

*Prophetic programme in the*  
**Seven Feasts of Israel**

Johan Malan

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## **Preface**

Johan Malan has written about the feasts of Israel with his customary thoroughness and clear thinking. He offers a very balanced approach of the subject and clears up a lot of confusion about how, why and if they should be celebrated in this age. At the same time, he uncompromisingly corrects some of the extreme views and errors relating to the subject.

The further I read in this book, the more obvious it became to me that my friend has a Spirit-inspired understanding of their prophetic significance. He connects the feasts of Israel with the first and second advents of her Messiah in a wonderful and very biblical way. In these times of distraction and deception, it is refreshing to come across a book that is not only theologically sound, but also very readable and enlightening. More importantly, the Redeemer who came from Heaven to love us and give Himself for us is pre-eminent throughout its pages.

I have no hesitation in saying that this work will make a valuable contribution to end-time literature. It will help you and I to better understand the times that we are living in and fill us with holy anticipation for the things that are still to come. It is long overdue and I highly recommend it to every Jew and every Gentile who longs to walk in the whole counsel of God.

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# 1. Shadow and Substance

The festivals of the Lord in Leviticus 23 are among the most enlightening passages in the Old Testament as they contain a prophetic programme on the future revelation of the Messiah in New Testament times. A blueprint of His plan to redeem humanity is evident from the different activities and rituals. The feasts are highly instructional in teaching believers what the Messiah would do during His first and second coming, and also highly devotional through demonstrating to Israel, as well as all future believers, how the Messiah should be followed, worshipped and served. It constitutes, in typological form, an early doctrinal basis for the redemptive work of the Messiah as well as the ultimate revelation of His kingdom after a spiritual harvest has been gathered for His kingdom among all nations.

In his authoritative and widely read book on the feasts, Edward Chumney (1994:1) says: “The festivals of the Lord found in Leviticus 23 were given to us by God so His people could understand the coming of the Messiah and the role that the Messiah would play in redeeming and restoring both man and the earth back to God following the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Although most non-Jewish Bible readers have heard of the feasts, the deep meaning and importance of these feasts are almost universally not understood. The apostle Paul wrote to the Gentile believers in Colossae that the feasts of the Lord, the new moon and the Sabbath days were a *shadow of things to come* to teach us about the Messiah (Col. 2:16-17). Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus, which means *Salvation*) was the substance or fulfilment of the greater plan that God revealed and foreshadowed in these seven important festivals.”

The seven feasts and their fulfilment are indicated in the table below:

<b>Old Testament Shadow</b>	<b>New Testament Fulfilment</b>
<b>1. Passover</b>	<b>Sacrificing of the Lamb of God</b>
<b>2. Unleavened Bread</b>	<b>Burial of Messiah</b>
<b>3. Feast of Firstfruits</b>	<b>Messiah’s resurrection</b>
<i>50 days between Firstfruits and Pentecost (Feast of Weeks)</i>	<i>50 days between the resurrection of Christ and Pentecost</i>
<b>4. Pentecost</b> ( <i>celebrating the receiving of the Law</i> )	<b>Pentecost</b> ( <i>celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit</i> )
<i>Four months during which the harvest is gathered in Israel</i>	<i>Dispensation of world evangelism to gather a harvest for the kingdom of God among all nations</i>
<b>5. The Feast of Trumpets</b> <i>Final gathering of the harvest</i>	<b>Sounding of the trumpet</b> <i>God’s harvest of souls is gathered</i>
<i>The seven days of awe: a time of testing and humbling*</i>	<i>The seven years of the Tribulation (Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> year-week)</i>
<b>6. Day of Atonement</b>	<b>Second coming of the Messiah</b>
<b>7. Feast of Tabernacles</b>	<b>Messiah’s millennial reign</b>

\* The seven days of awe referred to in the table are part of the ten days of awe from 1 to 10 Tishri, of which the first two coincide with the Feast of Trumpets and the tenth one with the Day of Atonement. The seven days in between refer to the time of Jacob’s trouble (the tribulation period).

The first four of these festivals, which are Passover (*Pesach*), Unleavened Bread (*Hag Hamatzah*), First Fruits (*Bikkurim*), and Pentecost (*Shavuot*), teach us about significant events in the first coming of the Messiah (*Mashiach*), while the last three feasts, which are the Feast of

Trumpets (*Yom Teruach* or *Rosh Hashanah*), the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) relate to important events associated with the second coming of the Messiah.

The feasts reveal to us the deeper things concerning our relationship with God and His Son, the Messiah, who gave Himself to be a propitiation for our sins. We will marvel at the wonderful way in which the feasts are fulfilled in New Testament times, and gain new appreciation for the inerrancy of the Bible as God's Word – particularly with regard to the fulfilment of biblical prophecies and Old Testament types of Christ.

The shadowy practices of the feasts in their original form, and their deep spiritual significance after their fulfilment in the Messiah, are a perfect reflection of God's plan of salvation for humanity, while also alluding to the final destination of believers in His kingdom. The symbolic acts in the first four feasts during springtime have a literal antitype in the Messiah's sacrifice for the salvation of sinners at His first coming. Practices in the last three feasts during the fall, give an indication of what the future holds when the Messiah will come again and reveal Himself in other capacities.

The most significant symbolic act, or shadowy practice, of the Jewish Passover was the slaying of the paschal lamb. The context of this ceremony was the situation of Israel's deliverance from their Egyptian bondage. The antitype of this event was the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the redeeming of people from their spiritual bondage caused by their slavery to sin. Another context of this feast of liberation was its celebration during the spring month, which fixes attention on the beginning of a new life under the care of God.

In the Feast of Unleavened Bread, leaven is used as a symbol of sin. Only the Messiah's life was sinless and perfect, and for that reason only He could fulfil the symbol of unleavened bread. He gives us grace to overcome sin.

The Feast of Firstfruits introduced the harvest season in Israel. It was symbolic of the beginning of a spiritual harvest that would be introduced by the Messiah's crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.

The Feast of Pentecost was an occasion of consecration in which two loaves of bread which were baked from the first wheat of the season were dedicated to the Lord with a view to sanctifying the entire nation. During the feast, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai is commemorated, but that only pointed to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Who writes the words of the Lord on the tables of believers' hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).

In the annual cycle of seven feasts there is a gap of four months between the spring and autumn festivals. The people of Israel were always conscious of the importance of the three harvest festivals as indicative of interventions by God (now and in the future) to reward believers during *Rosh Hashanah*, (the Feast of Trumpets), to judge unrepentant sinners during the seven days of awe following *Rosh Hashanah*, to save Israel on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) and to institute the promised Messianic kingdom during *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles).

In the light of these prophetic expectations, a time of humbling and repentance starts a month ahead of the harvest festivals in Israel, on the first day of the month Elul. This period extends for 40 days. After 30 days, on 1 Tishri, the Feast of Trumpets is celebrated for two days, followed by an intensive time of repentance during the ensuing seven days of awe, and concluded on *Yom Kippur* on 10<sup>th</sup> Tishri when the high priest made atonement for the sins of the nation. If the people fully repented from all their sins they found favour in the eyes of the Lord and could look forward to the celebration of the seventh feast, *Sukkot*, which is a joyous occasion after the final ingathering of the harvest.

The spiritual significance of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) is explained as follows by John Parsons (2012:4) of *Hebrew for Christians*: "From a spiritual perspective, *Sukkot* corresponds to the joy of knowing your sins were forgiven during *Yom Kippur*, and also recalls God's miraculous provision and care after the deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Lev. 23:43). Prophetically, *Sukkot* anticipates the coming kingdom of Yeshua the Messiah wherein all the nations shall

come up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord during this festival (Zech. 14:16). ... In light of the work of Yeshua as our High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) of the New Covenant, we now have access to the Heavenly Temple of God (Heb. 4:16). We are now members of the greater Temple of His body; we are now part of His great *Sukkah!*”

### **Greater appreciation for the New Testament**

Downie (1994:53) notes that five of the seven feasts were one-day feasts: Passover, Firstfruits, Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), Trumpets, and Atonement; the other two, Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, being seven-day feasts. The one-day feasts speak of certain acts of God completed once and for all, e.g. the death and resurrection of Christ, which could only take place once. The seven-day feasts speak of the blessed results of those feasts, and contain meticulous guidelines on how people should conduct their lives in the light of God’s deliverance.

Knowledge of the feasts will add greater appreciation of the New Testament institution of the Lord’s Supper, which is based on the first three feasts. As often as we observe this ceremony (as frequent as we like, regardless of the occasion) we reflect on God’s redemptive work through the Messiah, which was first revealed to us in these ancient festivals.

Believers in the Messiah stand to gain much spiritually from studying the Old Testament feasts of the Lord, particularly in paying attention to the detail of the various ceremonies and rituals, as that will guide us into probing the deep significance of the Messiah’s atonement for sins on the cross. When the Old Testament shadows are well understood we have more appreciation for the New Testament substance.

In the next chapter we will first discuss the basic nature of biblical prophecies, as well as the fulfilment of biblical types, as that will help us understand the typological nature of the paschal lamb and all the ceremonies connected to it, as well as the chronological fulfilment of the seven feasts in New Testament times.

Paying attention to the fulfilment of biblical prophecies will keep us from becoming involved with the continued perusal of shadowy practices which have already been fulfilled in the Messiah. When such rituals and practices are observed in a legalistic way without considering their prophetic significance as preliminary institutions aimed at preparing Israel on the coming of the Messiah, there is a very real danger that Jesus may be denied as Messiah. Such people might be inclined to view the feasts and laws of the Old Testament as their final means of salvation.

If we are fully aware of the prophetic nature of the seven feasts, they will unlock a wonderful future scenario on the Messiah, who alone can give full substance to the promises and typological images of the Old Testament. An unshakeable faith in Christ is the basis of an unbroken relationship with Him, by which we daily remain in contact with Him through our prayers and by walking in the Spirit. We are called upon to pray always (Eph. 6:18), thereby underscoring the fact that the intermittent holy days of the Old Testament have been replaced by a form of continuous worship which is not confined to certain holy days or seasons of the year.

The temple service with all its rites and ceremonies was abolished under the New Covenant of the Messiah, as the atoning death of the Saviour offers all believers frequent access to the throne of grace (Heb. 10:19-23). The personal relationship that we are enabled, through the Holy Spirit, to maintain with the Messiah after His once for all sacrifice on the cross, does not need mediation by priests. They offered typological sacrifices and also made a host of symbolic gestures to demonstrate reverence for God.

The religious life of New Testament believers has been enhanced through faith in Christ, on the basis of which we enjoy an infinitely deeper dimension of spiritual fellowship by being drawn close to God through the Messiah. Because of this, religious observance has been simplified and detached from multiple ritualistic expressions. In our spiritual worship we only observe the rituals of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which are both symbolic acts pointing to a definite religious experience.

The New Testament is the fulfilment of promises made in the Old Testament. Much spiritual benefit can be derived from studying the unfolding of God’s plan with humanity in the Old

Testament, as well as reviewing the persons, practices and experiences that foreshadowed the Messiah and our life of faith. We can, for instance, comprehend more fully all the implications of being a temple of the living God ourselves (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17) if we make a detailed study of the Old Testament temple service. The first is a type of the new, spiritual temple and instructs us more on what is expected of us. Likewise, a study of the feasts will help us to fully appreciate the way in which God introduced Israel to His divine plan of salvation, what He demands from people to enter into a relationship of faith with Him, and how He demonstrated His timeless demands towards holy living to His people.

A study of the God-given feasts of Israel sheds much light on the divine calling and spiritual destiny of this special people who, by the grace of God, survived four thousand years of a highly turbulent history. The fact that they were temporarily set aside by God due to their unbelief in the Messiah, by no means suggests that they ceased to be part of God's plan for humanity, and have been replaced by a "spiritual Israel" which is not of Jewish origin (the church). The Bible does not teach replacement theology.

Israel was, and still is, a blessing to the Gentiles since the Word of God was entrusted to them (Rom. 3:2), and particularly because the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, was born from the tribe of Judah in Israel (Luke 3:23-31; Rom. 9:4-5). The salvation which they refused by rejecting the Messiah was offered to the Gentile world during the past two millennia. This means that, in their fallen state, Israel is already a blessing to us. Paul also makes the important remark that if Israel were as great a blessing to us during their spiritual blindness, how much more will they be a blessing to the world in their fullness as a truly Messianic people! (Rom. 11:11-12).

In the meantime, pending their national spiritual rebirth as a nation during the second coming of the Messiah, we should demonstrate to Israel the real and lasting difference which the Messiah's salvation can bring about in a believer's life. While studying the feasts of the Old Testament, which are God's feasts and not an invention of Israel, we should explain the Messianic symbolism of these feasts to the Covenant People.

By comparing the message of the feasts with the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth, strong evidence can be presented that all seven of them find their final fulfilment in Him. Four of the seven feasts have already been fulfilled in a remarkable and undisputed way, and we are on the verge of the fulfilment of the last three when the Messiah comes again – first for His bride and then to judge the world and bless the remnant of Israel and the nations.

## 2. Biblical Prophecies and Typology

Every Christian should be committed to esteem biblical prophecies and devote himself to studying them. Peter says: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private [or personal] interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Four important principles are evident from this scripture and should be regarded:

*Firstly*, biblical prophecies have a clear message on the future. Peter says that the prophetic word is made more certain and we will do well to pay attention to it. Biblical prophecy does not contain any human speculation but is a trustworthy word which deserves full acceptance since it was spoken by God Himself who is the highest authority in the universe: “God *is* not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19). His Word is truth (John 17:17), and “there is no variation or shadow of turning” with Him (Jas. 1:17). He holds the future in His hands and none of His promises or warnings will ever pass away unfulfilled – in Jesus Christ they are Yes and Amen and will all be fulfilled (2 Cor. 1:20).

*Secondly*, biblical prophecies are absolutely unique and in a category of their own. God revealed them to people through His Holy Spirit and had them recorded in His Word. This information should be distinguished from all other forms of prophecy. Extra-biblical prophecies do not carry the divine mark of authenticity and truth, since they are either of human or of occult origin. Prophecies of the latter kind are not derived from a study of the prophetic word in the Bible but originate from dreams, visions, divination, fortune-telling, strange voices that talk to people, or from extra-biblical prophets and seers such as Nostradamus and others. Many nations have their own prophets who prophesy independently from the Bible what people want to hear. In some cases these extra-biblical prophecies are tied to the Bible in an effort to make them more credible, but in such cases they become even more deceptive. Biblical prophecies only have one origin: “... holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet. 1:21). Authors of the Bible recorded prophecies under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These direct revelations ended in the year 95 AD, after the book of Revelation, the last of the Bible books, was completed. The whole counsel of God, as far as He wished to reveal it, was then declared to us (cf. Acts 20:27). We should only consult the Bible for information on what the future holds.

*Thirdly*, biblical prophecies are not a matter of personal interpretation. No person on earth – regardless of how learned he may be – can interpret biblical prophecies in terms of his own insight and understanding. These prophecies were given by the Holy Spirit, and for that reason only He can guide you into all truth by giving you enlightened eyes of the mind to understand the true meaning of His words (John 16:13; Eph. 1:18). You have to be born again and study the Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit before you will be able to comprehend its full meaning. Even if you are born again you have to ensure that your interpretation of prophecies has not been influenced by the church fathers or theologians of your own denomination. They may be mistaken, and if you follow them you are not necessarily guided by the Holy Spirit. It is evident that people who do not understand the true meaning of the prophetic word usually offer fanciful interpretations. Since these prophecies do not really make sense to them, they do not regard them seriously and literally, but rather interpret them symbolically or allegorically. That is essentially an indication of unbelief in the prophetic word since they do not accept the fact that, in the end-time, the large body of biblical prophecies will be fulfilled literally. They refuse to believe that there will be a serious falling away in the church and in the world, that Israel will be restored in their land during times of great distress, that there will be a personal Antichrist and a great tribulation, that true Christians will physically escape the tribulation period, and that Christ will establish a thousand-year reign of peace on earth after His second coming. They rather spiritualise the Bible to evade these hard facts, thereby making room for their own views which are then carried over from one generation to another in the form of theological traditions of men.

*Fourthly*, Peter says that we should study the prophetic word until the morning star rises in our hearts. According to Revelation 22:16 the morning star refers to the Lord Jesus and specifically the fact that He comes again. The morning star appears during the last night watch and proclaims the message that the night is far spent. To Christians, this message is embodied in our future expectation in the second coming of Jesus Christ, and that this time He will come as the Sun of Righteousness to illuminate the whole world and establish His millennial reign of peace here. At present it is, spiritually speaking, still dark but soon the night of sin and unrighteousness will have passed away and everlasting righteousness will prevail. Did the morning star of hope and the glad expectation of the coming of Christ rise in your heart? If not, you should make an intensive study of biblical prophecies on the end-time and the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Without this knowledge you cannot claim to be an informed Christian who walks in the light in all respects, and who understands contemporary world affairs in the light of the Word. With the Bright and Morning Star in your heart you separate yourself from the present, evil world, and join in building a kingdom which is presently not of this world, but will soon be revealed here when the King comes.

## **Typology**

Apart from biblical prophecies there are also various types in the Old Testament that foreshadow New Testament persons or events. In his foreword to Hugh Downie's book on Israel's harvest festivals (1994:9-10), J. Boyd Nicholson says that the study of typology may be applied to certain persons, objects and events. In Romans 5:14 it is clearly stated that Adam is a type of Christ: "Adam ... is a type of Him who was to come." The first Adam is the head of a sinful race of people but Jesus Christ (the last Adam) is the Head of a spiritually regenerated race of people: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). There are many other Old Testament persons who were types of Christ, e.g. Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20), Joseph, Moses, Joshua and David.

