. Both relationships require the shedding of innocent blood, applied to the doorway that leads to where we live.

- (829) *Do not linger over the Passover meal. “And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is Yahweh’s Passover.”* (Exodus 12:11) The Passover meal wasn’t designed to be a particularly pleasurable, relaxed, or joyful experience, unlike some of the other *miqrym* on Yahweh’s calendar. The Israelites were to eat in haste, in a spirit of expectation and anticipation, prepared to bolt for the door on a moment’s notice like a sprinter on the starting blocks. It’s kind of funny, if you think about it. After four long centuries in bondage, it came down to one night of antsy watchfulness for the Israelites, after which they’d be shot out of Egypt like a human cannonball. Yahweh apparently likes to build the tension to the breaking point before He lets events unfold, knowing that when they do, they’ll fairly *explode* into place (a lesson that should not be lost on today’s prophetically pregnant world).

The watchfulness enjoined here is reminiscent of how we present-day believers are directed to live our lives. As Yahshua told His disciples,

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is [that is, the time of His return for them]. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:33-37) We, too, it seems, are being told to keep “a belt on our waist, our sandals on our feet, and our staff in our hand,” in a constant state of readiness to leave this world behind at the drop of a hat. That’s going to be really hard to do if we’re “invested” in the things of this mortal life. Yes, as in the Passover meal, we can eat our lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs as time permits, but we aren’t to get too comfortable: we must be alert, ready to go the moment Yahshua calls us.

- (830) *Remain where God says it’s safe. “And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.”* (Exodus 12:22) Another admonition for the night of the Passover feast—actually now (since the sun had set) the wee hours of the first day of the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread: the Israelites were not to go wandering around out of doors. They were to stay within the house whose doorposts and lintel had been sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. Why? Because outside was where Yahweh’s Angel of Death would be busy implementing His wrath. It was not enough merely to be an Israelite, for biological serendipity was not the criterion for receiving God’s protection. Indeed, there were a fair number of Egyptians (later referred to as the “mixed multitude”) who determined to heed Yahweh’s warning and stay indoors behind the blood-stained portal with their Israelite neighbors that night. One’s shelter and protection was based on Who he believed, not who his ancestor was.

In the same way, we today are vulnerable to wrath if we scoff at Yahweh’s warning and walk about in the darkness outside, unprotected by the blood of Yahshua sprinkled on Calvary’s upright stake and upon the lintel of fellowship. Consider the geography of the thing: the Israelites were in Egypt—symbolically, “in the world.” Yahweh was declaring their blood-spattered homes to be “embassies,” so to speak—a patch of heavenly soil set in the midst of a foreign country. We who dwell in this world under the embassy’s auspices possess diplomatic immunity, even though our respective nations are engaged in a cold war. Our Ambassador, of course, is Yahshua, who represents His “nation,” the Kingdom of Heaven, before the world. And we, the embassy staff, enjoy all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with being citizens of the Kingdom. But our diplomatic protection in this foreign land is only as real

as our citizenship. If we are pretenders, if we are traveling through life on a false passport, the protection we assume to be ours is an illusion.

- (831) *Trust the blood of the Passover Lamb to save you.* “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Yahweh. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:12-13) “For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.” (Exodus 12:23) There is a tacit precept latent in these verses: “You shall trust the blood of the Lamb to afford protection from the Destroyer.” It was a simple exercise in obedience based on evidence (in truth, the only kind of obedience Yahweh ever asks of us). The Israelites (not to mention the Egyptians) had seen Yahweh keep His word nine times by this point. Each promised plague had been worse than the last, each one calculated to destroy the reputation of one of Egypt’s deities. Their chief deity, the sun “god” Ra, had been the latest to fall, and still Pharaoh had hardened his heart. I get the feeling that the Egyptian king didn’t really believe in his nation’s pantheon anyway—religion was merely a convenient way to keep the masses subservient, obedient, and paying taxes. The real power, as far as Pharaoh was concerned, lay in the royal bloodline. On some level, he claimed the status of “deity” for himself, a position of ultimate lordship that would pass to his firstborn son and heir when he died. So Yahweh set about to dethrone the tenth and most tangible of Egypt’s false gods.

A clear choice was presented. Depending upon whether or not the people obeyed Yahweh in faith, they would experience one of two things: either the Destroyer would pass *through* their life, or he would pass *over* it. One might thus assume that the blood had been intended as a sign for the Destroyer, so he’d know which houses to pass over—to exempt it from wrath. But here Yahweh says that the “blood shall be a sign *for you*,” that is, for the Israelite believers. Since they weren’t supposed to be wandering around outside their dwellings during Passover, the only time they’d even *see* the blood was when they were applying it to the doorposts and lintels. At this point, the only sign they’d be able to see was their own faith. They’d done something totally illogical simply because their God had told them to: they trusted Him, even though they didn’t understand what He was doing, or how.

But fast forward fifteen hundred years or so to the definitive fulfillment of the Passover prophecy, and the intended train of thought becomes clear. (1) The Passover Lamb was to enter the Israelite “household” on the 10th day of Nisan (Exodus 12:3). Yahshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place on that very day, March 28, 33 A.D., fulfilling the Daniel 9:25 prophecy in the process. (2) The Jews were to slay the Lamb on the 14th of Nisan, which they did right on schedule by manipulating the Roman Procurator, Pilate, into crucifying the Lamb of God. (3) The Lamb’s blood was to be applied to the doorposts and lintels of Israel. These turned out to be the *stauros* and *patibulum* of a cruel Roman cross. (4) The blood was to be applied with hyssop, the same implement used to sprinkle the waters of purification in the ordinance of the so-called “red heifer” (see Mitzvot #574-576), required for cleansing in the event of one’s contact with death (something Passover brings into razor sharp focus). Again, the sacrifice of Yahshua fulfills the Torah’s requirements perfectly. (5) The Israelites were then instructed to stay indoors, remain watchful, and trust the blood they themselves had spilled to be efficacious in protecting them from the wrath of God.