Furthermore, there are various Old Testament events, objects and practices that likewise are of great typological and prophetic significance. Israel's deliverance from their bondage in Egypt is rich in examples and types which point to the New Testament deliverance of lost humanity from the spiritual tyranny of Satan. The first Passover was celebrated in Egypt, and the paschal lamb was a distinct type of Christ: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Many of the experiences of Israel during their exodus were also shadows of God's future dealings with His people, and for that reason believers under the New Covenant are referred back to these events and experiences for further instruction:

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ ... Now all these things happened to them as examples (Gr. *typos*), and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:1-4, 11).

The typology is very clear. By following Moses who led Israel out of Egypt, they were baptised into Moses, and therefore united with their spiritual leader who was the mediator of the Old Covenant. Similarly, we are baptised into Christ who is the Mediator of the New Covenant. The food that Israel ate and the water that they drank in the wilderness were supernaturally provided and refer to spiritual nourishment for God's people. To us, Christ is the water and bread of life. The cleft rock alludes to Christ as the Rock of Ages who was cleft for us, while the stream of water that flowed from the rock refers to the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

Many other types were also given for the edification of both Israel and New Testament believers: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Serpent by becoming a curse for us on the cross (Gal. 3:13). By looking up to Him in faith we are spiritually quickened and imputed with God's righteousness and eternal life.



The tabernacle, as well as the temple that was built much later, were also rich in symbolism and typological activities which referred to the Messiah, His sacrifice for sins, and His divine attributes as the light of the world and the bread of life. The daily prayers which are to be offered at His throne of grace were also foreshadowed by the temple service. AB Simpson (2009:5-6) says:

“The tabernacle is the grandest of all the Old Testament types of Christ. It was all one great object lesson of spiritual truth. In its wonderful furniture, priesthood, and worship, we see, with a vividness that we find nowhere else, the glory and grace of Jesus, and the privileges of His redeemed people. ... So in this pattern from the mount (Ex. 25:8-9), we can understand as nowhere else, that glorious temple of which Christ is the corner-stone and we also, as living stones, are being built up in Him ‘as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet. 2:5).”

Downie (1994:15) says: “The typical part of the Bible is just as important as the historical, biographical, prophetic, poetical, doctrinal, or practical parts. All are necessary to a complete Bible, and the study of all is essential to a mind well stored with the truth of God.”

When conducting a study of biblical typology we should avoid two common dangers. Firstly, there is the danger of disregarding the type by not interpreting it in terms of its New Testament fulfilment. Secondly, there is a danger of exaggerating the type and making unjustified conclusions. There are aspects of the type which can never be applied to the antitype. All fanciful interpretations should be shunned, and Scripture is to be closely adhered to.

Complex scenarios are sometimes used as types of future situations that will be of a similar nature: “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:26-30).

When studying this typology, and specifically also the utter indulgence in sin by entire communities, it becomes evident that those people openly rebelled against God’s authority and His insistence on living morally decent lives, thereby inviting the divine wrath that was poured out upon them. In the end-time, a similar situation will prevail. Since the depravity which characterised the time of both Noah and Lot is typical of the spiritual, moral and social decline of the last days, the following correlation between the historical and end-time situations can be made:

- In the times of Noah and Lot anarchy prevailed as people in these lawless and promiscuous societies did just as they pleased. Violence was the most common means used to resolve conflicts (Gen. 6:13; 19:9). So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot moral depravity was widespread. People became so corrupt that all the intents and thoughts of their hearts were only evil continuously (Gen. 6:5; 19:5). So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot people were excessively materialistic and adopted permissive lifestyles involving all sorts of licentiousness, including sodomy (derived from the name *Sodom*). So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot people scoffed at the believers and chose to ignore the prophetic warnings of forthcoming judgements. They regarded them as far-fetched speculations and continued with their reckless lives. So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot God gave the degenerate sinners reasonable time to repent of their evil ways. They refused to repent, thereby sealing their own fate. They had only themselves to blame for their downfall and punishment. So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot God offered a way of escape to the believers at the critical

moment before He turned in wrath to punish the wicked. The order of events was: First the prophetic warnings about the impending judgements, then the safeguarding of the believers who took heed of the appeal to repent, and ultimately the outpouring of divine wrath upon the wicked. So will it be again.

- In the times of Noah and Lot there was no security for nominal believers whose hearts were still devoted to the things of this world. Lot's wife was a type of those believers who only have an outward form of godliness, but are still spiritually dead. This false pretence cost her her life at the last moment. So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot an awful disaster struck this world soon after the evacuation of the believers. Death and destruction occurred as never before in history. So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah and Lot the wicked did not realise how many privileges and blessings they enjoyed due to the presence of a few believers in their midst (Gen. 18:23-32). God was prepared to pardon a whole city if there were only ten believers in it. When these believers, who shone like lights in a wicked and perverted generation, were taken out of the way, complete spiritual darkness characterised the godless, and provoked the anger of God. So will it be again.
- In the times of Noah people scoffed at the builders of the ark, and in their ignorance were unaware of their peril "until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:39).

It is reasonable to expect that amid all the depravity and sin which characterise fallen humanity, a loving God would also, right from the beginning, offer a plan of salvation aimed at spiritually restoring lost sinners. However, the Saviour only came in the fullness of time, after about four thousand years of human history since Adam and Eve. That explains the many symbolic and typological actions introduced to the religious practices of people in the pre-Christian era to prepare them for the fulfilment of God's salvation in the atoning death of the Messiah. All the countless sacrifices in the Old Testament point to the once for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and were ultimately fulfilled in it. In many ways God highlighted His insistence on righteousness and His promise of forgiveness to repentant sinners.

Many of the religious rituals and ceremonies observed by Israel, form part of the seven feasts which were instituted in Leviticus 23 and were annually celebrated. These are not Israel's feasts but the Lord's feasts, ordained by Him to prepare Israel on the first and second coming of the Messiah. The Lord said to Moses: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts" (Lev. 23:2). The seven feasts are all types of the Messiah's future work of grace in Israel and also among all the nations of the world, and therefore contain a very clear prophetic programme of future events.

The seven feasts were given to Israel to observe in order to prepare them on the coming of the Messiah. Paul describes them as "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). They are all Messianic feasts and therefore have strong prophetic significance. The first four have already been fulfilled during the first coming of Christ and up to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We are now close to the end of the long interval between the two groups of feasts, and therefore close to the end of the church age.

The church of Christ does not celebrate these feasts. We celebrate the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) which replaces the feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits. Every Sunday we also reflect on the reality of Jesus having risen from the grave on the first day of the week. Pentecost is observed in a way which is different from the shadowy practices of the Old Testament. Many Christians follow the examples of the early disciples who humbled and searched themselves before the Lord prior to them being endued with power from on high on the Day of Pentecost.

As for the fulfilment of the last three feasts, we do observe their prophetic significance and heed the signs of the times by preparing for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. We do not

celebrate the Day of Atonement, which will be fulfilled at the national conversion of Israel. The crucifixion of Christ was our Day of Atonement, and we keep on commemorating that until He comes again. By then, the last of the seven feasts will be fulfilled.

### **New Testament significance of the feasts**

We should be mindful of the fact that there is always infinitely more in the antitype than in the type, as there is more in the substance than in the shadow. Many believers overly involve themselves with the practising of shadowy rituals, thereby missing vital elements of the full, New Testament revelation that has become part of our Christian heritage.

We as Christians have not been commissioned to celebrate the seven feasts in the new dispensation following the coming of the Messiah, since we are supposed to concern ourselves with the Messianic substance of the feasts rather than with their original, shadowy nature. Nevertheless, the feasts have great typological and prophetic significance and we can benefit much from studying Old Testament promises and types which have already partly been fulfilled in New Testament times. The absolute literal fulfilment of the first four feasts during events which centre around the first coming of Jesus, not only confirm the credibility of biblical prophecy in general but also render ample proof of the fact that the remaining three feasts will equally be fulfilled literally during events related to His second coming.

Many books have been written to emphasise the important relationship between the feasts and the Messiah, e.g. *The seven festivals of the Messiah* by Edward Chumney (1994), *The gospel in the feasts of Israel* by Victor Buksbazen (1954), *Harvest Festivals* by Hugh Downie (1994), and *The feasts of Israel: Seasons of the Messiah* by Bruce Scott (1997).

Outlined below, we see that the first four feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost) were not only fulfilled in the chronological order in which they were given, but also on the very same day on the religious calendar of the Jews in which they were instituted. In a New Testament context these feasts relate to the crucifixion of the Messiah, His burial, His resurrection, and also to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We have every reason to believe that the last three feasts (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles) will be equally literally fulfilled.

A very important fact about the feasts is that they were given to Israel to prepare them on the coming of a Messiah who was not only to be their Saviour but also the Saviour of all mankind. The prophet Isaiah explicitly prepared Israel on the fact that the Messiah will be the Saviour of all nations in order to also gather many people from outside Israel into His kingdom: "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is no other*" (Isa. 45:22). In connection with the Messiah, the heavenly Father said:

"And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him. ... Indeed He says, It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:5-6).

Even before the crucifixion of Jesus, John the Baptist said that He was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). After His crucifixion, and shortly before His ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to all nations, even to the uttermost parts of the earth (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

At the fulfilment of the fourth feast (Pentecost) the universal extent of the Messiah's redemptive work was again strongly emphasised by bestowing a divine gift on the disciples to speak in different languages. In this way it was demonstrated that the message of the Messiah's salvation was not only to be proclaimed to Israel but indeed to all nations.

In the light of these indisputable facts it is obvious why New Testament believers partake in the Lord's Supper to commemorate the coming of the Messiah, when the first three feasts were fulfilled. Pentecost is experienced as a daily reality, and the historic event of the outpouring of the Spirit is often remembered by way of special services on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Enlightened by the New Testament revelations of the Messiah we know infinitely more about

Him and His message of salvation and sanctification than Israel did in Old Testament times. It would be completely irrational if we were to neglect or abandon our New Testament way of worship and start observing the shadowy practices which Israel observed during the previous dispensation of the Law. Orthodox Jews who do not recognise the Messiah still observe these institutions today.

Adherents of the Hebrew Roots Movement are mistaken when they argue that we are grafted into Israel when we become believers, thereby spiritually becoming Jews who are obliged to start observing the feasts in a typical Jewish way. The Lord Jesus is the Source of our life – not Israel. He is the true vine into which we have been grafted, as He Himself explained to His disciples: “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Also in the practical expression of our faith we should follow in His footsteps and become conformed to Him.

Some people, however, wrongly interpret the symbol of the olive tree used in Romans 11:16-24, by concluding that we as believers have been grafted into the people of Israel. Instead of becoming more like Christ, these people now become more like Israel. They observe Old Testament laws and celebrate Jewish festivals, including the Sabbath, and also use Hebrew names for the Lord. In this way they are compromising the salvation and liberty which they have in Christ.

A return to the law as the source of their life can have highly detrimental consequences in people’s spiritual lives. Paul says, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). If Jesus Christ is no longer the absolute centre of our lives, major problems follow. People who live under the New Covenant of the Messiah are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14; 10:4). The Messiah did not abolish the laws and feasts of the Old Covenant but *fulfilled* them (Matt. 5:17).

As far as the symbol of the olive tree in Romans 11 is concerned, it should be noted that it is actually only the branches that represent the people of Israel. They were broken off because of unbelief, and we have definitely not been grafted into the severed branches but through faith we are in Christ! Israel originated from God (Heb. El), the One who made them (Deut. 32:15) and thus fathered them (Deut. 32:18). He is the same God who was incarnated through the Messiah (John 1:1-14) and was described as Immanuel – God with us (Isa 7:14; Matt. 1:23). In this sense the Lord Jesus, as one of the members of the triune God, could say: “I am the Root and the Offspring of David” (Rev. 22:16). Although, as a human being, He was born into the royal lineage of David, He is also the Root, or origin, of David as well as the Root of Israel as the Chosen People.

Abraham, as the founding father of Israel, is only important because he had a relationship of faith with God as his spiritual root: “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). The deep meaning of the root, to Israel and the nations, is not the Jewish people that descended from Abraham, as well as their laws and rituals, but the Messiah who was born from this people. Jesus is the Seed of Abraham, and could therefore say to the Jews: “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). That is the reason why the Lord said to Abraham: “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). The Messiah, who is the Saviour of the entire world, would be born from Israel. Paul refers to the great significance of the Messiah’s crucifixion, “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith” (Gal. 3:13-14).

Christ is the source of all blessings, and because Israel has rejected Him, they have been scattered all over the world. Only after they have been reunited with Him, will they be grafted back into the olive tree in which we already are (Rom. 11:23-26). Then, they will be a blessing to all nations in the Messiah (Rom. 11:11-12). We should not try to imitate them now, but only follow in the footsteps of the Messiah. We must provoke them to jealousy by the way in which we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through the Messiah. We should not nullify this command in trying to win Israel’s favour by participating in cultural and religious activities in which Jesus Christ is not unequivocally recognised as the Messiah of Israel.

As far as the last three feasts at the end of the harvest season are concerned, we have much more information in the New Testament on events pertaining to the second coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His reign of peace on earth than has been revealed in the Old Testament harvest festivals. We should study these prophecies and foster an active expectation of His second coming, rather than reverting to the observance of Old Testament types. However much we can learn from these types they can never be compared with the substance of New Testament revelations.

### **Fulfilment of the law**

Love is the fulfilment of the entire law – that includes ceremonial as well as moral laws. According to the Strong's Concordance (1990: Gr. 4137) the word "fulfil" means "to finish (a period or task), to accomplish, end, or conclude." All references to the commandments of Christ in the New Testament emanate from only one basic command, and that is to have a heart filled with divine love (Matt. 22:37-39). This blessing can only be obtained by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Such a life may be described as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). He is the personification of God's love for us.

If we are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ we will fully know His divine love which passes knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19). Such a person will never revert to the elementary principles and shadowy practices of the Old Testament law because he who truly loves has fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8-10). He is challenged to pursue the more sublime demands of God's love such as following Christ, being filled with the Holy Spirit, complete holiness, continuous prayer, evangelising the world, preaching the Word on every occasion, denying the corrupt practices of the depraved world, and engaging in spiritual warfare by putting on the full armour of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The Old Testament law does not even come close to commanding or fostering these Christian virtues.

We are not convicted of sin by the Torah but by the Holy Spirit who is our guide and tutor. The standard against which we are measured is not the law but the sinless life of Christ. The ways in which we give expression to His law of love determine the nature of our spiritual life. We only observe the singular command of love, although it has many different applications. Jesus said to His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). A changed heart is needed to live up to this challenge, and that is exactly what the Holy Spirit wants to do for us (Rom. 5:5).

In a similar way, we study Old Testament feasts to better understand how we should devote ourselves to God and better serve Christ on a daily basis. This is done without reverting to the actual celebration of the feasts described in Leviticus 23. We focus on their typological and prophetic nature and then probe the New Testament to see how the first four feasts were fulfilled, and also to determine how the last three will be fulfilled. Although new aspects of God's plan for humanity are revealed, certain principles as well as His basic programme remain unchanged.

Unfortunately, there is a rapidly growing movement among certain Christians in the world to become more legalistic in the practising of their faith. Consequently, Torah observance, which also includes honouring and keeping the Jewish Sabbath, is pursued. The Messianic Jew, Victor Buksbazen (1954:61-62), emphasises the fact that circumcision and the Sabbath have only been imposed upon Judaism:

"The Sabbath is deeply imbedded in the heart of Judaism, a pivotal point of Jewish life. Sabbath and circumcision are two distinguishing marks of Judaism. None can be thought of as a truly religious Jew in the rabbinical sense unless he observes both. *Sabbath* means *rest*. It is pre-eminently and distinctly a Jewish holiday, given by God to the children of Israel through His servant Moses on the Mount of Sinai. ... The Sabbath is exclusively Israel's heritage, given under the law to the people of the law. The observance of the Sabbath as originally ordained by God presupposes the existence of a holy temple, a God-appointed priesthood, and a sacrificial system (cf. Num. 28:9-10). As things stand today, a Jew cannot observe the Sabbath in its

Scriptural setting, because the essential conditions for such observances are absent. What the Jews of today try to observe is the rabbinical version of the Sabbath. But this much changed Sabbath is even more impossible of strict observance.”

In the early church there was a fierce struggle against the Judaisers who believed that in order for a Gentile to become a Christian he first had to become a Jew and conform to all the demands of the law. However, the main group understood that believers were under no such obligation to the law. On a special meeting of apostles in Jerusalem it was ruled that Gentile believers were not under the law (Acts 15:1-29). Guidelines for proper moral behaviour were given but no mention whatsoever was made of the Torah and the Sabbath.

Buksbazen (1954:72) offers the following comparison between the Sabbath of the Jews and Sunday observance of Christians:

The Jewish Sabbath	The Christian Sunday
The Sabbath or the seventh day of the week commemorates a complete physical creation – Gen. 2:1-3.	The first day of the week is the day of resurrection and signifies a completed redemption – Matt. 28:1-6.
The Sabbath is a covenant sign between God and His people Israel: “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it <i>is</i> a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that <i>you</i> may know that I <i>am</i> the LORD who sanctifies you” (Ex. 31:13).	The first day of the week signifies the fellowship between the church and her Lord: “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7).
The Sabbath observance was commanded by the law. The punishment for non-compliance was death (Ex. 31:14).	Sunday is a day of voluntary, spontaneous worship without any commandment – a day of witness and labour for the Lord.
The Sabbath is an essential part of the covenant of works.	Sunday is representative of the covenant of grace.
The Sabbath is the crowning day of the week which rewards man for his toil.	Sunday emphasises what God has done for man through His only begotten Son.