Since the blood was to be a sign for *them*, not for the death angel, it had to have far-reaching significance beyond the events of that first night. If it didn’t point directly to Yahshua’s sacrifice on Calvary—ultimately offering shelter for the entire world when the Destroyer would eventually pass through—then either Yahweh is a liar, or some other fulfillment is forthcoming. Israel *is required* to figure out what the definitive *miqra* of Passover signifies. Search all you want: history offers no suitable alternative explanation to Yahshua’s sacrifice.

- (832) *Do not forget what Yahweh has done for you. “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which Yahweh will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’”* (Exodus 12:24-27) I have no axe to grind with people who wish to commemorate their nation’s history. But Jews today who insist that Passover has absolutely no significance other than God’s killing a few Egyptians so they could escape from slavery thirty-five hundred years ago just aren’t thinking clearly. Sure, it was a big deal at the time, and one might be inclined to see that bloody night as an earthshaking event to this very day—if it had led to permanent greatness for this nation of runaway slaves. But it didn’t. In reality, the times of Israel’s national prominence have been few and far between. In all of

Israel's long and turbulent history, they have enjoyed a combined total of *maybe* a hundred years of real glory—and none of it is directly attributable to this incident. In point of fact, it's a miracle of Biblical proportions that the nation of Israel even exists today—in any form. When asked to “observe this thing as an ordinance forever,” any thinking Jew could ask, quite reasonably, “Why? What have You done for us lately?”

The only possible explanation is that Passover *does* have significance beyond God's deadly one night stand in Egypt on behalf of Israel. Yahweh *has* done great things for them—and us—lately. It's easy to look at the prescribed response, “**It is the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households,**” and conclude that the *Egyptians* were Yahweh's sacrifice. But actually, the innocent lambs (prophetic of *The Innocent Lamb*) were “the Passover sacrifice of Yahweh.” It was their blood that kept the Destroyer at bay. The Egyptians were little more than collateral damage—a physical picture of a spiritual principle, namely that whatever is not under Yahweh's protection cannot long survive. That's why observant Jews through the ages have slain and eaten lambs, not Egyptians, on Passover.

- (833) *Salvation is achieved the same way for both Jews and gentiles. “If a stranger dwells among you, and would keep Yahweh's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.”* (Numbers 9:14) The message here is virtually identical to that of Precept #806 in the previous chapter. Here the principle is specifically applied to Yahweh's Passover. The point, here as there, is that Yahweh's ordained rites have significance beyond Israel; they bear consequence that is as universal as it is fundamental: we are all saved by the same thing, if we are saved at all.

Ignorance (or denial) of this precept has invariably led to two mirror-image heresies. The first says that the gentile “strangers” must become practicing Jews before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven: their males must be circumcised, the signs of the Torah (such as the wearing of the *tsitzit*) must be observed, the dietary laws must be obeyed, and so forth. Acts 15 effectively dealt with that one, though its practitioners persist to this day, undaunted by scripture and reason.

The converse heresy is that Israel's heritage and function—and indeed, the Torah itself—has been eclipsed by church tradition. Though the *ekklesia* was populated almost exclusively by Jews in its early years, the treacherous triumph of Akiba's rabbinical system over Israel's priesthood in the first few decades of the second century effectively killed the church

in Israel, driving it so far underground it took the better part of two millennia to resurface. The animosity became a mutual phenomenon, evidenced by the precepts laid down by the Council of Laodicea in 364. A few entries will serve to demonstrate this:

Canon 29: “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath [Saturday], but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord’s Day [Sunday]; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.” I beg to differ: Yahweh never set apart Sunday as a day of rest, but specified the Sabbath as His weekly *miqra*, or convocation, and He never changed that. The “church” doesn’t have the authority to refute Yahweh, nor does it have the right to pass off human tradition as God’s Word. It’s folly to even try.

Canon 37: “It is not lawful to receive portions sent from the feasts of Jews or heretics, nor to feast together with them.” This, of course, contains a direct contradiction to our present Precept. Between the resurrection of Yahshua and His Millennial Kingdom, Jewish and gentile believers were supposed to be branches grafted into the same Vine.

Canon 38: “It is not lawful to receive unleavened bread from the Jews, nor to be partakers of their impiety.” By this time, the church leaders had defined “impiety” as anything they didn’t agree with, even if Yahweh Himself had ordained it. Not to be outdone, the rabbis had ransacked Judaism, leaving nothing *but* “impiety” in their wake. But God’s Word had decreed “one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.” That ordinance was Christ.