In Jesus Christ we have entered the rest of the Lord, thus explaining the fulfilled meaning of the Old Testament Sabbath which is also mentioned together with the seven feasts of the Lord in Leviticus 23:3.

### Israel’s end-time restoration

God’s programme of feasts did not merely serve the purpose of preparing Israel on the coming of the Messiah but it also suggests that Israel, as a nation, would only be saved at the end of the New Testament harvest season on the Day of Atonement. The fulfilment of Passover should have been their Day of Atonement, but the Lord knew that the great majority of Israelites would reject the Lamb of God and hand Him over to the Romans to be crucified. In consequence, a new dispensation would dawn in which believers from all nations would be witnesses of the Messiah in the world.

Israel will only be saved as a nation after a harvest has been gathered among the Gentiles; hence the Day of Atonement will be the penultimate festival to them. Paul says “that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and will turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:25-26). That will happen after the church dispensation when the Gentiles will have had ample opportunity to enter into the kingdom of God.

The final three feasts are celebrated in the seventh month on the religious calendar of Israel. This month marks the end of the harvest, and is concluded when the aftercrop is reaped. When

this very critical period of Israel's history dawns at the end of the church dispensation they will, as a nation, still be unsaved: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" (Jer. 8:20).

Although it will be a very late hour in the harvest season, a special opportunity to be saved will nevertheless be offered to the Jews: "Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, when I return the captives of My people" (Hos. 6:11).

After the church has been glorified and gathered in heaven, and the unbelievers on earth have been judged by the Messiah, the entire remnant of Israel will be saved and established in their land during the reign of the Messiah. That will be the fulfilment of the seventh feast, the Feast of Tabernacles.

### 3. Appointed Times of the Feasts

The chronological order in which the seven feasts were instituted is very significant: “These *are* the feasts of the LORD ... which you shall proclaim at their appointed times” (Lev. 23:4). The scheduling of the feasts was done within the framework of Israel’s annual agricultural cycle. In their prophetic application they reveal the unfolding of God’s redemptive purpose through the ages, starting at the atoning death of the Messiah and consummated in His second coming and millennial reign.

The feasts are divided into sections of four and three, which represent the beginning and end of the harvest season. Seven is the biblical number of perfection, which is frequently used in Revelation – e.g. the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, etc. The specific times of the feasts, as well as their significance and typological message, are as follows:

*The Passover* is held on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the spring month (Nisan or Abib), and is the first month on the religious calendar. This feast typifies the death of Christ.

*Unleavened Bread* directly follows the day of Passover and is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan. It was fulfilled in the burial of the Messiah who, through His sacrifice and sinless life, became to us the unleavened Bread of Life.

*Firstfruits* consists of a wave offering before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath in the spring month, and typifies the resurrection of Christ. It introduced the beginning of the Feast of Weeks.

*Pentecost* marks the end of the Feast of Weeks, 50 days after *Firstfruits*. This feast foreshadowed the descent of the Holy Spirit and was followed by a four-month interval during which the harvest was to be gathered.

*Trumpets* is celebrated on the first day of the seventh month and marks the end of the harvest season. Prophetically, it refers to the gathering of God’s harvest of saved people in the heavenly barn at the end of the Messianic age.

*The Day of Atonement* is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month and looks forward to Israel’s national repentance and reconciliation with their Messiah.

*Tabernacles* is celebrated from the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month for one week, and concludes the harvest season. This joyous feast typifies the Messiah’s millennial reign of peace when He will be in the midst of the saved remnant of Israel as well as His glorified church.

By presenting the feasts to Israel in an agricultural context, God uses natural activities to demonstrate spiritual principles to His people. The spring festivals teach about the life-changing and world reforming consequences of the Messiah’s coming to the world, leading to the destruction of spiritual slavery and the assurance of freedom to God’s people. The fall festivals focus on the glorification of God’s people, judgements upon the unbelievers, as well as the establishment of a government of righteousness on earth.

#### **Jewish chronology**

The Jews use a lunar calendar in which each month starts after the first sliver of the new moon has appeared in the sky. Since the length of a lunar month is only 29½ days, the length of a lunar year is 354 days, compared to the 365¼ days of a solar year or seasonal year. This shortfall presented Israel with a problem, since certain of their months are closely associated with the seasons of the year. Nisan, when the first three feasts are celebrated, must always be in spring since they have to cut a sheaf of barley for the wave-offering of the Feast of Firstfruits. Tishri is the month when the harvest is finally gathered, during which the last three feasts of the gathering of the harvest are celebrated.

Israel developed an elaborate system of leap-years to ensure that their lunar years elapse concurrent with seasonal years. Within every cycle of 19 years, the following are leap-years: 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19. To all these years a 13<sup>th</sup> month is added at the end of the religious year between Adar and Nisan, called Ve-Adar (2<sup>nd</sup> Adar). Because of these leap-years the dates of Jewish feasts may vary considerably on the solar calendar, even up to a month, but they



nevertheless keep track with the seasonal cycle.

Israel has two lunar calendars – the one a religious calendar which starts in the spring month (Nisan, formerly Abib), and the other one a civil calendar which starts with *Rosh Hashanah* on 1 Tishri. The names of the months are as follows, with approximate equivalents on the Gregorian or solar calendar:

Names of months	Corresponds with	Number of days	Month of civil year	Month of religious year
Tishri	Sept–Oct	30	1	7
Cheshvan	Oct–Nov	29 or 30	2	8
Kislev	Nov–Dec	29 or 30	3	9
Tevet	Dec–Jan	29	4	10
Shevat	Jan–Feb	30	5	11
Adar	Feb–Mar	29 or 30	6	12
Nisan	Mar–Apr	30	7	1
Iyar	Apr–May	29	8	2
Sivan	May–Jun	30	9	3
Tammuz	Jun–Jul	29	10	4
Av	Jul–Aug	30	11	5
Elul	Aug–Sep	29	12	6

Days in Israel elapse between sunset and the following sunset. Nights are divided into four watches: from sunset to 9 pm, from 9 pm to midnight, from midnight to 3 pm, and from 3 pm to sunrise. Days are also divided into four watches: sunrise to 9 am, 9 am to noon, noon to 3 pm, and 3 pm to sunset.

In the counting of days, a system of inclusive reckoning is followed in which any part of a day is also counted as a full day. A week (e.g. from Wednesday afternoon to the next Wednesday afternoon) may be described as eight days as both Wednesdays are counted as full days. The Feast of Tabernacles in Israel is celebrated for one week, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the seventh month: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall* be the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. ... *For* seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation” (Lev. 23:34-36). The last day of this week, i.e. the eighth day, was the great day of the feast (cf. John 7:2, 37).

Leviticus 23 says, among others, the following on the feast of the 50<sup>th</sup> day: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath ... seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (Lev. 23:15-16). These 49 days between a Sunday and a Sunday seven weeks later, are referred to as 50 days because the first and last Sundays are both counted as full days. In the New Testament, these two feasts were fulfilled during the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on a Sunday, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit seven weeks later, again on a Sunday. “Pentecost” means “Fiftieth” – that is the Feast of the Fiftieth Day.

### Prophetic years

Apart from Israel’s lunar calendar the Bible also uses a prophetic calendar in which every year has 12 months of 30 days each – i.e. a year of 360 days. From Genesis 7:11, 24 & 8:4 it is evident that the Flood lasted five months of 30 days each, i.e. 150 days. In Revelation 11:2-3, 12:6 and 13:5, a period of 42 prophetic months – the two halves of the tribulation period – equals exactly 1 260 days, hence every month is 30 days long. This calendar is very specific and cuts across all other calendars. The reason for the use of the prophetic calendar was to ensure that despite the use of any other calendars (e.g. Israel’s lunar calendar or the solar calendar of the Romans) it would still be possible to arrive at a specific date – e.g. for the crucifixion of the Messiah.

Daniel 9:24-27 offers a clear prophecy on the time of the Messiah's crucifixion, which was the fulfilment of the Feast of the Passover. During the Babylonian exile of Israel, Daniel prophesied on the restoration of Jerusalem, and indicated that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem, a count-down of 69 year-weeks would follow until the crucifixion of the Messiah: "... from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks*" (Dan. 9:25). The rebuilding of Jerusalem took up 7 year-weeks, followed by another 62 year-weeks until the Messiah was "cut off" by Israel and the Roman authorities (Dan. 9:26).

69 year-weeks (483 prophetic years) had elapsed since the day when King Artaxerxes, on 1 Nisan 445 BC, gave Nehemiah permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8), and the day of the Messiah's crucifixion on 14 Nisan, 32 AD. Prof. J.M. Schepers of the University of Johannesburg indicated in an article (1984:7-10) that 483 prophetic years of 30 days each, represent 173 880 days. Divided by  $365\frac{1}{4}$ , this period equals 476 06 years on the Gregorian calendar. On this calendar, the 69 year-weeks elapsed between 23 March 445 BC and Friday 11 April 32 AD, ending on the Friday when Jesus was crucified.

The very same prophetic calendar will also be used for the counting down of the coming 70<sup>th</sup> year-week of Daniel (the tribulation period). This seven-year period will be the fulfilment of the seven awful days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. It will, therefore, be possible to keep track with the progress of this very dark year-week, which will begin when Israel concludes a covenant with the false messiah (Dan. 9:27). In the middle of the week, after 42 months or 1 260 days, he will profane the temple by setting up an image of himself in the Holy of Holies and declaring himself to be God. After another 42 months, the true Messiah will set foot on the Mount of Olives and bring an end to the false messiah's reign of terror.

The Lord, therefore, has given Israel two exact dates: one on the first coming of Christ and another one on the time of His second coming. The first one has already been fulfilled, almost two millennia ago. The second one will also be fulfilled on its fixed time, but the final countdown of seven years can only begin after the false messiah has been revealed and concluded a covenant with Israel and the nations. The Bible does not reveal to us when the time of Jacob's trouble will begin, but the advanced stage of Israel's restoration suggests that it cannot be far off.

Another date on which many people try to speculate is that of the rapture, when the heavenly Bridegroom will come secretly to meet his bride and take her away to her heavenly mansion. This event does not form part of the 70<sup>th</sup> week and can therefore not be scheduled. Although the signs of the times indicate that the rapture may be close at hand, the specific date has not been revealed to us in the Bible. The Lord wants us to walk with His Son in such a way that we will be ready for His coming every day.

When we embark on a journey through the seven festivals we will always have the correct historical perspective on the first coming of Christ where our new life started, as well as a Biblical future expectation which is based upon prophetic promises on His second coming when we will be glorified and become co-heirs of a heavenly kingdom.

## 4. The Feast of the Passover

The people of Israel were explicitly instructed that the annual feasts were to be celebrated on the times and in the specific ways determined by God: "These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim in their appointed times. On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover" (Lev. 23:4-5).

The establishment of the Passover was the first guideline for God's plan of salvation that was to be fulfilled 1 500 years later when the Messiah was crucified for the sins of the world. Moses told the people of Israel: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year ... Now you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 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 ... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt ... 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" (Ex. 12:5-7, 12-13).

Passover celebrates the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, where they were slaves to the Egyptians. In a spiritual application of this event it is obvious that Egypt is a type of the evil world and its systems, while its leader, Pharaoh, was a type of Satan. The children of Israel were delivered from their bondage by putting the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses, thereby picturing the Messiah's deliverance from sin and the rule of Satan.

The Passover is the first of the seven great feasts of Yahweh because the slain Lamb was the foundation and starting point of God's salvation of His people. Religiously, the Passover month had to be the beginning of months (Ex. 12:2). The seventh month of the civil year became the first month in the religious year. God was about to reveal Himself in a new way. Hitherto He had revealed Himself in a variety of ways, but not as Saviour-God. Up to this point, Israel had existed as downtrodden slaves with no national status or spiritual ambitions. Now, a new beginning was made in their history through divine power. The past, with its bondage and subsequent miseries, was blotted out. They were now redeemed from slavery and death by the token of the lamb's blood and the power of God. It was the beginning of months, because it was the birthday of a nation (Downie, 1994:34).

The birthday of a believer is also the beginning of months and years because the day of the new birth eclipses the day of the natural birth. Then the past is under the blood, forgiven and forgotten by God: "... old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Spiritually speaking, and also with regard to their physical habitation, Passover (during the spring month) was the beginning of a new life to Israel. So too in a New Testament context, receiving Jesus into our lives is the beginning of a new life. Passover is the first of the feasts. Likewise, repenting of our sins and believing in the shed blood of Jesus is the first step in our walk with God (Chumney, 1994:25).

The meaning of the Passover is obvious and easily understood. Paul tells us that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7), thereby pointing to the cross upon which the Lord Jesus Christ would die as the true Paschal Lamb. Despite the fact that for a long time the Passover remained unfulfilled, God's salvation was the foundation of His dealings with Israel. When He gave His law He said: "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). When the Passover was fulfilled during the crucifixion of Jesus, the cross became the final basis for the saving of both Jews and Gentiles. The cross represents the transition from the old to the new and is the true centre of all things. Old Testament saints looked forward to it, and New Testament saints look back to it.

It was truly a moment of destiny when God intervened in such a dramatic and manifest way to deliver His people from Egypt. For this reason, the Passover was to be regularly observed in memory of the wonderful event of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Orthodox Jews today still keep the Passover in a solemn way, yet without giving any recognition to its fulfilment by the

Messiah. They eat unleavened bread and observe all the rites connected with their bondage and deliverance from Egypt, but the paschal lamb is lacking. They put a piece of roasted shank bone from a lamb on the table, but not the lamb itself. This piece of shank bone is a witness against them because, having rejected Christ, there is no paschal lamb for them. The blood is also lacking in all their other feasts and solemn offerings.

Why did God use such an unusual way of deliverance when His people were in Egypt? Why the slaying of a lamb, its blood shed and sprinkled on the doors of houses as protection against a destroying angel who was about to pass through the land of Egypt in judgement? Surely God could have delivered Israel by using His mighty power and saving them all the trouble of selecting and slaying a lamb and sprinkling its blood on their houses! God could have destroyed the Egyptian armies at the onset as He did in the end and thus delivered Israel from their power. But such a method of deliverance, while effective, would not have addressed the question of man's sin and the demand of God's righteousness. The children of Israel were not only *slaves* in the land of Egypt, they were also *sinner*s in Egypt.

During the long time of their stay in a foreign country, Israel not only adapted to the Egyptian culture but they also worshipped Egyptian idols, as demonstrated in the worship of a golden calf at Mount Sinai. The lesson had to be taught to them that they could only be spiritually delivered by means of sacrifice and blood shedding. God could not, in the interests of His justice and righteousness, deliver Israel on any other ground, "for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). The same principle applies to us: "... without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

God's law demands the death penalty for sinners (Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 5:12), but in His infinite love He devised a plan of substitutionary death in which an innocent person could die in the place of sinners, to bear their guilt. This is where the slaying of the paschal lamb comes in: a spotless and innocent lamb was to be slain and its blood, as a sign of its life that was laid down, was to be sprinkled on the doorposts of sinners' homes. But the lamb was an animal and therefore only a type of the true Lamb of God that would be slain in the fullness of time:

"For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He [the Messiah] came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God ... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*" (Heb. 10:4-10).

### **Requirements of the lamb**

The paschal lamb in Egypt had to conform to certain well-defined requirements since it was to be a true type of Christ, the Paschal Lamb of God.

*The lamb was to be a male* (Ex. 12:5). It was through one man's sin that sin came into the world (Rom. 5:12). Because Adam, the first male, sinned, a sinless male, Jesus, had to die to atone for that sin: "For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offence *judgement* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift* came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:17-19). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22)

*The lamb was to be of the first year* (Ex. 12:5). The firstborn of both man and beast was to be set aside and given to God (Ex. 13:2, 11-13). Chumney (1994:27-28) indicates that the theme of the firstborn runs through the Bible. Cain was set aside for Abel, Ishmael for Isaac, and Esau for Jacob. Spiritually, God gave us these examples to teach us that the firstborn after the flesh (that which is natural) is set aside to bring forth the firstborn after the spirit (that which is spiritual). In this process, God distinguishes between the first or natural birth and the second or spiritual birth. The first birth constitutes us as sinners and the second birth makes us believers and children of

God (John 1:12; 3:1-7; 1 Cor. 15:45-47). Jesus was the firstborn of Mary naturally, and the firstborn of God spiritually (Matt. 1:21-25; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Rev. 3:14).

*The lamb was hidden for four days (Ex. 12:3, 6).* Israel were commanded to take a lamb on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan and set it aside for four days until the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Jesus fulfilled these four days during the week prior to the Passover. He went up to Jerusalem, became part of public life in the city while preparations were made for the Passover, and made various appearances before He was arrested, tried and crucified. However, there is also another interpretation of the four days, given by Chumney (1994:26):

“Eschatologically, these four days that the lamb was hidden is prophetic of the people’s expectations that the Messiah would come 4 000 years from the creation of Adam as part of the 7 000-year plan of God to redeem both man and the earth back to how things were in the Garden of Eden. These four days are prophetic of the Messiah Yeshua being hid from the world and not coming to earth for four days or 4 000 years from the creation of Adam. A day is understood to be prophetic of a thousand years, based upon Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8. Linking Psalm 90:4 to each day in creation ... the entire redemption [of man would thus] take 7 000 years to complete from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.”

*The lamb had to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5).* Centuries later, the spotless Lamb of God was provided for humanity’s need: “John saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Of all who ever came into this world He alone was the sinless one. Hebrews 4:15 says that although Christ was tempted He was without sin.

*The lamb had to be slain (Ex. 12:6).* A living lamb, however carefully selected, could not save the Israelites; it had to die. Likewise, Christ’s life of righteousness, apart from the cross, would have availed us nothing. It would have left the question of sin and a broken law unsettled and unsatisfied. Judicial righteousness demands the death of the sinner. For man’s offence, some man must die. But what man? Only a man whose own life was not forfeited because of personal sin. Therefore the Lord Jesus came forth, the sinless and spotless One, upon whom sin and death had no claim, and of His own voluntary will gave His life for sinners (Downie, 1994:37).

*The lamb was slain in the evening (Ex. 12:6).* According to Chumney (1994:29), from 6 a.m. to noon is the morning part of the day. From noon to 6 p.m. is the evening part of the day. The phrase “between the evening” (original rendering of Exodus 12:6) refers to the period of the day that goes from noon to 6 p.m., which is 3 p.m. This would be the 9<sup>th</sup> hour of the day, counting from 6 a.m. The slaying of the paschal lamb in Egypt on the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (3 p.m. our time) on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, took place at exactly the same hour when the Lamb of God died on the cross on Passover day (Mark 15:33-37).

*The blood had to be sprinkled (Ex. 12:22-25).* “The hyssop was dipped into the basin and the blood applied to the lintels and doorposts of the houses. This was a token that a life had been forfeited for that home. Faith had to appropriate the blood. The lamb could have been selected, even slain, but if the token of an obedient faith had not been manifested, death would have been the result. It is not enough for us that the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed for the remission of sins. We must appropriate to ourselves, by an obedient faith, the benefits and blessings of Calvary. We must dip the hyssop of our faith into that blood and apply it to our hearts. ... God said, ‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’ (Ex. 12:13). It was the blood alone that was the ground of deliverance for the Israelite. ... So the blood of Christ is the only ground of our deliverance from the guilt and doom of sin and our acceptance with God. That is why the blood alone will be the subject of the eternal new song which the redeemed will sing in heaven” (Downie, 1994:38).

The elders in heaven will have a strong consciousness of the redemptive merit of the slain Lamb of God who has redeemed them: “And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

Peter also underscores the great significance of the blood of the Lamb: "... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Paul says: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

### **When did Christ die?**

The Lord Jesus compares His burial and resurrection from the dead to the experience of Jonah: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). Jonah 1:17 reads, "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." John Hannah (1985:1467) says, "The phrase *three days and three nights* need not be understood as a 72-hour period, but as one 24-hour day and parts of two other days." Compare in this regard also Esther 4:16 and 5:1, where Esther asked for a fast of three days and three nights; but on the third day, before the end of the day, she had accomplished her purpose with the fast.

Some people have a problem with the view that Jesus was not in the grave for three full days (i.e. 72 hours), and endeavour to move the crucifixion from Friday to the preceding Wednesday. However, in the inclusive chronology of the Jews a part of a day is also reckoned as a full day. Louis Barbieri (1983:47) makes the following remarks on Matthew 12:40: "Since the Jews reckoned part of a day as a full day, the 'three days and three nights' could permit a Friday crucifixion." In an addendum to the Strong's Concordance (*Harmony of the Gospels*), 41 events are listed, together with Scripture references, that all occurred during the week of Christ's crucifixion – the week commencing with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a Sunday, and ending with His crucifixion and burial (Strong, 1990). This sequence of events proves beyond any doubt that He was crucified on a Friday.

According to the Bible, as well as other supporting sources, Jesus was crucified on Friday, early in the morning, and buried on that Friday afternoon shortly before the start of the Sabbath, while He rose early on the first day (Sunday) of the following week. The day when He was crucified (Friday) was the first day of the Passover events, Saturday (the Sabbath) was the second day, and Sunday (His resurrection) was the third day. In Jewish chronology, a period of this nature is described as "three days and three nights" or simply as "three days". Jewish days elapse between sundown and sundown the next day. Therefore, the third day after the crucifixion already commenced on the Saturday evening at dusk.

The men on their way to Emmaus confirm these facts. The day (Sunday) when Jesus rose from the dead they were walking along the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Not being aware of the fact that Jesus Himself had joined them, they discussed the events related to His crucifixion early on the Friday morning, and added: "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive" (Luke 24:21-23). Sunday was, therefore, the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, which occurred the preceding Friday.

On this Sunday afternoon, on the third day, when the men of Emmaus talked to Jesus, He had already risen from the grave several hours earlier: "On the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb" (John 20:1). After Jesus had met with the travellers to Emmaus, still on the day of His resurrection, He also appeared to His disciples (John 20:19).

Jesus was in the grave for only a part of the third day, and also for only a part of the preceding Friday. But the Jews nevertheless regard this as three days and nights, although only parts of these days constitute the entire period. The discussion of the men from Emmaus nullifies all speculation on an earlier day for the crucifixion. If Christ was crucified and buried on Wednesday (the fourth day of the week), then the following Sunday would have been the fifth day since the event took place, but these men clearly said it was "the third day"! For a full discussion of the

atonement death of Christ, see *Jesus Christ and our life in Him* (Malan, 2012).

### **The fulfilment of Passover**

The fulfilment of the Old Testament Passover was during the crucifixion of the spotless Lamb of God who was incarnated in the fullness of time to lay down His life on our behalf. Because of the typological nature of the Passover, referring to the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God, it was obvious that this feast would be fulfilled during one of its future celebrations. The Lord Jesus was indeed crucified on the feast of the Passover. According to Mark 14:1-2, the Jews in fact wanted to avoid such a situation: "After two days it was the Passover ... And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

But the Jews could not succeed in averting the exact fulfilment of this feast, and Jesus was crucified on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan (11 April 32). On the ninth hour of the day (3 p.m.) He died (Mark 15:34-37), on precisely the same hour when the lamb was slaughtered during the first Passover in Egypt. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon, and gave permission for His burial (Mark 15:42-45). That was done before six o'clock on the Friday evening, when the Sabbath started, on which no one was allowed to be buried (Luke 23:52-54; John 19:31).

We read the following about the day of the crucifixion in Mark: "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member ... went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:42-43). John Grassmick (1983:191) comments as follows on this passage: "Jesus' burial officially confirmed His death, an important point in early Christian preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The designation *Preparation Day* is used here as a technical name for Friday, *the day before the Sabbath* (Saturday) as Mark explained to his non-Jewish readers. Since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday was used to prepare for it. This reference confirms that Jesus was crucified on a Friday."

Friday (the day before the Sabbath, or the Preparation Day) and Saturday (the Sabbath) are the only two days with specific names in the Jewish week. The other days are simply numbered, e.g. the first day of the week (Sunday), the second day (Monday), etc. Should a religious feast such as Passover (the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan) be celebrated on any particular day of the week, it is celebrated like a Sabbath, but not referred to as a Sabbath; the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. Likewise we may also, on any day of the week, celebrate certain religious feasts as a Sunday, but that does not however, turn such a day into a Sunday.

The crucifixion of Jesus on the Preparation Day is clearly evident from John 19: "Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a solemn day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away ... But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:31-34). The Sabbath directly following upon the Preparation Day on which Christ was crucified, was described as a solemn day (NKJV) or a special Sabbath (NIV) because it was at the same time as the weekly Sabbath and the important first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Luke also confirms the fact that the burial of Jesus occurred on the Preparation Day: "Then he [Joseph from Arimathea] took it [the body of Jesus] down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near" (Luke 23:53-54). The Sabbath that would start at sundown that evening was, without any doubt, the weekly Sabbath. If it was the Passover that would begin, it would mean that Jesus was crucified a day before the Passover and that this feast would then not have been fulfilled on its appointed time. He was indeed crucified on the day of the feast, the day when the sacrificial lamb was slaughtered in Egypt to mark the beginning of Israel's exodus from slavery.

We should have an unwavering confession of Christ's atoning death and His resurrection, regardless on which specific day they occurred. Nevertheless, it is edifying to have specific

historical points of reference for these important events.

### **Great significance of the lamb**

The Passover, strictly speaking, was the sacrificing of the lamb – the sprinkling of the blood – and nothing else: “It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD” (Ex. 12:27). The blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doors of the houses in which the Israelites lived, and God said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Ex. 12:13). Thus the sacrifice of the lamb gave the name to this day. This took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, in the closing hours of that day. Immediately afterwards, the lamb was taken into the homes of the Israelites, roasted with fire, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. By this time a new day had commenced; it was the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and was called the “feast day”, or “the feast of the Passover” (Downie, 1994:44).

Thus we see that the Passover was on the 14<sup>th</sup> day and the feast of the Passover on the 15<sup>th</sup> day, although only a few hours elapsed between the killing of the lamb and the eating of it. The killing of the lamb and the sprinkling of its blood was just the beginning of Israel’s exodus; it was, however, the basis of all that followed.

The significance of the Passover was evident in three different ways. Firstly, the blood made them safe. They had to accept God’s provision of salvation by slaying the lamb, sprinkling their houses and taking refuge under the blood – only then would they be safe. Secondly, they had the word of God as a firm promise that He would accept and protect them if they heeded His commands. Thirdly, the lamb was also to be eaten to provide them with nourishment and strength for the difficult journey that lay ahead.

In like manner, the believer in Christ has the blood of the Lamb for salvation, but he needs to appropriate the atoning death of Christ in faith by closely identifying with His death and becoming conformed to it (Rom. 6:5; Gal. 2:20, 6:14; Phil. 3:10). If we are cleansed by the blood, God will “pass over” us by exempting us from judgement. The believer also has the Word of God with its many promises of salvation and protection. Furthermore, Christ is to us the bread and water of life (John 6:33-35). He daily strengthens us to fight the good fight of faith and to keep on making progress on our journey of faith.

It is important to note that the Israelites first had to apply the blood to the divinely designated place and then go inside the house and feed on the lamb. They could not feed on it outside as they first had to be under the shelter of the blood – saved first. It is exactly here where many Christians go astray and transpose the order by trying to get certain blessings from Christ without first of all knowing the saving and cleansing power of His blood. They try to love, serve, and follow Christ without success and wonder why they fail. Many of them trust Him for healing and other blessings without intending to become followers of Him (cf. Luke 17:11-19).

When God saved the Israelites He did not only save them from death, He gave them life and also the means by which that life was to be sustained. Salvation is always that there is deliverance from death and judgement caused by sin, but also the gift of new life imputed by the Holy Spirit: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24). After salvation and regeneration there is new life which must be sustained and strengthened by a caring God.

In the detailed instruction about feeding on the lamb, the Israelites were told that it must be roasted with fire: “Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire” (Ex. 12:8-9). Roasting the lamb with fire alludes to the judgement of God. This idea could not be appropriately represented by a raw or boiled lamb; therefore the lamb had to pass through the fire. This reminds us of the true Lamb of God who passed through the fire of God’s judgement with regard to sin. As it was the death, and not the life of the lamb, that brought deliverance to the Israelites, so it is the death of Christ that has brought salvation to us.

The Person of Christ must never be separated from His death. Paul said: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). We should



ever praise Him for His sacrificial love. It is for this reason that the memories of Calvary will be eternally fresh, even long after our earthly life had passed away (Rev. 5:9).

The bitter herbs also relate to the suffering of the lamb. Fellowship with Christ involves fellowship in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13). We have to take up a cross if we wish to follow Him (Luke 9:23). Downie (1994:48) says: "How often would we like to escape the bitters of life, the bitter herbs, the bitter waters! Yet the graces of the Christian life are fostered by these very things. We become matured Christians by suffering. Trials call out faith, patience, meekness, and gentleness. Through much tribulation the soul enters into the gates and riches of the heavenly kingdom."

### **Haste of the journey of the redeemed**

The lamb was to be eaten in great haste (Ex. 12:11); the girded loins, shod feet, and the staff in the hand indicate the eagerness and readiness to leave Egypt that characterised the old life. There was no time to be lost. Believers should be quick to leave Egypt (the sinful world of which they were part) and run towards the life that is in the Messiah. Eagerness and commitment should be features of our new life and service to the Lord: "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Shoes must be on our feet: "... having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15). "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15). We should not be slack concerning divine opportunities, privileges and promises. The staff in our hands refers to the believer's authority in Christ. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). Sin should not be allowed to reign over us again.

The haste with which the Israelites ate the paschal lamb suggests that we, as believers in Christ, have only a short life in which to learn more of Christ and to prepare ourselves to be larger vessels of glory in the expanding of His kingdom. Are we using our time to the best possible advantage? Are we feeding on the Word that became flesh and are we learning more of Him each day?

There is no turning back on the journey towards the Promised Land, difficult though it may prove to be. Never ever, like the backsliders, revert to the world and seek the help of the wicked in solving your problems: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help ... but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!" (Isa. 31:1). Christ is our Shepherd who leads us in paths of righteousness.

### **The Passover meal (Seder)**

How do modern Jews celebrate Passover?

Elaborate preparations are needed for the Passover meal, as indicated by Arnold Fruchtenbaum (1991) in his book: *A Passover haggadah for Jewish believers*. When laying the table a place of honour is reserved for Elijah, the herald of the Messiah, should he come on this most solemn night to announce the joyful news that the Messiah has at last come. Victor Buksbazen (1954:8) says: "The rabbis say Messiah is most likely to come on the night of the Passover. And so a place at the table is set for Elijah, the traditional cup of Elijah is filled, and an empty chair awaits the heavenly guest. Will he come? Will he sip the wine? These are the secret questions of every heart. ... What high hopes that cup symbolises and what dreams are shattered at the sight of its remaining untouched!"

Chumney (1994:37-46) identifies the following 15 steps to the Passover Seder as it is observed today:

1. The cup of sanctification (*kaddesh*). The first cup of unfermented wine is called the cup of sanctification. Before the wine is drunk a blessing is recited: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine." During the Feast of Passover Jesus said: "I am the true vine" (John 15:1).

2. The washing of hands (*u-r'chatz*). No blessings recited.
3. The eating of green herbs (*karpas*). This refers to the place in the Seder when the celebrants dip green vegetables in salt water and eat it.
4. The breaking of bread (*yachatz*). During the celebration of Passover, three cakes of unleavened bread (sing. *matzah* pl. *matzot*) are placed one upon another with a napkin between each cake. The middle cake, known as *afikomen* ("that which comes after") is broken in two. One piece is distributed among the people present, and the bigger piece is hidden in a napkin to be eaten later. The Messianic understanding is that these three pieces of *matzot* represent God the Father, the Messiah Yeshua, and the Holy Spirit. The central piece, the *afikomen*, is broken, a portion is eaten, and the remainder hidden and then brought forth to testify of the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua. Jesus Christ is the unleavened bread which was broken for us (cf. Luke 22:19).
5. The telling of the story of the Exodus (*maggid*). The *maggid* concludes with the second cup of wine, which is called the cup of wrath. This cup is not drunk, but is poured out on the table as the plagues of Egypt are recited. In telling the story of the Exodus, each person is to see the Exodus as if God personally redeemed them: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, *This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt" (Ex. 13:8). Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath when He was in Gethsemane, shortly before He died on the tree (Luke 22:42-44).
6. The washing of hands with a blessing (*rachtzah*).
7. The blessings over bread (*motzi*). This blessing is expressed as follows: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth the bread from the earth." This blessing is a prophecy of the resurrection of the Messiah from the earth because He is the believer's bread (John 6:47-51).
8. The eating of the bread (*matzah*). The Passover is called the season of our freedom. On this day, you are freed from the slavery of Egypt, which was associated with the bondage of sin. Now that you are freed you are seen as a king. Kings traditionally recline at their meals, so celebrants recline during portions of the Passover Seder. Believers in Jesus are priests and kings before God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10).
9. Bitter herbs (*maror*) are blessed and eaten. These bitter herbs symbolically refer to the sufferings of the Messiah.
10. The bread and bitter herbs are eaten together (*korech*).
11. The meal is eaten (*shulchan orech*).
12. The *matzot* that was hidden (*afikomen*) is found, ransomed and then eaten (*tzafun*).
13. Grace after the meals (*barech*). At the conclusion of *barech* the blessing for wine is recited over the third cup, after which the cup is drunk. This is the cup of redemption: "Likewise *He* [the Messiah] also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). Paul says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).
14. Songs of praise (*hallel*). Psalms 115 to 118 are chanted in special praise to God. The fourth cup is now filled, and a door is opened for Elijah to enter and proclaim the coming of Messiah.
15. All is finished (*nirtzah*). A final song is sung and ends with the phrase: "Next year in Jerusalem!" (cf. Matt. 26:30).

From practises such as preparing for the possible appearance of Elijah at the *Seder*, it is evident that orthodox Jews do not recognise Jesus as Messiah and are still waiting for another messiah to come. The fulfilment of all the symbolic acts in the Seder meal still eludes them, and will continue to do so until their eyes are opened to see the wonderful fulfilment of the Passover rites

in the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God. Believers in Jesus know that the fourth cup will be drunk anew in the kingdom of the Messiah after His second coming (Matt. 26:29).