- (834) *Observe Passover on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of Yahweh.”* (Numbers 28:16) We’re used to national holidays where the actual *date* doesn’t really matter all that much. I mean, Independence Day in the U.S. may fall officially on the fourth of July, but if the big day falls on a Sunday, everybody is going to take off Monday the fifth instead, I guarantee it. The precise date of Passover, however, is of crucial importance—as are the dates of each of the seven annual *mo’edim* of Yahweh. Not only could it have been a fatal error if you’d killed the Passover lamb a day late or a day early—leaving your firstborn child vulnerable to the Destroyer—Passover and all of the other *miqrym* were prophecies of significant events that would transpire in future history, on the very days of their scriptural mandate. In the case of this first *miqra*, Passover (the 14th day of Nisan, which falls in the spring, in March or April on our Gregorian calendars) was commonly referred to as the Day of Preparation, because the actual meal (that of *Chag Matzah*, the Feast of Unleavened Bread) was eaten after sunset, technically the start

of the new “day.” And John 19:31 reports that Yahshua was indeed crucified on this Day of Preparation—Passover, the day before the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, this is why Yahweh stressed only the date, the “appointed time”—the fourteenth day of Nisan—here in Numbers 28, in Leviticus 23:5, in Numbers 9:2-3, and in Deuteronomy 16:1, hardly mentioning what the Israelite celebrants were supposed to do.

Are these dates still important? Yes, aside from the historical confirmation of Yahweh’s Word in the fulfillment of the first four *miqrym*. That’s because the last three of these seven milestones are still in our future. When their fulfillments are due on God’s calendar, they will come about on the very days specified in the Torah, just as the first four did. The next one on His schedule is the Feast of Trumpets, *Yom Teruah*, which I’m convinced is prophetic of the rapture of the church. It will fall on the first day Tishri (in our September or October) in some future year. Next on the list is the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippurim*, on the 10th of Tishri—indicative of the day the returning King Yahshua will be recognized and hailed as the Messiah by Israel (see Zechariah 12:10-11). Last on the schedule of holy appointments is the Feast of Tabernacles, prophetic of the day when Yahshua will begin His earthly thousand-year reign upon the earth—God “camping out” with men for the duration of the fulfillment of another of Yahweh’s “schedule” metaphors, the Sabbath Day—the last of seven millennia delineating the course of Spirit-enabled man upon the earth from Adam onward.

- (835) *Congregate in the place chosen by Yahweh when observing Passover.* **“Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, for in the month of Abib Yahweh your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where Yahweh chooses to put His name.”** (Deuteronomy 16:1-2) Every spring, Passover Seders are celebrated by observant Jews all over the world, in apparent compliance with this passage. They eat their lamb and unleavened bread and bitter herbs (along with a wide variety of rabbinical “condiments” that weren’t even mentioned in scripture) and in so doing, they think they are following the Torah. But if we read on for a few more verses, we encounter a startling clarification: **“You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you; but at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall roast and eat it in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.”** (Deuteronomy 16:5-7) That’s right. Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were forbidden to sacrifice the Passover lambs

anywhere but where the Tabernacle was—“the place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide.” That means that today, according to the plain reading of the Torah, Passover Seders held anywhere but Jerusalem are illegal!

Once again, we are faced with a conundrum. By evicting Israel from the Promised Land because of their sins—not once, but twice—did Yahweh make it impossible to do what He required them to do? Has He callously “written off” entire generations of Jews, simply because they didn’t have access to their ancestral homeland—in effect damning them for the sins of their fathers? It’s roughly the same problem we ran into when we realized that they haven’t had the ark of the Covenant and its mercy seat with which to carry out the rites of the Day of Atonement since before the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C.—meaning that if the Torah doesn’t point toward something greater, if it isn’t symbolic of a more comprehensive reality, then their sins have accumulated without atonement or forgiveness for the last twenty-six hundred years! Yahweh hasn’t *forced* Israel to recognize Yahshua as the fulfillment of these two prophetic types (and hundreds of others), of course. But He has placed Him firmly in the “strongly suggested” category. The Jews’ only remotely logical alternatives—the self-serving prevarications of rabbinical Judaism and mindless retreat into atheism—leave much to be desired (if you ask me).

On the other hand, if Yahshua actually was (and is) the Messiah, then a whole different paradigm is in play. “The place where Yahweh chooses to make His name abide” is in reality the hearts of Spirit-indwelled believers. (Did not Paul remind us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? And is not the temple God’s picture of His plan for our redemption and reconciliation?) Passover is “kept” there—in our hearts—through our recognition, acceptance of, and trust in the sacrifice of Yahshua on Calvary’s cross, for He is indeed “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The second *miqra* on Yahweh’s calendar is inextricably linked with the first—so much so that in common Jewish practice and parlance, they were seen as virtually the same thing. It’s only natural: the lamb that was slain on the afternoon of Passover was eaten after sundown, that is, technically several hours into the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The fire that was kindled during the first *miqra* was used to roast the lamb on the second. The leaven or yeast that was removed from every Israelite home on *Pesach* was the very thing characterized and defined

Chag Matzah by its absence. One day could not be observed without the other, and they were, for all intents and purposes, seen and celebrated as one holiday.

But Yahweh was very careful to separate them in His instructions, to call them by different names and place them on different dates—though the second followed immediately on the heels of the first. It behooves us to ask why. If these days were purely memorial—if they spoke only of the events surrounding the exodus—then there would be no reason to distinguish them. But if they were symbolic of separate concepts, prophetic of different events that would prove crucial to God’s plan for our redemption, then we need to carefully consider what these things might be. We have already observed that the crucifixion of Yahshua took place on the 14th of Nisan, Passover, in the year 33—His death occurred at the very time the paschal lambs were being slain. This of course is a dead giveaway (if you’ll pardon the all-too-literal expression) to Christians that Yahshua’s sacrifice was the very thing the Passover symbolically pointed toward. Indeed, recognition of this fact is what most fundamentally separates Christianity from Judaism. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, then, symbolizes a different facet of Yahweh’s plan. Precisely what that is will become apparent in the next few Precepts.