In the light of the Old Testament Feast of the Passover it is all the more wonderful how the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, thereby fulfilling all the sublime principles and prophetic expectations of the Passover. Paul says:

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

This Christian ceremony of remembrance and dedication also provides for a wide perspective of the new life in which we look back to the Saviour's crucifixion, while also looking ahead to His second coming when His kingdom will be revealed in glory. Within this perspective of our lives no provision is made for the time before Christ when we were still in the bondage of sin. Therefore, all of us also have a "religious calendar" in which we forget the things which are behind (Egypt and the wilderness life of unbelief), while looking ahead to the coming of the King when we will rule with Him. In this sense we can also say, "Next year in Jerusalem!" since we believe that Jesus Christ will soon return to restore the throne of David in Jerusalem and rule the world from there (Luke 1:32).

Until then, we must run with endurance the race which is set before us (Heb. 12:1-2). The Messiah encourages us to fight the good fight of faith to the end: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26). The basis of a life of victory over the flesh and the powers of darkness is the Lamb who laid down His life for us. For this reason, Passover celebrations (the Lord's Supper) should be observed right down to the end of the church dispensation: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

## 5. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

An extended feast of one week was instituted directly after the day of Passover, aimed at the spiritual and moral transformation of Israelites who accepted the deliverance which God offered to them through the sacrifice of the paschal lamb: "And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it" (Lev. 23:6-7).

A proper reaction to Passover was to be demonstrated by those who were pardoned by God; that is why this feast is actually an extension of Passover: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover" (Luke 22:1).

While the Passover is a type of Christ's atoning death in which He met all the righteous claims against sin, the Feast of Unleavened Bread points to the obligation of believers to change their lifestyles in such a way that their conduct would conform to God's holiness and therefore be acceptable to Him. Various guidelines were given, including symbolic acts which were prescribed to promote communion with God among the Israelites who were delivered from their sinful past in Egypt.

For the Jews this was a feast of soul-searching and cleansing. As yeast is a symbol of sin, eating unleavened bread would mean that the believer was honestly committed to living a holy life. Therefore, they had to remove all the yeast from their houses for the duration of the feast. This rule was to be applied so stringently, that they even had to sweep out crumbs of leavened bread and burn it outside: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel" (Ex. 12:15).

This feast was fulfilled when Christ died. He was the ear of wheat that had fallen in the ground and died in order to grow and bear fruit (John 12:24). As the perfect and sinless Son of God, He was the unleavened bread of life through whom we could come to spiritual life. That was why Jesus said: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Paul says that this feast is indeed a Christ-centred occasion that is to be observed by all of us: "Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

### Purging leaven from the house

In the Old Testament, a ceremony of searching and removing leaven from the houses of the Israelites was conducted in preparation for the festival of Unleavened Bread. First, the wife thoroughly cleansed the house to remove all leaven (usually crumbs of bread baked with leaven) from it. In the Bible, leaven is symbolic of sin. Chumney (1994:59) explains this practice as follows:

"In cleaning the house, the wife is instructed to purposely leave ten small pieces of leaven (bread) in the house. Then the father takes the children, along with a candle, a wooden spoon, a feather, and a piece of linen cloth, and searches through the house for the ten pieces of leaven. By nightfall on the day before Passover (*Pesach*), a final and comprehensive search is performed. At this time, the house is completely dark except for the candles. Once the father finds the leaven (bread), he sets the candle down by the leaven and lays the wooden spoon beside the leaven. Then he uses the feather to sweep the leaven onto the spoon. Without touching the leaven, he takes the feather, spoon, and leaven, wraps them in a linen cloth, and casts them out of the door of the house. The next morning (the fourteenth of Nisan), he goes into the synagogue and puts the linen cloth and its contents into a fire to be burnt."

The New Testament expression of this practice is explained as follows by Chumney (1994:59-

60): “Spiritually, we are to cleanse the leaven (sin) from our houses (lives) by allowing the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Ha Kodesh*) to reveal to us, through the knowledge of Yeshua and the Scriptures, the sin that is in our lives. It is only through God’s Word that we are able to identify sin in our lives, as it is written in Psalm 119:105, ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’ So the spiritual understanding of the candle is that it represents the Word of God. The feather represents the Holy Spirit. Even though we have the Word of God, we need the Spirit of God to illuminate the entire Bible to us. ... The spoon represents the tree that Yeshua died upon (Deut. 21:22-23). The leaven (sin) was swept on the spoon (the tree) as part of the ceremony. Likewise, our sin was swept or cast upon Yeshua (2 Cor. 5:21) when He died upon the tree.”

The Holy Spirit who regenerates us has also come to sanctify us by enabling us to walk in newness of life: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:25-27). All the leaven of sin and carnality should be removed from our lives.

### **The leaven of sin**

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be kept for seven days. In the Bible, seven is the number of completion or fullness. The believer who keeps this feast should keep it fully to the Lord and set himself aside to Him. This feast demands complete separation from all things that are sinful, while feeding only on Jesus who is the unleavened bread of life.

We are repeatedly warned against the destructive consequences of harbouring the leaven of sin in our lives. The following are various kinds of leaven spoken of in the Bible:

*The old leaven* (1 Cor. 5:7-8). This refers to old habits and sins that people indulged in before conversion. These sins became established forms of conduct through the force of habit, and are apt to reassert themselves during moments of weakness or a lack of vigilance. God said to Israel: “According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances” (Lev. 18:3). The sinful behaviour of the pagan world where we come from, as well as the wicked customs of unsaved people whom we will meet during the course of our new life, should not be followed by a Christian. No compromise whatsoever should be made, since “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). If the things which are regarded as right and proper by the world do not conform to biblical standards, they should have no part in the lives of Christians.

*The leaven of malice and wickedness* (1 Cor. 5:8). It is startling to note how often these two concepts which describe a highly depraved lifestyle are mentioned in the New Testament with regard to Christians. Paul says to the Ephesians: “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). Peter warns fellow Messianic Jews against the same tendency towards wickedness: “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (1 Pet. 2:1). It is hard to believe how wanton Christians can sometimes become. People who persist in sinning are returning in a spiritual sense to Egypt and stand to lose their faith if they do not repent. Paul admonished backsliding Hebrew Christians, and called them to repentance and perseverance:

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:12-14).

The leaven of sin was eroding their faith in the Messiah, and they no longer actively nourished their souls with the unleavened bread of life. If they continued sinning they would end up having evil and unbelieving hearts, thereby departing from the living God.

*The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees* (Matt. 16:6). Their deceptive teachings were like pervasive yeast, penetrating and corrupting the nation. The Pharisees were hiding their worldliness and covetousness behind a cloak of religion, and used it as a mask to cover up their real character. Outwardly they were the most religious people of their day, but inwardly they

were full of corruption. They did not recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah and utterly rejected His claim to be the Son of God. The Sadducees were of a kindred spirit, but unlike the Pharisees they did not believe in angels, the afterlife and resurrection from the dead. These leaders were secular in their outlook and regarded politics as more important than religion. The ordinary people were repeatedly warned against the double standards and false teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

We live in similar times today: the deity of the Lord Jesus, as well as His resurrection from the dead, is rejected by many of the modern scribes. The end-time hypocrites are also very covetous and power-hungry. They speak evil of evangelical believers who oppose them by refusing to heed to their false teachings. Nevertheless, evangelically-minded people have no choice but to reject the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

*The leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15).* This man was a religious opportunist. He knew much about the Jewish religion and was also well informed on the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He actually desired to see Jesus, and was glad when it happened (Luke 23:6-8). However, Herod had no intention of repenting and becoming a disciple of Jesus – he only wanted to see some of the miracles performed by Him. This kind of religious opportunism is rife today. Many people are flocking to meetings where healing services and other sensational signs and wonders are offered, but they have no desire to humble themselves and become disciples of the Lamb of God. They are interested in divine blessings and a show of supernatural power, but not in meeting the demands of the gospel.

*The leaven of false doctrine (Gal. 5:9).* Paul addressed a serious problem related to a false gospel of legalism which was proclaimed by certain people in the congregation of the Galatians, and he likened it to the pervasive working of leaven. The false prophets contended that faith in the Messiah was not sufficient for salvation, and that members of the church also had to observe the Torah and be circumcised. Paul warned them in no uncertain terms against the false gospel of mixing law and grace:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage [to the law]. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt* to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:1-4).

Paul was highly disturbed at the way in which the Galatians opened themselves to the leaven of deceit by trying to add requirements of the law to the salvation offered to them by the Lamb of God: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:1-3). Paul vividly and graphically proclaimed the crucified Christ to them, but their eyes had been diverted from the Cross to the Law. They were without excuse.

A different gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4) based on a convergence of law and grace is rapidly gaining in popularity these last days. It usually starts with the observing of ceremonial laws pertaining to feasts and holy days (Sabbaths), but some go further and also confirm the old covenant by way of circumcision. As far as the holy days of the old covenant are concerned, Paul says: “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain” (Gal. 4:9-11). In his comment on this Scripture, Campbell (1983:602) says:

“Under the influence of the Judaizers the Galatians had at least begun to observe the Mosaic calendar. They kept special days (weekly sabbaths), and months (new moons), and seasons (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), and years (sabbatical and jubilee years). (Cf. Col. 2:16). They observed these special times, thinking that they would thereby gain additional merit before God. But Paul had already made it clear that works [of the

law] could not be added to faith as grounds for either justification or sanctification.”

Instead of the leaven of false doctrines we should proclaim the true message of God's plan with humanity. The basic and very precious lesson that we learn from the seven feasts is that they reveal God's plan of salvation for Israel and the nations. In the Messianic era the feasts are celebrated in such a way that the Messiah is honoured and exalted, and this should be done on a much more regular basis than was required by the Old Testament's programme of annual feasts. That is the reason why, under the new covenant, Passover is substituted by the Lord's Supper, which can be celebrated as often as we like.

The crucifixion of Christ is the core of the gospel message and should always be preached. It would be wrong for Christians to celebrate an Old Testament Passover in which the symbols (wine and unleavened bread) are not directly related to Jesus as the Lamb of God, and in which the door is left open for Elijah to announce the coming of the Messiah – as if He has not yet come. That amounts to a denial of the Messiahship of Jesus, and Christians can have no part in the denial of the Messianic fulfilment of Passover symbols.

Likewise, the Feast of Unleavened Bread has been fulfilled in Jesus, and we have the obligation to teach Christian holiness as often and comprehensively as possible. The Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, and we have the privilege to reflect on that every day of the week, but particularly on Sundays. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the cause of a New Testament celebration of Pentecost which is quite different from the Old Testament's rejoicing in the Torah.

As far as the message of the last three feasts is concerned, we delight in the prophetic perspective gained from a study of the feasts, but we give expression to this expectation by way of preaching and writing on the second coming of Christ, and also by warning unrepentant sinners against the coming Antichrist's spiritual deception and subsequent reign of terror. We have a vast amount of New Testament prophecies to add to those of the Old Testament, thus enabling us to speak with great authority on end-time events, but without trying to set dates for the coming of Christ.

*Israelites were to remove all leaven from their houses (Ex. 12:15).* The head of the house was not only forbidden to eat leaven during the feast, but he had to make sure that there was no leaven in his house. Hugh Downie (1994:60-61) says that both personal and collective holiness is incumbent on us today. Our individual lives must be clean and our associations pure. This raises an important question of what to allow, not only in our own lives but also in the circles in which we move. As individuals, we are responsible to keep leaven out of our own lives; as parents we should see that there is no leaven in our homes. Many who are very zealous about keeping leaven out of the church are not so particular about leaven in the home, although home life is just as important as church life.

All parents who are thoughtful and discerning realise how difficult it is to keep children, especially adolescents, within reasonable bounds. The age in which we are living is a difficult and dangerous one for young people and we have sympathy with them in their problems and struggles. Yet the parents, not the children, should govern the home. The father and mother should have the final say as to what is to be allowed in the home and the parent who lets go of his or her God-given authority is heading for a domestic disaster.

*A very severe penalty was attached to the discovery of leaven in the house.* “Whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel” (Ex. 12:15). This cutting off might mean one of two things – actual death as in the case of the Sabbath breaker (Num. 15:36), or exclusion from the privileges of the people of God, as in the case of Azariah (2 Kings 15:5). Downie (1994:61-62) says:

“In the New Testament cutting off means one of two things and sometimes both – loss of fellowship with God or with the people of God. We cannot walk in darkness and have fellowship with Him who is the light, in whom is no darkness at all. There must be an unclouded sky between the soul and God if communion with Him is to be a reality. In extreme cases, like that dealt with in Corinth, the offender is put out of the local assembly. Yet even in a case like that, it

must not be forgotten that restoration is the determined goal in all discipline. The Corinthians made the mistake of thinking that when they excommunicated the offender the matter was ended. They had to be reminded it was their duty to try and bring him back again. Too often a person is disciplined by a company of God's people and no effort whatsoever is made to bring him back again. ... Cases of restoration are rare indeed and one can only conclude that it is because there are so few who measure up to the standard laid down in Galatians 6:1."

### **Abide in Christ**

Our relationship with the Lord Jesus is a matter of the utmost importance, and all of us should surrender ourselves to live holy lives by abiding in Christ. He pardons abundantly and it is only in extreme cases that the "cutting off" or "casting out" of an apostatised believer will occur: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:4-6).

What about apostatised churches? Can they also be cut off from communion with God? Downie (1994:63) says that only the Lord can cut off a company of His people, or as it is put in Revelation 2:4-5, remove their lampstand from its place because they have left their first love. That is His prerogative and He did not hand it over to churches or anyone else to exercise. An assembly is cut off when it ceases to exist altogether and, unfortunately, that is by no means a rare thing. The discontinuance of an assembly means that the Lord has removed their lampstand from its place, as He did at Ephesus. What a solemn reflection!

The Lord is not content with the leaven of sin in our lives, and made it possible for us to live free from the domination of sin. Even if we do sin – which is always a possibility – our strained relationship with the Lord should immediately be corrected through confession and repentance. Johns says, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

Keep on confessing any sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts you, while single-mindedly committing yourself to walk in the light: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7).

The verb by which cleansing is promised to us here is written in the continuous tense, which means that if we have fellowship with Him He will continuously cleanse us from all sin. In this way we can keep our moral and spiritual record with the Lord clean, thereby living free from contamination and domination by the leaven of sin.



## 6. The Feast of Firstfruits

This feast is also closely related to the annual agricultural activities in Israel. The action of gathering the harvest is used metaphorically to describe the gathering of a spiritual harvest for the kingdom of heaven in Israel, but in a New Testament context also among all nations:

“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 the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Lev. 23:10-11).

Israel is a winter rainfall area, therefore the first sheaf of grain was given to the Lord as a sacrifice in the spring. This had to be done on a Sunday (the day after the Sabbath), and it was a very significant event spiritually, as this celebration was meant to make the people of Israel acceptable to the Lord.

Edward Chumney (1994:69-70) says that the people of Israel were familiar with the concepts of “firstfruits” and the “firstborn”. The first fruits were always the choicest, the foremost, the first, the best, the pre-eminent of all that was to follow. They were holy to the Lord. The concept of the first fruits or firstborn is a major theme in the Bible. This can be seen by the following Scriptures: Exodus 23:16, 19; 34:26; Leviticus 2:12, 14; 23:20; Numbers 18:12-15, 26; Deuteronomy 18:1-5; 26:2-4, 10; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 10:35-39; Proverbs 3:9; Jeremiah 2:3; Ezekiel 44:30; 48:14; Hebrews 6:20.

The firstborn of both man and beast were sanctified and presented to the Lord (Ex. 13:2; 22:29). The first fruits of all the earth were presented to the Lord as first fruits at His altar in praise and thanksgiving (Deut. 26:1-11).

The Feast of the Firstfruits was celebrated close to the time of the Passover. The barley was nearly ready to be harvested when the Jews left Egypt (Ex. 9:31). This adds to the meaning of the spring month of Nisan as the beginning of a new life. Not only did Jesus rise from the grave in that month, but the Jews were also led out of Egypt in Nisan. In the year 32, the ceremony was conducted on Sunday morning 16<sup>th</sup> Nisan – the day on which Jesus rose from the grave. It was the day after the Sabbath: “Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene” (Mark 16:9).

The seed that had fallen in the ground (the death and burial of Jesus) gave its first fruit on that Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the grave. It also indicated the beginning of the harvest of souls, for the whole harvest that would be gathered after that, would be acceptable to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, it signalled the transition from the old covenant to the new. That is why it had to happen on a Sunday, the first day of the week and symbolically the beginning of a new dispensation. The day of our rest in the Lord was changed from the seventh day of the preceding week to the first day of a new week in the dispensation of grace. Because of the finished work of the Messiah, we can celebrate resurrection day every Sunday. We have entered into the new covenant with God through His Son, and are therefore active partakers in the resurrection life of Jesus our Lord: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Cor. 15:17).

The Lord Jesus is depicted in different ways as the Firstfruits, the One who sanctified the entire harvest of people who would be saved in His name during the New Covenant. Together they constitute the harvest of souls to be gathered in the heavenly barn. The following statements about Christ as the Firstfruits are relevant to this discussion:

*He is the firstborn of Mary:* “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us. Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS” (Matt. 1:23-25).

*He is the only begotten [or first-born] of the Father:* “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

*He is the firstborn over all creation:* “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15).

*He is the beginning of the creation of God* (Rev. 3:14).

*He is the firstborn from the dead:* “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come ... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood ...” (Rev. 1:4-5).

*He is the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom. 8:29).

*He is the firstfruits of the resurrected ones:* “Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

*He is the pre-eminent one:* “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence” (Col. 1:18).

Jesus Christ is the Most Holy One of God and is sanctified by the Father. As the Firstborn of the Father He is pre-eminent in the entire creation, and in Him the entire harvest of souls is sanctified and made acceptable to the Father.

### **Firstfruits as the token of justification**

It is obvious that a ritual associated with the beginning of a new harvest season could in no way contribute towards Israel’s justification before the Lord. This feast clearly foreshadowed the new life that would be given to them by the Messiah, and also the fact that His resurrection would be the beginning of the gathering of a big harvest for the Lord on earth.

Christ “was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25), and a risen and ascended Christ is the ground of our acceptance with God. The crucifixion of Christ would have lost its meaning apart from the resurrection. Without the resurrection, the death of Christ would only have appeared to men as the death of a noble martyr. Faith would have lost a sure anchorage without a living Christ who also conquered death. At the same time, He also gained a great victory over the devil, “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul shows us how vitally important the resurrection of Christ is. He rightly reasoned that if Christ is not risen we have nothing worth living for; but if He is risen we have everything that we require for this life and eternity. The resurrection is the great sign that God the Father is satisfied with the ransom price paid by Christ on the cross on behalf of all sinners. Furthermore, a belief in the resurrection is important for salvation since it pre-supposes a belief in the deity of Christ. Only the spotless Lamb of God could offer Himself as an acceptable substitute for sinners by carrying their guilt and conquering death and hell on their behalf. His resurrection is proof of a tremendous salvation.

### **Relationship between His death and resurrection**

There is a very close relationship between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the one is a precondition for the other. The way to victory and glory was through dying and rising from death again: “Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:23-24).

The seed of grain first had to be sown into the ground; otherwise there would have been no wave sheaf and no subsequent harvest. So Christ had to die and rise again before there could be a harvest of redeemed souls for God. Downie (1994:68) says:

“As the corn of wheat, Christ stood absolutely alone. He was the only begotten of the Father, the sole object of His eternal love. Had he not died, He would always have remained alone in His

solitary and unapproachable glory. As the corn of wheat, He died alone. None could share in His sufferings for sin; none could go with Him to the shameful cross of Calvary. Having died alone and risen from the dead, He is no longer alone. He has become 'the firstborn from the dead' (Col. 1:18), 'the firstborn among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29)."

We should identify closely with the death and resurrection of Christ by dying to the old life of sin, being pardoned by Christ, and then experience regeneration which is a raising up into a new life in the likeness of Christ:

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:4-8).

From this Scripture it is clear that to be baptised into the death of Christ is a spiritual experience through which we are united together in the likeness of His death. Then, and then only, will we fully partake in His resurrection life. We have to make a full surrender to Christ in which we deny and crucify ourselves (laying off our old nature) before we will be able to put on Christ in all aspects of our life through being filled by the Holy Spirit, thus enabling us to walk in newness of life.

Christians who fail to make this surrender are spiritually bogged down by an uncrucified, fleshly nature: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-3). The Spirit of God is not given full control of your life as long as the flesh is not surrendered to the cross of Christ. To such people, the following command is impossible to heed: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). The spiritually immature Ephesians were reminded that they had to put off the old life before they would be able to fully put on the resurrection life of Christ: "... put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and ... put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

In his personal life, Paul experienced that constant association with the death of Christ is the key to keep on growing in the knowledge of the power of His resurrection. He stated it as a personal objective, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Paul knew that leading a life in the power of Christ's resurrection will ensure that a believer is spiritually qualified to share in the resurrection of the saints at the end of the church dispensation. This is a blessing which is only promised to believers.

### **Different resurrections**

There are different ways and stages in which the promise of resurrection is fulfilled in believers. Firstly, at rebirth, we are spiritually quickened by receiving the resurrection life of Christ: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph. 5:14). We arise from spiritual death, although physically we still live in mortal bodies. Nevertheless, we already have the assurance of eternal life (John 5:24).

As people who are spiritually alive and, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, walking in the resurrection life of Christ, we are strangers and pilgrims in an evil world. We are looking forward to the coming of Christ, when we will also be bodily resurrected to receive immortal, glorified bodies like the one with which Christ rose from the dead: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

The Lord Jesus also explained the resurrection of believers as follows: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

This is a reference to the fact that some of the spiritually reborn people who will still be physically alive when Jesus comes, will never die – they will be changed from mortality to immortality in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51-54). The others, who have already died physically, will be resurrected in glorified bodies and live forever.

The Bible clearly distinguishes between two physical resurrections – one for believers and one for unbelievers. The one is called the resurrection of life, the first resurrection, or the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Acts 24:15). The other one is called the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29). There is at least one thousand years between these two resurrections, which not only differ in time but also in character and results (Rev. 20:4-6).

Paul refers to the important fact that the first resurrection occurs in different stages: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:22-24).

Jesus Christ Himself initiated the first resurrection and made it possible for all who believe in Him to share in the wonderful blessings of the first resurrection. When Christ comes at the end of the church dispensation, the main harvest of believers will be gathered in heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Afterwards, the tribulation saints will also be resurrected (Rev. 20:4). They all form part of the first resurrection in Christ.

What an incredible future to look forward to! Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, has redeemed us by His precious blood, He defeated the enemy of our souls, He rose from the dead and also imparted His resurrection life to us. Now we can look forward to the day when we will receive new, glorified bodies during the resurrection of the just, and to eternal life in His divine presence.

## 7. Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks)

This feast is also known as the Feast of Weeks, due to the seven weeks that must elapse between the feasts of Firstfruits and Pentecost: “And 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; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your habitations two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD” (Lev. 23:15-17).

On the fiftieth day, a Sunday, two leavened loaves had to be brought to God as a wave offering. Remember that leaven is a symbol of sin, therefore these two loaves do not point to the Messiah. They must be seen as prophetic symbols of two groups of believers – those in Israel and those in the Gentile world. Even though the believers from Israel and the nations are saved, they are not sinless and perfect, and must be consecrated to the Lord. That is the meaning of this ceremony. The festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread relate to Jesus who is without sin, but Pentecost refers to the sanctification of Israel and the church where sin still exists.

The Jews celebrate the onset of the dispensation of the law at *Pentecost* (derived from the Greek word *pentecostos*, meaning *fiftieth*). They believe that the people of Israel were already at Sinai fifty days after leaving Egypt. It was there that God gave Moses the law (Ex. 19:1-3). It was for the celebration of this feast that the Jews from different countries gathered in Jerusalem on the day when the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2). They did not realise that the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread *and* the Feast of the Firstfruits had already been fulfilled through the atoning work and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, they did not realise that the dispensation of the law had come to an end.

The new dispensation of grace, ministered by the Holy Spirit, was to replace the dispensation of the law, “for the code of the law kills, but the Holy Spirit makes alive” (2 Cor. 3:6 AB; see also Heb. 8:7-13 and Jer. 31:31). 3 000 people died at Sinai because they were punished under the law for worshipping an idol (Ex. 32:28). On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the New Testament, 3 000 people were saved when the new dispensation was introduced by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41).

The beginning of the dispensation of the church at Pentecost indicates that it replaces the dispensation of the law. It was another example of God’s perfect timing, since 40 days had passed between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and another ten days while the disciples were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. This total of 50 days is exactly the same as the time that expired between the two wave offerings of Firstfruits and Pentecost. Christians still recognise this chronology, as we celebrate the resurrection on the Sunday after Good Friday, the ascension 40 days later on a Thursday, and Pentecost ten days later, again on a Sunday.

It is also interesting that Pentecost is not celebrated in isolation. The counting of 50 days serves as a chain that links Pentecost to the first three feasts. It therefore forms part of the cycle of spring festivals and is intimately linked to the Firstfruits festival celebrated 50 days earlier. For this reason, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit must always be seen in its close association with the whole series of events that include the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At Sinai, God revealed Himself to Israel in a new and greater way than before. Extensive new guidelines and laws were given on how to honour and worship Him and also how to observe godly principles in human relations. The fact that these legalistic guidelines proved to be beyond the ability of fallen human beings, placed greater emphasis on the need for the coming of the Messiah as Saviour and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the One who can guide believers into all truth.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus on a Sunday (“the day after the Sabbath”), as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, again on a Sunday, are the earliest prophetic indications in the Old Testament of a future dispensation in God’s plan of salvation in which new

principles would be laid down of worshipping Him through His Son under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A relationship was to be entered into with His Son, and not with the law. The objective of believers would be following the Messiah and becoming conformed to His image of righteousness, rather than following the dictates and shadowy rituals of the law.

In the new dispensation, the seventh-day Sabbath imposed by the law would be replaced by the worship of the Messiah who rose from the grave on the first day of a new week. He fulfilled the law which no other man could do, exposed its weakness of not being able to reconcile Israel with God, superseded its demands by setting new standards for true spirituality, and introduced a new life of faith in Him through the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost enables believers everywhere with motivation and spiritual power to live lives according to the sinless example of the Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose with this experience is not only to comply with the command towards personal holiness but also to have boldness to engage in the Great Commission of world evangelism. We are all called upon to labour in the harvest fields of the world and gather a spiritual harvest for the kingdom of the Messiah.

## **Two spiritual marriages**

The giving of the Torah to Israel on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after their exodus from Egypt was an important new phase in the unfolding of God's calling for them to be His special people. The first salient point in formalising this relationship was the sign of circumcision which was instituted when a covenant was concluded between God, Abraham and his descendants through Isaac (Gen. 17:7-11). At Sinai, spiritual principles and demands were laid down to ensure that Israel would serve only the true God, Yahweh. He said, "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:2-3).

Abraham was the first Hebrew believer who was called by God to come over from the pagan world and serve Him in a new land which God would give to him and his descendants (the term *Hebrew* is derived from the verb which means "to cross over" or "to make a transition"). In the typology of Abraham's family, Abraham is a type of God. Paul describes him as "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16) while James refers to him as "the friend of God" (Jas. 2:23). His barren wife, Sarah, depicts Israel in their predominantly barren relationship with God during Old Testament times. She only fulfilled her expected role as mother in her old age, much in the same way as Israel will only be spiritually awakened at an advanced stage of their history as God's chosen people.

Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the son of promise. Abraham loved his son dearly, so it must have been a very traumatic experience to receive the following command from the Lord: "Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22:2). Abraham obeyed, and willingly gave his only son to die. Likewise, Jesus was the only-begotten and beloved Son of the Father, who was willing to give Him over to die in order to become a ransom for our sins.

Isaac and Jesus were both prepared to do what the Lord had said. Isaac even carried the wood on his shoulders and climbed the mountain on which he was to die as a burnt offering. Many years later the temple of the Lord was to be built on that very same mountain. Thousands of animals were sacrificed there and became types of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who was to be offered just outside the gates of Jerusalem for the sins of the entire human race. Like Isaac, Jesus was prepared to lay down His life, and He carried the wooden cross on His shoulders on His way to the place where He was to be sacrificed.

Isaac was raised from the altar and given back to his father: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said: In Isaac your seed shall be called, accounting that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Heb. 11:17-19). Many centuries later the Messiah gave His life so that others could be saved, but He rose from the dead and returned to His Father in heaven. He gained victory over death.

Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was a type of the Holy Spirit and was sent out by Abraham to find a wife for his son (Gen. 15:2; 24:2-4). After a long journey he returned to Abraham with Rebecca, who then was married to Isaac. Likewise, the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father to gather a bride for His Son from a predominantly pagan world. At the end of the church dispensation, when the bridal congregation of Christ is ready and full in number, she will be taken away to Jesus in heaven where the marriage will be consummated. John says: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8; for a discussion of the bride of the Son, see Malan, 2009).

In Abraham's core family there were five members who were typical of the triune God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), as well as Israel and the church. The marriage relationship between Israel and God is often alluded to in the Old Testament. God says to Israel: "Your Maker *is* your husband, the LORD of hosts *is* His name; and your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of all the earth" (Isa. 54:5). After a period of spiritual unfaithfulness Israel's broken relationship with God will be restored (Isa. 54:7; Hos. 2:14-17). Wonderful promises were made by God on their end-time restoration:

"The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice. ... For thus says the LORD: Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel! Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth. ... Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd *does* his flock ... Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:3-4, 7-10, 31-34).

A spiritual resurrection is awaiting the people of Israel. In their blinded and agnostic state they were already a blessing to the Gentile world in that the salvation that came to them was rejected and subsequently offered to the Gentiles. The natural branches of the olive tree (Israel) were broken off from the root (the Holy One of Israel) and branches from the wild olive tree (Gentiles) were, through faith, grafted into the Messiah. The obligation now rests on us to provoke Israel to jealousy by our spiritual heritage in the Messiah (Rom. 11:11-12).

We should demonstrate to Israel the joy of deliverance, the freedom that we enjoy in Christ, and the holiness and love which He instils in us through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). In this way they should practically be able to see that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). We cannot achieve this end by compromising with the legalistic and ritualistic expressions of Judaism. Once the people of Israel make the transition from legalism to the grace of the Messiah, they will fulfil their ancient calling to be God's special people on earth, and be a blessing to all nations. Paul says: "For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15).

"Life from the dead" is not only what unbelieving Israel needs, but all people on earth who are still spiritually dead are desperately in need of rebirth. Christ is the resurrection and the life! The Holy Spirit has come on Pentecost to endue believers with power from on high, thereby authorising them to follow in the footsteps of Christ and to do the work that He has commissioned them to do.

Orthodox Jews in the present time on Pentecost, only commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> day after their exodus from Egypt when they received the law at Sinai, still keep on rejoicing in the law instead of in the new dispensation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That amounts to a serious error of misjudgement as they have lost track with the further unfolding of God's divine plan for the salvation of Israel and the nations. The period under the law was a preparatory phase in their spiritual development, leading to the coming of the Messiah. He came after His people had passed through 1 500 years of failed attempts to satisfy the demands of the law, and is indeed the only One who can "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He offers them newness of life through faith in Himself, as well as the promise of the Holy Spirit, but this offer is still turned down by the majority of Jews.

The pervasive problem of not being in step with the fulfilment of biblical feasts cannot be attributed mainly to Israel's inability to recognise the fulfilment of the Feast of Pentecost, but goes further back to their failure to realise that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah and Lamb of God. If they had realised and accepted this all important fact, they would have found themselves among the disciples of Christ who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

### **The necessity of atonement**

The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was part of an elaborate set of religious rites, principles and activities aimed at preparing Israel on the coming of the Messiah. Edward Chumney (1994:93-94) says:

"The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai involved the Aaronic priesthood, the sacrificial system, the tabernacle, the sabbath days, the festivals, the civil and ceremonial laws, and the Ten Commandments. ... These things are given by God as a shadow of the things to come (Heb. 10:1) to teach us (Gal. 3:24) about the Messiah Yeshua and the redemptive work of God (Col. 2:16-17). *Shavuot* (Pentecost) was the birth of the congregation (*kehilat*) in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). The things given at Mount Sinai were divine and from God, but shown in a physical way to enable us to understand the spiritual truths that God wanted to communicate to us" (1 Pet. 2:5-9).

The laws and the sacrificial system given to Israel were indeed holy ordinances, and yet they were only a shadow of even more wonderful things which were still to be revealed to them: "For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect ... For *it is* impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:1, 4).

What, then, was the purpose of giving Israel laws that were impossible to obey in an acceptable and sustained manner, and then demanding them to bring sacrifices that were unable to cleanse them from sin? As stated in the Scripture above, the law and the sacrifices were shadows, or types, of a perfect plan of salvation that would be revealed in the Messiah as the true Lamb of God. They needed the law as their tutor to Christ, so He could do for them what the law could not do (Gal. 3:24).

As for the sacrifices, Israel had to appreciate their need in the indispensable role of forgiveness and atonement. Their continued transgressions of the law underscored the important function of atonement on an ongoing basis. But the animal sacrifices were ineffectual to cleanse them from sin, and were therefore only types of the Messiah's once for all sacrifice. God did forgive the sins of Old Testament saints by virtue of the sacrifices offered to Him, pending the final sacrifice of the Messiah to validate all the preliminary sacrifices that were brought before His crucifixion.

The atoning death of Jesus was therefore also of retroactive effect in that it equally applies to the salvation of believers before the time of Christ. In the end we will all be united together in the Messiah and share in the atonement provided only by Him. In concluding his discussion on Old Testament saints, Paul says that these people, "having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise [of the Messiah], God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb. 11:39-40).



## **Trumpets of the Lord**

During the course of the seven festivals, three trumpets are sounded to call the people together for the announcement of a new phase in God's plan of salvation. The first trumpet sounded at Sinai during Pentecost (The Feast of Weeks) after God's people were called out of Egypt, and were about to receive the law. The second trumpet sounds during the Feast of Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*) after the main harvest has been gathered, and the third one on the Day of Atonement to celebrate Israel's salvation.

Israel were on the brink of the dispensation of the law when a trumpet sounded on the mountain and Moses was summoned to go up higher and receive God's commandments: "And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up" (Ex. 19:19-20).

Even though Israel nominally agreed to accept and observe the law, their hearts were not right with the Lord. When Moses was still on the mountain they lapsed into idolatry and worshiped a golden calf. This attitude did not augur well for the ensuing dispensation of the law. Indeed, the Israelites more often than not faltered in their spiritual lives, thereby rendering themselves unfit to serve the Lord and also to receive the Messiah when He eventually came.

Consequently, the Messiah commissioned His small group of disciples to humble themselves in anticipation of the blessing of Pentecost, and to then start preaching the gospel to all nations: "Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:46-49; cf. Acts 1:8).

This blessing on the day of Pentecost was received fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits when Christ had risen from the dead (Acts 2:1-12).