(836) *Observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the day specified by Yahweh. “On the fifteenth day of this month [the first month, Abib/Nisan] is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.”* (Numbers 28:17-18) The day after the Nisan 14 Passover, a seven-day festival (see Precept #838) was to begin. We are reminded that the first day of this *mo’ed* was to be a *qodesh miqra*, a holy convocation—and a Sabbath: no customary work was to be done. (We find this literally the case in the crucifixion year, 33 A.D., when Nisan 15 fell on a Saturday, the natural Sabbath.) And indeed, when the sun heralding the Sabbath fell below the horizon, the work of our redemption had been completed. The sacrifice had been made, the fires of judgment had been kindled, and Yahshua had declared, “It is finished.”

Something else had been finished as well. The leaven—all of it—had been removed from the household of faith. That is, our sin (which is what leaven represents) had been physically taken away, if we would but trust in Yahshua’s finished work. These things—the Sabbath and the removal of leaven—are related. With both images, the picture of God’s having already done the work of removing the sin from our lives is the central theme. If we fail to accept that Yahweh has removed our sin—*past tense*—we are faced with the prospect of doing it ourselves (something that has proved impossible for everyone who’s ever tried). And if we

refuse to “rest” in Yahshua’s finished work, represented by the Sabbath, we once again will be faced with a never-ending and ultimately impossible task: working to achieve reconciliation with God on our own merits.

So whereas Passover explained the means by which Yahweh would redeem us, the Feast of Unleavened Bread reveals that He has actually accomplished His mission—and that we may now rest in the assurance of our salvation: our sin has been removed from our lives. What was Yahshua doing on this day in 33? His body rested from its labors in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. His soul meanwhile, made alive by the Spirit of God, “**went and preached to the [antediluvian] spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient,**” as we’re informed in I Peter 3:19-20. That is, He did nothing more to secure *our* release from sin, for everything that could be done, had been done.

- (837) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* **“You shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah you shall offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; you shall offer one-tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs; also one goat as a sin offering, to make atonement for you. You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering.”** (Numbers 28:19-23) Though in a class by itself, the Passover Lamb wasn’t the only sacrifice specified for the spring *miqrym*. Here, still in the context of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we see an assortment of “burnt offerings,” or *olah*, which, if you’ll recall, were not to be eaten by the priests or the worshippers, but were to be wholly consumed in the flames of the altar, indicating their dedication to Yahweh. Let us break down the list and review what each type of sacrifice signified in the liturgy of Israel.

First were two young bulls. Bulls, you’ll recall, represent false teaching, the influence and error of the world’s agenda. At first, I was puzzled as to why Yahweh would specify two of them. Indeed, if these instructions were for Israel’s edification only, this would make no sense. But Yahweh knew that eventually there would be two groups who called upon His name (or *should have*), Israel and the *ekklesia* of Yahshua, and both of them would make ruinous mistakes, foster damnable heresies, and embrace error. Not the same mistakes, mind you: Israel’s blunder would consist most fundamentally of its rejection of their Messiah; the church’s most disastrous misstep would be its propensity to incorporate pagan worship practices and attitudes. Both would display a tendency to ignore what Yahweh had told them and substitute their own manmade traditions

in place of His Word in their daily walk. The close familial relationship He wished to share with them both would all too often be cast aside in favor of mindless religion. The parent-child bond of love He desired to foster between us would be twisted by us into a sad caricature: we would habitually respond to our Heavenly Father either with arrogant pride or obsequious obeisance. Fortunately, both permutations of this “bull” are being consigned to the flame. Both Israel and the Church will be, in their own way, purged of their sacrilege.

The ram (a mature male sheep with horns) represents the Messiah, with special emphasis being placed on His authority, His right to rule. He is the Lamb of God who has been qualified, so to speak, by laying down His life for His people. This ram is a precursor of the honored Lamb in the heavenly scene recorded by John: **“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”** (Revelation 5:11-13)

Then there were seven yearling lambs, which again represent Yahshua the Messiah, but this time emphasizing the totality of His innocence: their number, seven, speaks of completion and perfection, and they are said to be “without blemish.” All of these *olah* sacrifices are accompanied with fine flour. This flour (which speaks of God’s provision for us in this life) is grain from which the worthless, inedible husks have been removed through a milling process that can only be described as “tribulation.” The flour is permeated with olive oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. So ask yourself: for whom does God provide in this life, refining them through trials to become pure and undefiled, filling them with His Spirit? *Us!* We believers accompany our Messiah as the fine flour accompanies the lambs.

Finally, a goat is offered. The symbolism is explained for us right in the text: **“as a sin offering, to make atonement for you.”** Note that only one goat is offered, as if to say it’s not so much our *sins* being atoned for—the individual acts of less-than-perfect behavior that plague our days. Rather it’s our *sin*—the very concept of our failure before God. All of this is to be offered up as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These things are the sum total of what it means to have the “leaven” removed from our lives.

- (838) *Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.* “**In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to Yahweh; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.**” (Numbers 28:24-25) The sacrifices that were made on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, listed in the previous precept, were to be repeated every day for the duration of the festival—seven days in all. Both the first day and the seventh day were designated Sabbaths—days in which no one was to do their regular jobs. We should contrast this with the arrangement we’ll see concerning the final *miqra*, the Feast of Tabernacles, where another Sabbath was tacked onto the end as well (see Precept #861). But there it was to fall upon the *eighth* day, not the seventh as is the case here. The symbol is different because the reality it represents is different.