## 8. The Long Interval: Gathering of the Harvest

Pentecost is followed by a period of four months during which the harvest of different products is gathered in Israel. The last three feasts are then celebrated after the harvest, in the seventh month. The long time-span between these two groups of feasts has prophetic significance. It refers to the dispensation of the church, for in that time the harvest of the kingdom of heaven is to be gathered among all nations. Those working for God should dedicate themselves towards completing their task within the available time: “Do you not say: There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35).

On another occasion Jesus said: “The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2). In one of the parables a field is used as a symbol of the world, and the final gathering of the harvest as the end of the world (Matt. 13:38-39). The Greek word for “world” used in Matthew 13:39 is *aion* (Eng. “aeon”) and also refers to a long period, like an age (cf. 1 Cor 10:11). In the parable, “aeon” refers to the Messianic age between the first and second coming of the Messiah, during which the harvest should be gathered. Only at the end of this age the harvest will be assembled in the heavenly barn.

There are different descriptions in the Bible of the nature of the church dispensation, as well as various signs that indicate its end, after which Israel will again play a central role in God’s divine plan for humanity. The following are important facts to keep in mind:

### Rejecting of the Messiah

The Lamb of God who was sent to Israel as their Saviour and King was rejected by the great majority of people, including their spiritual leaders. By this act He was “cut off” from His own people, who rejected His credentials and decided to find their own way spiritually without Him. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). This negative reaction of Israel accounts for the long interval in the celebration of the seven feasts. Despite the tragic consequences for Israel caused by the rejection of their Messiah-King, the long interval is nevertheless a most meaningful phase in the proclamation of God’s salvation to the entire world – including the dispersed Israelites.

The Messiah explains Israel’s spiritual blindness and the consequences of Israel’s rejecting of the Son of God as follows in a parable:

“There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance. So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? They said to Him, He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matt. 21:33-43).

Jesus the Messiah indicated to the Jewish leaders that they were the tenants who would reject the Husbandman (God) in two stages: first they rejected His servants, and now they were on the verge of also rejecting and killing His Son. Louis Barbieri (1983:70-71) says:

“It seems clear that Jesus was speaking of the nation of Israel that had been carefully prepared by God to be His fruitful vineyard (cf. Isa. 5:1-7). The care of the vine had been committed to the nation’s religious leaders. But they had failed to acknowledge the Master’s right over them and

had treated His messengers and prophets badly. They ultimately would even kill His Son, Jesus Christ, outside Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 13:12). ... By way of application Jesus said the kingdom of God was being taken away from those who heard Him, and it would be given to the people who would produce its fruit. ... But the kingdom has not been taken completely away from Israel forever (Rom. 11:15, 25). And the church is not now inheriting the kingdom. ... Jesus was simply saying the kingdom was being taken away from the nation Israel at the time, but it would be given back to the nation in a future day when that nation would demonstrate true repentance and faith.”

During the interval between the feasts, the gathering of God’s harvest occurs mostly among the non-Jewish nations. While thus occupied, Gentile believers should provoke Israel to jealousy by the way in which they serve and glorify the Messiah, and also by the diligence in which they execute His commands.

It is also interesting to note that during the time between the first and second coming of the Messiah, there are two transitional generations in which Israel and the church coexist. During the first generation after the coming of the Messiah, the first four feasts were fulfilled (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost). Because of Israel’s rejection of the Messianic fulfilment of these feasts, the writing was on the wall for Israel to be phased out from God’s divine plan, being dispersed from their God-given land (Matt. 23:36-38). At the same time, before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the church of Christ was established in the Gentile world and therefore gradually phased in.

In the last generation before the coming of the Messiah, Israel is restored in their land, and that in itself is a sign to the church that the dispensation of world evangelisation is drawing to a close (Luke 21:24). While Israel is increasingly being re-established in their land, the true church should prepare to be taken away from planet earth when the Heavenly Bridegroom comes.

### **Israel’s kingdom suspended**

The Messiah was born in Israel to be their Saviour and King (Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:32). By the time Jesus was introduced to the nation when He started with His public ministry, the kingdom of Israel had already been non-existent for about six centuries, dating from their Babylonian exile. They were first the subjects of the Babylonian Empire, followed by the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. By the time of Christ the throne of David was still vacant, and in His Olivet Discourse He indicated that this situation would remain unchanged until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.

Jesus prophesied an even more absolute subjection of Israel by the nations, in which He said that they would not only be without a king but also without a capital city and a land, while many of them would also lose their lives:

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20-24).

This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans conquered and destroyed Jerusalem, leading to the death of 1.1 million Jews. The remaining 97 000 inhabitants of the dying city were taken as captives of war and dispersed to various countries (see Malan, 2012). It is clearly stated in the above prophecy that Jerusalem would not be trampled indefinitely but only until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled – indicating that there would be an extended time during which the Gentile world would be offered the opportunity to become part of the kingdom of God. Paul also referred to this period of the gathering of a harvest among the pagan nations, after which the whole Israel will be saved:

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:25-26).

Israel will definitely be physically and spiritually restored in the end-time: “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: ... I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (Ezek. 36:22-26).

The re-establishment of Israel as a people of God who truly serve Him will occur when Jesus returns after the long interval of world evangelism. This time He will not again be rejected by Israel, but will be fully accepted. During His first coming He said: “For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matt. 23:39). It will then be fitting for the Messiah to restore the throne of David and establish His worldwide kingdom: “After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things” (Acts 15:16-17).

As long as Israel is scattered and Jerusalem trampled, God’s kingdom will not be manifested as a physical reality on earth. Only Christ can establish His kingdom and that can only happen after He has come as King of kings, defeated and judged His enemies and saved the remnant of Israel.

The Lord Jesus has never commissioned His disciples to engage in kingdom transformations by mustering forces through ecumenical alliances and mass meetings. Neither have they been empowered to dispel evil forces from earth by means of strategic spiritual warfare, or challenged to strive after high positions such as kings, apostles, or special prophets who are anointed to wield supernatural powers by doing signs and wonders.

To the contrary, we are strangers and pilgrims in a world which lies in the sway of the evil one (1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 5:19). Those who are saved are relatively few (Matt. 7:14; Luke 13:23-24) and we have been warned that we will be despised, hated and persecuted by a predominantly wicked and God-rejecting world (John 15:18-20; 16:33).

In the parable of the wheat and the tares we are told that we will live and work in close association with wicked people right down to the end of the dispensation, when the time for the final harvest dawns: “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” (Matt. 13:30).

Presently, during the time close to the second coming of Christ, it is conspicuous that the spiritual tares are increasingly grouping themselves together in the form of cults, deceived churches, the non-Christian religions, interfaith movements, and mystical organisations such as the New Age Movement, transcendental meditation groups, secular humanists, etc. At a given time the trumpet of God will sound and all true believers will be gathered together in heaven.

### **A dispensational perspective on evil**

The final phase of the church age will not be characterised by a kingdom situation of peace and justice, in which the church occupies a position of supremacy over evil worldly powers, but rather in an unprecedented confrontation between the powers of light and darkness. Before God intervenes to judge the perpetrators of evil, the global harvest period will begin when the true church is summoned to heaven. Right now, we are living in a time of great apostasy and falling away from the truth, and if we are serious about prevailing against the forces of spiritual deception we should be well informed on the great impact of evil influences on humanity.

The reality of an opposing kingdom of darkness should always be kept in mind. Satan is responsible for the spiritual and moral downfall of humanity, and he is intent on the end-time

revealing of his kingdom on earth. The false messiah and the false prophet will be at the head of this wicked kingdom during the seven years of the tribulation period, and Satan will give them his power, his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:1-2). His deception and attacks on believers will increase in intensity as we move closer to the end.

Satan has achieved such astounding success with his efforts that all the previous dispensations in human history have ended in large-scale apostasy. These rebellious situations gave rise to dramatic interventions by the Lord in which the followers of Satan were judged, leading to a new phase in the progressive unfolding of God's plan for humanity. According to biblical prophecies, future dispensations will also end in apostasy among the majority of people on earth.

The seven dispensations are mentioned below, and they offer a clear dispensational framework for the understanding of God's dealings with humanity, as well as an explanation for the periods of intensified actions by the devil. From this short review it will be evident that not only Israel failed to live up to their spiritual calling, but also people and nations of all ages in human history. In the light of these facts it will be evident why the Feast of Trumpets in the end-time will be followed by "seven awful days" of divine judgement.

**1. The dispensation of innocence in the Garden of Eden.** God had commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning them that they would surely die if they did (Gen. 2:17). The devil disguised himself as a snake and sowed the seeds of unbelief in their hearts, to which they heeded. Adam and Eve suddenly became aware of the distinction between good and evil; they were victims of evil deception, and their relationship of faith in God was consequently broken. They immediately died spiritually and also physically became mortal beings. Instead of obedience to God they now became subservient to a foreign god – the devil. In this way they acquired a fallen nature which was also inherited by all their descendants (Rom. 5:12). The original sin of our first parents accounts for the fact that all people are born as sinners. If they are not regenerated by Christ they remain under the control of the god of this age, thereby heading for eternal death and condemnation (Rom. 5:13-19). Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their unbelief, and the dispensation of innocence ended in a great tragedy for humanity.

**2. The dispensation of conscience.** God enabled fallen humanity to distinguish between good and evil through their conscience. They could communicate with God through prayers and sacrifices, thereby establishing a relationship with Him. They had the ability to make moral choices between good and evil (Gen. 4:7). However, the inclination to sin got the upper hand. All people, except for Noah and his family, degenerated into total apostasy, and that gave rise to the Flood in which all the wicked people were destroyed (Gen. 6:5-7).

**3. The dispensation of human government after the Flood.** This stage of human history was characterised by the forming of nations with their own rulers. They had the choice whether to serve God or not. By their own choice they all developed into pagan nations who worshipped idols, thereby rendering evidence they were all deceived by Satan. By building the tower of Babel they endeavoured to establish a pagan world government under the leadership of a king who deified himself. God defeated their effort by the confusion of languages, after which the different peoples (or nations), independent from one another, continued with their idolatry and unbelief in the true God.

**4. The dispensation of the law.** The Lord introduced a new dispensation by first calling Israel and later delivering them from Egypt so that they could serve Him as a holy and independent people in the Promised Land. He gave them His law and also guided, strengthened and blessed them through the priestly service in the tabernacle. He gave clear instructions to Israel not to mix with pagan nations, since they would defile themselves spiritually with the idolatry of these nations. The seven feasts of the Lord were also given to them to further teach them about His great salvation. Tragically, Israel's long history in the Old Testament was mainly characterised by apostasy, disobedience to the law, unbelief in the true God, and the worshipping of idols. The Chosen People of God had receded into spiritual darkness and unbelief, and together with all the inhabitants of the world they were victims of "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

**5. The dispensation of the church.** With the birth of the Messiah a great light shone upon a people who walked in darkness. "That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:9-11). The coming of Jesus Christ, His atoning death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit formed the basis of a new testament in which all people were to be called out of darkness into His marvellous light. The first four of the seven feasts of Israel were fulfilled during the year of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and during the subsequent centuries many people (although never a majority in any particular society or nation) came to faith in Christ.

The global revelation of God's grace in the New Testament coincided with increased knowledge of Satan and his kingdom. But many of the early believers, at their own peril, did not resist deception as they should have done. Paul said to the Corinthians, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you put up with it well" (2 Cor. 11:3-4). Spiritual deception permeated the entire church dispensation, and only small groups of people remained true to the gospel of Christ. Right now, the world is spiritually in a particularly dark time which will give rise to a dramatic intervention by the Lord to remove true believers and then surrender the deceived masses to the dictatorship of the Antichrist.

Deceived, nominal believers will only have themselves to blame for their predicament when they are left behind at the rapture. The Messiah warned believers among the nations not to follow Israel's bad example by lusting after evil things, worshipping idols, yielding to sexual immorality, murmuring against God, and tempting the Messiah (1 Cor. 10:5-10). Are we learning from Israel's mistakes? Paul says: "All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:11-12). Never despise Israel because of their wrong doing, but be determined to do better and to set a good example for them (cf. Rom. 11:13-23).

**6. The dispensation of the Antichrist's rule.** The Antichrist will be revealed shortly after the rapture, when the dispensation of his seven-year long reign on earth will begin. Although God will also raise special witnesses to preach the gospel during this time, converts will die as martyrs because of persecution by the Antichrist. This dispensation will end in world-wide apostasy and also in a demonic-inspired effort to kill the true Christ when He comes again (Rev. 19:19). These efforts will lead to the notorious battle of Armageddon when all the evil forces and their leaders will be destroyed.

**7. Dispensation of the Millennium.** Christ will personally rule during this dispensation, and the saved Israel will be His special witnesses who will evangelise the world (Isa. 27:6). They will be highly regarded by all nations (Zech. 8:23). Although the first generation of people after Christ's return will all be saved, their children will still be born with sinful natures and will therefore have to be evangelised. As incredible and unlikely as it may seem, a mere form of godliness will in the course of time during the Millennium, set in and give rise to widespread unbelief. Satan will be released from the pit after 1 000 years to once more tempt humanity in order to reveal the hidden thoughts and desires in their hearts. The majority of them will immediately fall victim to his deceit and wilfully participate in the last big rebellion against God and His kingdom (Rev. 20:7-10).

It is clear that the great falling away of the present time will lead to an extremely polarised situation: The majority of humanity will be carried away by the strong current of deception and immorality, and pave the way for the coming of the Antichrist as the self-declared God and man of sin. Conversely, the group of true believers will resist deception and evil, and be "counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). That will happen when the trumpet of the fifth feast sounds.

## 9. The Feast of Trumpets

Three feasts are scheduled for the seventh month (Tishri) in Israel's religious calendar, i.e. the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:24). The seventh month marks the end of the harvest.

This feast has been integrated into the Jewish New Year celebrations (*Rosh Hashanah*) since Tishri (usually September on the Gregorian calendar) is the first month in their civil calendar. *Rosh Hashanah* denotes the beginning of a new year (*Rosh* means "Head" and *shanah* "year"). The Jews believe that God created the earth in the month of Tishri; therefore, they regard it as the beginning of everything and consequently the first month of the year.

How do we, as Gentile believers, feature in the fulfilment of the Feast of Trumpets? Despite the fact that the content of the seven feasts form an important part of Israel's religious practices in the Old Testament, and are presented within the religious version of Israel's lunar calendar, they are prophetically of universal significance and were fulfilled with reference to the spiritual needs of all the descendants of the first Adam. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Christ is the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) who came to offer new life to all of us – Jews and Gentiles alike.

This was the reason for Christ sending out His disciples to all the corners of the earth to proclaim the gospel of salvation. The Holy Spirit was also poured out on Pentecost to empower the entire church of the Messiah to gather a bride for Him among all nations. Consequently, the gathering of the final harvest of God's kingdom on earth, which is preshadowed by the Feast of Trumpets, is also applicable to believers everywhere.

### The Trumpet of Awakening

*Rosh Hashanah*'s biblical name is *Yom Teruah*, which means "the Day of Sounding the *Shofar*", or "the Day of the Awakening Blast". The great significance of *Rosh Hashanah* as New Year's Day requires that this feast is celebrated on exactly the correct day on the lunar calendar – that is after the appearing of the first sliver of the new moon as seen from Jerusalem. However, in practice it is not always possible to inform all people in Israel, as well as those outside the country, of the promulgation of the new moon and the official beginning of the New Year. To solve this problem, a two-day *Rosh Hashanah* is observed by the Jews, which serves to strengthen the significance of this day. In the rabbinical view, the two days are regarded as one long day (*yoma arikhta*).

The Trumpet of Awakening is part of a longer season of repentance, referred to as *Teshuvah* (to return or repent). This season starts on the first day of Elul (the month preceding Tishri) and continues for 40 days, ending with *Yom Kippur* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishri. Thirty days into *Teshuvah*, on Tishri 1, comes *Rosh Hashanah*, followed by 10 days of intensified repentance, ending on *Yom Kippur*. These ten days are known as the days of awe (*yamin nora'im*). Each morning during the month of Elul, after the morning service, the trumpet (ram's horn or *shofar*) is blown to admonish people to repent and return to God. Special prayers are also offered at midnight for forgiveness. These prayers are known as *shlosh*.

Buksbazen (1954:28-29) says the following on the final period of increased efforts towards repentance: "New Year's Day on the first Tishri opens the solemn period of repentance preparatory for *Yom Kippur*. In the afternoon of New Year's Day, Jews throughout the world assemble near rivers, brooks, and oceans to cast away their sins. This ceremony is called *Tashlikh* and is based on Micah 7:19, 'He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.' Wherever Jews honour the traditions of Israel, *Tashlikh* is observed. In the afternoon of New Year's Day you may see crowds of Jews near larger bodies of water performing the symbolic ritual of casting away their sins."

According to Edward Chumney (1994:103), "*Teshuvah* [the time of repentance] speaks to all

people. Those who believe in the Messiah are called to examine their lives and see where they have departed from God. It is a call to examine the Scriptures and the evidence that the Messiah was who He said He was. God has always a heart to warn people before He proclaims judgement. God warned the people before the flood, and He warned Nineveh before it was ruined. He does not want anyone to receive the wrath of His judgement (Ezek. 18:21-23, 30-32; Zeph. 2:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:9).”

Those who heed the warnings of the Lord and repent will be saved. People who disregard the warnings in the Bible by failing to get in the right relationship with the Messiah will be responsible for their own spiritual ruin – regardless of whether they were hardened sinners or backsliders who strayed from the ways of righteousness. The following call to repentance in association with the blowing of trumpets speaks for itself, as well as the warning to backsliders:

“Whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his *own* head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand. So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me ... Say to them: As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel? ... When I say to the righteous *that* he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die. Again, when I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, *if* the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die” (Ezek. 33:4-15).