As always, seven is the number indicating completion or perfection. Bearing in mind what each sacrifice meant—the two bulls, the ram, the seven lambs, the fine flour with oil, and the goat—it is clear that Yahweh wants us to understand that Yahshua’s sacrifice would be complete, perfect in every way for its intended purpose—to remove our sin from us so our fellowship with God could be restored. By declaring both the first and last days of the festival to be Sabbaths, Yahweh is telling us, in so many words, “From beginning to end, My grace is sufficient for you.” Or, as the risen Yahshua put it, “**Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.**” Then, as if to declare Himself the very personification of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the bridge between Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits, He explained, “**I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.**” (Revelation 1:17-18)

Something else worth noting: these sacrifices—made by man in recognition of God’s awesome accomplishments—are pleasing to Yahweh. They are His “food,” a “sweet aroma” to Him. As odd as it may sound (especially if we’ve been raised in an atmosphere of dour, works-based religious repression) God actually *enjoys* it when we acknowledge what He’s done for us. Like any father, he loves it when His children jump up into His lap, hug Him, and thank Him for being their Daddy. You know it’s true: moments like that make all the grief and toil worth it.

- (839) *Assemble before Yahweh on the seventh day of the feast.* “**Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to Yahweh your God. You shall do no work on it.**” (Deuteronomy 16:8) A slightly re-phrased repetition of the same thought is found here in Deuteronomy, this time with a reminder that only unleavened bread—a symbol of the life

Yahweh provides, free from corruption—was to be eaten for the whole week. The concept of the *godesh miqra*—a holy convocation—is reintroduced here, but a different Hebrew word is used. “Sacred assembly” (“solemn,” in some translations) is the Hebrew noun *asarah*, which is derived, oddly enough, from the verb *asar*, meaning to hold back, restrain, or govern. The idea is that on this Sabbath, we are to restrain ourselves from working—from usurping Yahweh’s authority by attempting to attain a sinless state through our own efforts—presumably because it can’t be done. Being “governed” by God’s methods thus gathers us into a sacred, solemn assembly of like-minded believers, trusting in the finished work of Yahshua, as represented by the sacrifices of the *miqra*.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

We discussed certain aspects of the Feast of Firstfruits in Chapter 13 of Volume One of *The Owner’s Manual*, in Mitzvot #517-#520, and again in Mitzvah #552. There we observed that Maimonides was fixated on what grain offerings must be made, how much to bring, when to do this, and in what order. It totally escaped him that without a tabernacle or temple or priesthood, none of what he said was legally possible. Once again, we are faced with the prospect that if Yahweh didn’t have something more important in mind when He instituted these appointments, if they were not symbolic of some great and fundamental truth affecting the destiny of the entire human race, then His instruction concerning them (along with the bulk of the Torah) devolves into what looks like a silly, pointless exercise in which God delights in seeing an entire race of people chase their collective tail—endeavoring to do the impossible in order to appease the unreasonable. In other words, the very idea is nonsense.

(840) *Observe the Feast of Firstfruits on the day specified by Yahweh. “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.’”* (Leviticus 23:9-11) Even though the third *miqra* on Yahweh’s schedule wasn’t memorial of anything related to the exodus, and even though there was no overt connection between it and the first two *mo’edim*, the Feast of Firstfruits (also known as *Bikurim*) followed the initial Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread by only one day, making its scripturally mandated date the 16th of Nisan. This placed it *within* the seven-day observance of Unleavened Bread—making it part of the process

by which our sin is shown to be removed from our lives, and at the same time indicative of something entirely unique in God's plan.

Believers in Yahshua, of course, immediately recognize the significance of the timing: the day after the specified Sabbath marked the resurrection of Christ from the tomb—Sunday, Nisan 16 (April 3), 33 A.D. Our entire faith hinges on the reality of this one act: the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits in the resurrection of Yahshua. It's not that it's any more important than His substitutionary death (predicted by Passover) or the fact of His having removed our sin from us forever (prophesied by the Feast of Unleavened Bread). But by conquering physical death, Yahshua proved His deity and His worthiness to be the propitiation—the One who can legitimately atone—for our sin. After all, men die because they sin. It's a universal fact of our nature. Only One who was sinless—who was in fact God incarnate—could presume to die to provide a ransom for the ruined life of someone else. If He weren't sinless, He'd be paying for His own sins, leaving the rest of us right back where we started—lost.

It isn't immediately apparent, however, how the resurrection of Yahshua meshes with the imagery set forth in the *miqra* of Firstfruits. Let's walk through it. You begin with grain, which Yahweh has caused to grow out of the dust for our benefit and nourishment. This grain is no longer growing in the field (that is, alive and walking among us) but has rather been cut down and bound by men: it's a sheaf. It is the intention of God and Man alike that the grain be used to make the bread of life, but Yahweh asks us to do something first: bring it to the priest (he whose function it is to communicate with God on our behalf), who is then to wave the sheaf before Yahweh as acknowledgment that He is the source of this blessing, the One worthy of our thankful praise.

This "sheaf" in this illustration is Yahshua, cut down by men for the benefit of men (on Passover). The "priest" is also Yahshua—He who ultimately represents mankind before Yahweh. And in a remarkable plot twist, Yahweh—the God to Whom we owe our thanks—is *also* Yahshua, voluntarily bereft of several dimensions and clothed in mortal human flesh. (I guess it's true: sometimes if you want something done right, you've got to do it Yourself.) Thus the sheaf, when lifted into the air before Yahweh, is a picture of the resurrection.

Moses notes that the sheaf will be "accepted by Yahweh on *your* behalf," that is, on behalf of—for the benefit of—those who brought it to the priest in thanksgiving to God. Logically then, if we do not thank God for the bounty He has provided (ultimately, our salvation) the sacrifice of Yahshua will *not* be "accepted by Yahweh on our behalf." In other words,

though the sheaf has been cut down, its benefit to us depends upon our willingness to accept it with thanksgiving and acknowledge its Source. After all, the Israelites (as we saw in Leviticus 23:14, Mitzvot #518-520) were forbidden to do anything with the grain until it had been presented before Yahweh as the firstfruits offering. Christ's death avails us nothing as a mere "historical event." This is personal.

And notice something else: the sheaf (Yahshua) is not all the grain there is. There is a whole field out there waiting to be harvested. Yahshua is not just the "fruit," but the *firstfruit*. The harvest to come will be comprised of grain that is like that first sheaf—it has the same sort of spiritual DNA, if you will. We are the same kind of organism—children of Yahweh—brothers and sisters of the Son of God. There are other kinds of plants out there in the world, of course, but they are not the same "species" as Yahshua and His followers. They may even look somewhat similar, but upon close examination, it becomes evident that there is nothing of value there—you can't make "bread" out of them that will spiritually nourish the world. Some of these plants are merely worthless, while some are poisonous, but none of them will participate in the harvest. Oh, they'll be cut down at the end of the age all right, but they won't be gathered into God's "barn." So the Feast of Firstfruits, between the lines, predicts a coming harvest of believers. As we shall see in a little while, the harvest itself is commemorated by another of Yahweh's seven *mo'ed-miqrym*.

- (841) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Firstfruits. "You shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin."* (Leviticus 23:12-13) As we saw in Precept #837, several symbolically significant animals from the flocks and herds of Israel were to be sacrificed as burnt offerings on each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since the Feast of Firstfruits falls on the second of those seven days, you might expect the offerings of Unleavened Bread to serve for both celebrations. But here we see that in addition to the bulls, rams, lambs, and goats of *Chag Matzah*, a separate burnt offering was to be made on Firstfruits, *Bikurim*. Once again, we see that Yahweh wants us to keep them separate in our minds, for they predict different things.

The special Firstfruits offerings were to be performed at the same time the sheaf of grain was being waved before Yahweh, indicating that the two things are related—indeed, the sacrifice of the lamb is the key to the meaning of the waving of the barley sheaf. The lamb, of course, signifies

The Lamb of God, Yahshua. As usual, the burnt offering is accompanied with a *minha* or grain offering with olive oil, reminding us of Yahweh's provision permeated by His Spirit. And as with most offerings (but overtly specified here) a drink offering (*neseq*) of wine was to be poured out, a transparent reference to the shed blood of Christ. "One-fourth of a hin" (somewhere between two and three pints) is significant for two reasons. First (as I explained in Vol. 1, Chapter 12) the drink offering and the oil for the *minha* were always the same amount. But second, it seems likely to me that this is the precise volume of blood Yahshua would have lost during His ordeal on the cross. The average human body holds a little under five quarts of blood, and the amount specified here is about a third of that, perhaps slightly less. Crucifixion victims did not bleed to death, though blood loss certainly weakened them. Their Roman torturers actually made it a point to avoid severing arteries with their nails, for they didn't want their prey to succumb too quickly: agony was a far better intimidation tool than mere death. The imagery of the *miqra*, then, links the blood of the Messiah spilled upon the earth with the rising of His Spirit and body, as the oil is burned upon the altar with the grain and the flesh of the lamb, rising as smoke toward the heavens. It's the perfect picture of Christ's bodily resurrection, if you know what to look for.

FEAST OF WEEKS

The Feast of Weeks was known as Pentecost in the Greek New Covenant scriptures (*pentekonta* means fifty; *pentekoste* means "the fiftieth day") because there were to be exactly fifty days between the Sabbath beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread and this fourth *mo'ed* in Yahweh's schedule of seven appointments. It's also known as *Shavu'ot*, the Feast of the Harvest, and (since it's not confusing enough already) it's occasionally associated with the concept of "firstfruits," though this time the summer wheat harvest is in view, not the spring barley harvest—which was the focus of *the* "Feast of Firstfruits," *Bikurim*.

We covered the basics under Mitzvah #521 in Volume 1, Chapter 13. There we demonstrated from scripture that the historical event presumed by the rabbis to be the reason for the holiday is wrong—they're off by several months. The real reason for the timing is revealed in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2: this would prove to be the day Yahweh chose to send His Spirit to indwell those who had received Yahshua as their Savior and anointed King. Shortly before His passion, Yahshua had told His disciples, **"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:16-17) The events of Acts 2 are the fulfillment of this

promise—tantamount to saying “God will personally dwell inside you”—as well as being the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks.

We should recognize that for Yahweh to take up residence within His children, a major paradigm shift has taken place, making this event worthy of a place—the central position, in fact—on His exclusive *mo‘ed-miqra* list. Why? Because formerly, His stated place of residence on earth was the Tabernacle or Temple—in the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25:8, 40:34). But from Pentecost onward, we believers—our bodies and souls—would be where Yahweh “lived.” As Paul put it, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”** (I Corinthians 3:16-17) And, **“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”** (II Corinthians 6:16; cf. Leviticus 26:12) This explains why our behavior *per se* has nothing to do with our salvation, and why practicing religion in lieu of having a personal relationship with God is spiritual suicide. The only real issue is whether or not Yahweh’s Spirit dwells within us. Remember: His Spirit only comes if invited.

(842) *Observe the Feast of Weeks on the day specified by Yahweh. “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain.”* (Deuteronomy 16:9) **“Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation.”** (Numbers 28:26) The timing of the Feast of Weeks is described several different ways in scripture, but they aren’t contradictory: they all boil down to the same thing. Another way of putting it was what we saw in Leviticus 23:15-16. **“You shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.** There is a raging rabbinical controversy, of course, as to whether the “Sabbath” in question is the *miqra* of Unleavened Bread (designated a Sabbath even when it didn’t fall on the seventh day of the week), or the natural Sabbath that came closest to it. Only in one year out of seven, on average, would the *miqra* fall on a natural Sabbath. And Yahweh—who is *not* the author of confusion—saw to it that the definitive fulfillment of the Feast occurred in just such a year, 33 A.D., making the whole discussion academic.

This means that the day after the Sabbath upon which *Chag Matzah* fell, the Israelites would begin to harvest the barley crop—they would “begin to put the sickle to the grain.” By definition, this is a Sunday.

Seven weeks to the day after this (i.e., Sunday, Sivan 6) the Feast of Weeks, *Shavu'ot*, would be celebrated by, among other things, bringing the firstfruits of the *wheat* harvest as a “new grain offering,” as we saw in Numbers 28:26 above. So you may be asking, as I did, what does the wheat harvest have to do with the indwelling of God’s people with His Holy Spirit? I believe the answer is to be found in God’s consistent use of metaphor. Yahshua used this one twice in Matthew 13:

First, the parable of the sower: **“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”** (Matthew 13:19-23) Those of us who “hear the word and understand it” are those who “bear fruit.” What fruit? In context, it’s the increase of the grain that the Sower has sown, something explained later by Paul as **“the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”** (Galatians 5:22-23) In other words, the harvest of souls promised by the Feast of Weeks is possible *only* if those souls are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God—as evidenced by “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives.

A second parable explains the difference between bearing “the fruit of the Spirit” and bearing no fruit at all. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [weeds that look like wheat but bear no fruit] among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ ... And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’ He answered and said to them: ‘He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.’”** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-38) Beside the prophetic

ramifications for the worthless tares, the lesson at hand is: “the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom,” i.e., those who produce the “fruit of the Spirit” since they are indwelt by that Spirit. It is these alone who will be harvested when the time comes. But the harvest *per se* is a subject embodied in another *miqra*. For now, we’re “just” being shown how the Spirit of Yahweh indwells and sets apart the “wheat” growing in the field of this world—you and me, if we trust God.

- (843) *Present an offering to Yahweh on the Feast of Weeks.* “Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” (Deuteronomy 16:10-12) In Leviticus 23:15-20 (Mitzvah #521) a whole range of offerings were mandated by Yahweh for the Feast of Weeks—all symbolic of the coming Messiah, one way or another. But here in Deuteronomy, none of that is repeated. Rather, the people are given a short list of related instructions designed to help them get to the essence of the *mo‘ed-miqra*. The “Then” that begins our passage refers to the calculation of the date for the Feast spoken of in the previous verse (and our previous Precept).

First, a “freewill offering” is to be made. That’s a *nadabah*, literally: “voluntariness.” It’s based on the verb *nadab*, meaning “to make willing, to incite.” The idea here is that Yahweh had “incited” the Israelites to thankfulness by blessing them, and they are to take the opportunity of the *miqra* to willingly respond in kind “as Yahweh your God blesses you.” It’s an admonition to remember and recognize Yahweh’s blessings.

Second, they were to rejoice—not only those who were enjoying obvious temporal blessings, but everyone. Rich and poor, free and slave, citizens and aliens, landowners and Levites, families as well as widows and orphans—*everyone* was to rejoice. Yahweh is telling us that something about this day is a universal cause for joy, something that transcends our earthly circumstances. That “something,” as it turns out, is the indwelling of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit, which is available to everyone, regardless of his or her station in life, temporal circumstances, cultural background, or personal history. No one is so broke, so oppressed, or so simple-minded that he can’t cry out to God. And no one is so rich, privileged, or gifted that he doesn’t need God.

Third, they were to keep the feast “at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” Physically, this was where the Tabernacle or Temple stood, but as we have seen, that “place” is now—ever since the fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks on Sunday, the sixth day of Sivan, 33 A.D.—within the hearts and minds of believers. *We* are the Temple of God; *we* are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

And fourth, they were to remember their former state as slaves, being forever cognizant of the change that had taken place in their lives. More to the point, the Israelites needed to remember Who had brought about that transformation from bondage to freedom. It was Yahweh, not themselves. They had been slaves in Egypt so long, it didn’t even occur to them that freedom was possible; nor could they have attained it for themselves by simply rebelling against the world they knew. They needed a deliverer, a redeemer, a savior. It’s the same with us: while we remain in bondage to our sin, it is not in our own power to effect our release. Only Yahweh can free us—and He has. This we must never forget.

We are by no means finished with our survey of Yahweh’s appointments, His holy convocations. But this might be a good place to take stock of where we are in His unfolding plan. Each of the four *mo’edim-miqrym* we’ve addressed thus far have been fulfilled in history—all within the space of a little over seven weeks in the spring and early summer of 33 A.D. Each of the four took place on the very days of the Hebrew calendar that were required in the Torah. And each of the four was ultimately centered on the life, sacrifice, and Spirit of Yahshua of Nazareth. To recap, the first appointment was Passover, fulfilled through the sacrificial death of Yahshua. The second, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, prophesied the fact that the Passover sacrifice had removed the curse of sin from our lives. The third *miqra*, the Feast of Firstfruits, was fulfilled through the Messiah’s resurrection, a harbinger of our own anticipated harvest. And the fourth, the Feast of Weeks, came to pass when the very Spirit of God took up permanent residence in the lives of the followers of the Messiah.

Of course, not everyone is prepared to perceive that the first four Feasts of Yahweh were fulfilled in the person of Yahshua. Orthodox Jews, by definition, do not. In order to see this truth, one has to be willing to accept a comprehensive, and quite consistent, system of symbols and metaphors that Yahweh built into His Torah. Some of these (such as the goat atoning for sin) He explained in the immediate context; some (like the lamb of God ultimately being fulfilled in

Christ, or the drink offering representing His spilled blood) were made clear only in the Gospels. And others (for instance, that the sacrifice of a bull represents the rejection of false worship and the world's ungodly agenda) are pretty much left for us to figure out on our own. So it's a fair question to ask: why didn't God simply spell it out in plain English—okay, Hebrew? *I'm going to manifest Myself as a human being and provide Myself as an offering, so whoever chooses to trust in the efficacy of My sacrifice to redeem him from his debt of sin will never have to die, but will enjoy fellowship with Me for all eternity.* (Oops, He *did* spell it out, not in the Torah, and not in Hebrew, but in John 3:16, in Greek) Why didn't Yahweh make His plan clearer in the beginning? Because love requires choice: He wanted folks to choose to be with Him, and that means the option must exist *not* to choose Him or accept His way. So instead, He employed symbols and metaphors, dress rehearsals and outright prophecies. To one who's looking for Yahweh, as I am, the symbols are ridiculously transparent; but to those who are not willing to accept God's grace, they're opaque, mysterious, pointless, and in the end, impossible to follow.

But I digress. We were talking about how Yahweh has delivered four essential features of His plan of redemption through Yahshua's role in the first four *miqrym*. We can safely surmise that something equally significant remains to be accomplished in each of the remaining three. So what's left on Yahweh's revealed "to-do" list? What has He said He would do on our behalf? What has He told us about time and again, both by implication and overt prophetic prediction, in the Old Testament and the New? It's actually a rather short list.

First (in order of human expectation, not of chronological fulfillment) is the concept that the Messiah must come. This is the one thing Orthodox Jews and Christians can agree upon, though Christians realize that He will be coming *back again*. It is clear from the large body of Messianic prophecy that no one has fulfilled *all* of the things prophesied of Him: He has yet to come in power and glory, a King reigning over the whole earth in justice and wisdom with a rod of iron, as the Scriptures insist He must. The Messiah will, moreover, rule as King of the Jews: His throne will be in Jerusalem.

The second thing on God's unfinished agenda is to restore Israel. I realize that Task Number One listed above sounds like roughly the same thing, but it's not. You see, Yahweh's idea of restoration and that of the Rabbinical Jewish mindset are two very different things. The rabbis envision a new era of earthly political power reminiscent of the glory days of Solomon. But in reality, Israel's coming political ascendancy under the Messiah's reign will be a *byproduct* of her national restoration, not its cause. That's because Israel's restoration, as far as God is concerned, will be a *spiritual* phenomenon. As Yahweh promised Solomon, **"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face,**

and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14) Israel's "wicked ways" continue to this very day, evidenced by the ongoing state of exile outside of Israel and the Muslim blight within it. God has not yet "healed their land," but He will. What will it take to bring this about? A complete spiritual paradigm reversal within Israel—precipitated, I'm afraid, by the coming of God's wrath upon the earth. It may sound like the most improbable of scenarios, but this repentance leading to restoration is the single most oft-repeated prophetic theme in the entire Bible. Yahweh apparently enjoys doing the impossible, and He always keeps His word.

Third, and most astonishing of all, is the promised transformation of Yahweh's people from their present mortal state, human beings made of dust, subject to entropy and eventual death, into glorious immortal beings (not unlike the resurrected Christ), with bodies built for a new heaven and a new earth where death is a foreign concept. This miraculous "translation" from one kind of body into another isn't some Johnny-come-lately Christian theological innovation, either. It was revealed in the oldest writings in the Bible: **"All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You."** (Job 14:14-15) What kind of "change?" **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."** (Job 19:25-27) Yeah. Mine too. Paul described the process God would employ to bring this about in I Corinthians 15:35-54.

We shall soon learn that these three monumental "tasks" God has set for Himself are reflected in the celebration of the final three *mo'edim* on His list. You may be thinking, *There's a fourth thing, isn't there? What about all that judgment, wrath, and hell-fire I've heard about all my life? Aren't those things on God's agenda?* Yes, they are, but they are not subjects for our celebration or commemoration. We will not participate in these things. Although Yahweh in His mercy has revealed what lies in store for His enemies, so that we might warn them, His holy convocations are appointments He's made with *us*—meetings whose time, place, and circumstances tell us of the incredible lengths to which our God went so that we might have life, abundant and eternal.