All people on earth should be confronted with the necessity of believing in the Messiah as Saviour and repenting (turning away) from their sins. After rising from the dead, and shortly before His ascension, Jesus said to His disciples: “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:44-47).

In this Scripture it is clearly stated that the Messiah’s atoning death is also to be appreciated as the fulfilment of various Old Testament pronouncements (everything written about Him), since that would lead to a better understanding of God’s plan of salvation for humanity, and further emphasise the need for repentance in order for sins to be remitted. He is the Lamb of God who was slain and rose again on the third day. He is also the unleavened bread of life who expects of His followers to feed on His Word and repent from the leaven of sin in their lives. Unrighteousness should be abandoned and believers should pray for cleansing by the blood of the Lamb.

Now, in the end-time, we have different wake-up calls to repent and live holy before God in anticipation of the soon coming of His Son as the heavenly Bridegroom. One of the major signs of the end of the church dispensation is the gathering of Israel back to the land of their fathers. When we see the fig tree budding and growing in springtime, we know that the summer of God’s kingdom is at hand. When summer has come, the fig tree will bear fruit and that will be a sure indication that the spiritually revived Israel will be a blessing to the entire world (Rom. 11:12; Isa. 27:6).

### **The last trumpet**

It is quite obvious that the trumpet of *Rosh Hashanah* will be fulfilled during the final ingathering



of God's harvest on earth, and that will take place when Christ comes for His saints. However, there are those who take issue with this interpretation by maintaining that this trumpet alludes to the restoration of Israel from the Diaspora. Hugh Downie (1994:98-99) is of the opinion that the trumpet of *Rosh Hashanah* heralds the message of the end-time gathering of Israel in their land, and to him this is strictly a Jewish event. He firmly believes in the rapture, but says that it will not necessarily occur on *Rosh Hashanah*. However, there was no occasion of the sounding of trumpets during or subsequent to modern Israel's establishment in their land in May 1948.

The close succession of the last three feasts suggests that there will be an intervention by God to gather His saints, which will be followed by a dark time of judgement (the tribulation period) before Christ's public coming on the Mount of Olives. Many of the scholars who produced books and articles on this subject are strongly convinced of the fact that the Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled when God's harvest among all nations is gathered. The following are views that are commonly expressed:

- Edward Chumney (1994:92-93) says: "The biblical name for *Rosh Hashanah* is *Yom Teruah*, which in Hebrew means "the day of the awakening blast". This trump (*shofar*) is mentioned by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. Because the last trump is only blown on *Rosh Hashanah* and because the apostle Paul specifically mentions that the rapture (*natza*) of the believers in Yeshua the Messiah will take place at the last trump, the apostle Paul was giving a clear understanding that the rapture of the believers in Messiah will happen on a *Rosh Hashanah*."
- John Ritchie (2000:61-62), who lived from 1875 to 1930, said that the Feast of Trumpets will have its grand fulfilment in the coming of the Lord Jesus for His saints (1 Thess. 4:16-17), but also in the awakening and gathering of God's earthly people, Israel. He does not choose between the two diverging interpretations and tries to accommodate both.
- David Reagan (2012) says: "Trumpets (called *Rosh Hashanah* today) points to the rapture when the Messiah will appear in the heavens as a Bridegroom coming for His bride, the church. The rapture is always associated in Scripture with the blowing of a loud trumpet (I Thess. 4:13-18 and I Cor. 15:52)."
- Arnold Fruchtenbaum (1993) says: "The fulfilment of the Feast of Trumpets is the rapture of the church regardless of what view one takes of the timing of this event. There are two main passages which give the details of the rapture of the church, both of which mention the issue of a trumpet. This is no accident in light of the fact that the rapture will fulfil the Feast of Trumpets. The first of these passages is I Thessalonians 4:13-18 ... and the other 1 Corinthians 15:15-58)."
- Luzius Schneider (2000) says: "The trumpets will announce the second coming of Jesus."
- Cheryl McGrath (2000) says: "That the Feast of Trumpets is prophetically tied into the second coming of Jesus is usually undisputed."

Paul mentions the blowing of the trumpet when Christ will come to take his earthly bride to her heavenly mansion which He has prepared for her: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

The mystery of the first resurrection has been revealed to the Corinthians: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

Many people have problems with the fact that the trumpet that will be blown at the resurrection of the saints is described as the "last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:52), and because of that they reject the concept of a pretribulation rapture. It is true that several trumpets of God's judgements will be

blown during the tribulation period, and that a trumpet will also be blown at the second coming of Christ when the feast of the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled. However, the last trumpet which is mentioned in connection with the resurrection of the saints refers to the last of a long series of trumpets that are blown every year from the first of Elul to the second day of Tishri. These trumpets announce the coming end of the harvest season and are, particularly, also a call to repentance. The last trumpet in this series blows on the second day of Tishri just before dusk when the day is about to end.

Shortly after the last trumpet is sounded the seven-day period which is known as the “seven days of awe”, starts on Tishri 3 and continues until the end of Tishri 9. The seven days of awe prophetically refer to the year-week of the tribulation under the false messiah. On Tishri 10, the Day of Atonement is celebrated.

In the light of this sequence of events, two phases should be distinguished in the coming of Christ – His coming *for* His saints when the trumpet is sounded before the seven days of awe, and His coming *with* His saints on the Day of Atonement. These two phases in the coming of Christ differ from each other in the following respects:

<b>Coming before the tribulation</b>	<b>Coming after the tribulation</b>
Comes as heavenly Bridegroom	Comes as King of kings
Comes secretly during the rapture	Comes publicly so all can see Him
Comes for His saints	Comes with His saints
Meets His saints in the air	Sets foot on the Mount of Olives
Rewards His saints	Judges and rules the world
Only seen by saints	Every eye will see Him
Returns to heaven after calling together His bride	Remains on earth to rule as King in Jerusalem

### **The first resurrection**

When one considers the three main trumpets that are sounded during the seven festivals it is obvious that they are highly significant in announcing new dispensations in God’s plan for humanity:

- On Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out, the sound of a mighty wind was heard (Acts 2:2). That was the birthday of the church of Christ, and therefore the beginning of the dispensation of the church on earth. On that day the Spirit empowered the disciples to go out into the world and preach the gospel of salvation to all nations. Pentecost was a countdown of 50 days from Passover Sunday, and provided the spiritual strengthening and ability to proclaim the message of the crucified and risen Christ’s grace to the world.
- During the fulfilment of the Feast of Trumpets all saints of all time will be assembled as a token of the conclusion of the church age and the beginning of the permanent phase of the glorified church of Christ. Deceased saints will be resurrected with glorified bodies, while the living ones will instantly be changed from mortality to immortality.
- The feast on *Yom Kippur* will be fulfilled when the Messiah-King comes with the sounding of a trumpet, thereby introducing the dispensation of God’s revealed kingdom on earth. All those who survived the great tribulation, Jews and Gentiles alike, will be saved when Christ comes. They will then also share in the blessing of the promised Messianic kingdom.

In view of the profound significance of the Feast of Trumpets in resurrecting and glorifying the church of Christ of all ages (including Old Testament saints who waited for the Messiah) we should clearly understand and accept the promise of the first resurrection. At this event, the Lord Jesus will come to raise only born-again believers; this is why Paul says that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). Nothing whatsoever is said here about the resurrection of the

unbelieving, unjust dead. Since a first resurrection also implies a second, and since we know that the just as well as the unjust will be raised (Acts 24:15), it follows that the unjust dead will be raised at a later resurrection.

Revelation 20 says that at least a thousand years will separate the two resurrections. John refers to all the saints who will be raised in the first resurrection to reign as kings with Christ during the millennium: "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:4-6).

Those who share in the first resurrection are declared blessed; therefore, to be declared part of this resurrection signifies a very privileged status. Various other Scripture references offer irrefutable evidence that born-again believers will be resurrected first. Paul refers to a chronological order of resurrections (1 Cor. 15:20-24).

Between the resurrection of Christ as firstfruits and the resurrection of the born-again just at His coming (the first resurrection), the entire dispensation of the church, presently approaching two millennia, will elapse. It is clear from Revelation 20 that the subsequent one thousand years of Christ's reign will elapse between the resurrection of the just and the end of this present earth, when the unjust dead will be raised (the second resurrection) to face the final judgement at the great white throne.

The following are expressions which refer to the first resurrection only:

- The first resurrection (Rev. 20:6).
- The resurrection of the children of God (Luke 20:36).
- The resurrection of those who died in Christ (1 Thess. 4:16).
- The resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13-14).
- A better resurrection (Heb. 11:35).
- The resurrection to life (John 5:29).
- The resurrection from the dead through Jesus (Acts 4:2).

When the resurrection from the dead of either Christ or of Christians is referred to in Scripture, the Greek expression *ek nekroon* is used. It means *from among the dead* and is *only* used when other dead are not raised at the same time, but are left behind in their graves. This expression, which is used 49 times in the New Testament – 34 of which refer to the resurrection of Christ Himself – is not used even once when the second resurrection is referred to. When the latter, i.e. the raising of the unjust dead, is referred to, *toon nekroon*, meaning *of the dead*, is used instead.

At the rapture, the just will be raised *from among* the unjust dead and, together with the living just, who will be instantly changed, both will rise in glorified bodies to meet Christ in the air. The unjust (unsaved) dead will remain in their graves, since they did not "die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

### **The opening of three books**

According to rabbinical tradition as described in the Talmud, God opens three books during *Rosh Hashanah*. The Messianic Jew, Victor Buksbazen (1954:24) says: "In one book the righteous are registered; in the second are those who are neither wholly righteous nor utterly wicked; and in the third the wicked are recorded."

In the first book not only the names of all the righteous are written but also the rewards and blessings they will receive from the Lord. This includes material and spiritual blessings, such as a spiritually productive life, health, sufficient harvests and victory over the enemy. The sounding of the trumpet of *Rosh Hashanah* every year assures them of sustained blessings from the Lord while serving Him here on earth. When this feast is finally fulfilled (nobody knows in which year) the saints will be resurrected and receive eternal blessings and awards of grace in heaven. True believers will give account of their lives before the judgement seat of Christ and receive rewards from Him (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul says, "... each one will receive his own reward

according to his own labour” (1 Cor. 3:8 ff.). Followers of the Messiah who persevere to the end on the Lord’s way of righteousness are a minority group.

The second book contains the names of all those who are not completely righteous, but neither are they utterly wicked. According to popular opinion among the Jews, most people in Israel are in the second category as there are many things in their lives that are not pleasing to the Lord. This group is not seen to be permanent and its members are granted a limited period in which they can repent and restore their broken relationship with God. If they do this, they will be promoted to the first group and included in the ranks of the righteous who enjoy all God’s blessings. If they do not repent and follow the Messiah, they will be relegated to the third group of lost sinners. During the coming tribulation period of seven years, which will be the fulfilment of the seven fearful and awful days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, people who try to be good but are not truly born again, will have a final opportunity to decide where they wish to stand – with the true Messiah who demands holiness, or with the false messiah who will be the man of sin.

The third book contains the names of the godless as well as the just punishment they will receive. The vast majority of people on earth do not serve the God of the Bible and are therefore unbelieving agnostics or pagans who serve foreign gods. They will be judged and condemned by God after the second resurrection.

Reverting now to the first group: Through the feasts of God (the Lord’s Supper and Pentecost in the New Testament), believers are called to higher levels of dedication. They should often reaffirm and strengthen their trust in the Lamb who shed His blood for them on Golgotha. They should also regularly search their own lives to see if they are harbouring any leaven of sin which grieves the Spirit of God. When they are thoroughly cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1) they should commit themselves anew to the service of the Lord and do works that are worthy of repentance. Paul says that we should work resolutely with a view to receiving awards of grace before Christ’s judgement seat:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

As for the second group: Many people regard themselves as believers who lead decent lives, but they are not really born again and therefore not guided by the Spirit of God. In Israel such nominal believers regard themselves as justified covenant people, but because of rejecting the Messiah they are not. The Lord Jesus said to them: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:7-9). They practice a manmade religion which is void of any true spirituality. Isaiah said the following about this pervasive problem: “We are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).

In the church of Christ there are also vast numbers of nominal believers who outwardly seem to be righteous but inwardly they are still in spiritual darkness. Paul warned Timothy against church people who live sinful lives, and at the same time they have “a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim. 3:5). They lack the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and yet, through own effort, they maintain an outer form of godliness. True Christians should withdraw from the circles of hypocrites, lest they become like them and start leading double lives based upon false pretensions.

The Lord Jesus said to the church in Sardis: “... you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). They were admonished to repent from their dead form of godliness and to go out and preach to lost sinners.

If such people do not repent they will remain behind when the trumpet sounds for the resurrection of the saints at the rapture. During the subsequent tribulation the category of nominal believers who are neither righteous nor completely wicked, will soon cease to exist. Some of them will become followers of the Antichrist and completely deny the true Christ, while the others will reject the Antichrist and turn to the true Christ with undivided and repentant hearts. John says about them:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! ... Then one of the elders [asked] me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, Sir, you know. So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9-14).

The third group of unrepentant sinners will share the Antichrist’s doom with him: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11).

### **A sign to Israel**

The sounding of the trumpet at the rapture will be a wake-up call to Israel during the fulfilling of the Feast of Trumpets. At that moment, Messianic believers in Israel and elsewhere will be snatched away together with members of the body of Christ from all over the world. It is uncertain whether orthodox Jews and other unsaved people will also hear the sound of the trumpet when the Bridegroom comes (1 Thess. 4:16), but the sudden disappearance of Messianic believers will convey a vivid message to Jews in Israel that the Messiah has come for His bride like a thief in the night.

In traditional Jewish marriage ceremonies, a *shofar* was sounded when the time arrived for the bride to be taken away secretly. The bridegroom came for his bride in the evening or at night – usually between six o’clock and midnight. When he and his friends got close to the bride’s house they would give a loud shout and blow on the *shofar* to let the bride and her maids know to come out immediately to meet the groom outside along the road. Those who did not have enough oil at that critical moment were late for their appointment and remained behind after the Bridegroom had returned to his father’s house with his bride.

Directly after the dramatic fulfilment of this event in the end-time, many Jews will realise that Jesus is undoubtedly the true Messiah. In the light of Biblical prophecies they will know that the false messiah will soon afterwards be revealed to usher in the time of Jacob’s trouble. Despite the fact that the majority of Jews will mistake the false messiah for the true Messiah (John 5:43; Dan. 9:27), a substantial number of Jews will not be deceived by him and instead surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus. The 144 000 special witnesses of Christ will emerge from this awakening. They will lead many of their own people to the Lord, as well as many Gentiles, and encourage them to stand firm during the dark days of the tribulation period.

### **The time of Jacob’s trouble**

The ten awful days from 1 to 10 Tishri include the seven days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, and represent the time of Jacob’s trouble. The end of the harvest season will mark the beginning of Daniel’s 70th year-week, a time when Israel will be tried and persecuted and Jerusalem surrounded by the armies of hostile nations (Ezek. 22:18-22; Zech. 14:2, 12). During this time many people from different nations will have to make a final choice with regard to their eternal destiny. Unprecedented events will occur when the terrible judgements of which we read in Revelation 6 to 19, are announced in rapid succession.

Jeremiah explicitly mentions the coming day of the Lord's judgements: "Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). The "trouble" not only refers to the wrath of God which will be poured out upon rebellious humanity, but also to the deception and fury of the false messiah which will be unleashed upon all the subjects of his global empire. During this year-week, the spiritual deception of Israel will take on unprecedented extremes because of the actions of the false messiah, but there will also be those who oppose the deception (Dan. 11:32-33).

In reaction to the severe deception and persecution, a minority of Israel and the nations will turn to the true Messiah and be saved (Rev. 12:11), while the majority will follow and worship the false messiah. Many people will die during the judgements of God while they are in "the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14).

The conversion of 144 000 Jews and their dedication to the service of the Lord (Rev. 7:4) will be a very important event at the beginning of the tribulation period, just after the revelation of the Antichrist. The 144 000 will be the first group which will represent the spiritual revival of Israel as a people. This process will only be concluded at the second coming of the Messiah. Revelation 7:1-8 ties up with an extensive series of prophecies in the Bible in which the guarantee is given that the Lord will not only restore Israel physically in their land, but that they will in the latter days also experience a spiritual revival (Jer. 32:36-40; Ezek. 37:1-28).

From a dispensational point of view it is quite obvious why the 144 000 Jews will be saved and dedicated to the service of the Lord. After the Lord Jesus removes His church, which He commissioned to be the light of the world during the present dispensation, He will utilise the spiritual potential of Israel to make His light shine in the dark night of the tribulation period.

## 10. The Day of Atonement

“Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD” (Lev. 23:27). *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, begins at sundown at the end of the ninth day of Tishri. It is the most solemn of all the Jewish holy occasions. This sixth feast foreshadows the salvation of the entire Israel when, during the second coming of the Messiah, they will truly become God’s people.

This important religious feast was the only day of the year on which the high priest (*Cohen Ha Gadol*) was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies to bring atonement sacrifices for the sins of the nation. According to Leviticus 16, a bull and a goat were sacrificed on this day, while another goat (the scapegoat) was sent away to wander in the wilderness. Before the goat was sent out, the high priest laid both his hands upon the head of the goat and confessed all the sins of the Israelites, thereby putting them on the head of the goat to be carried away to an uninhabitable place (Lev. 16:20-22).

To ensure that the sins of the nation, carried away by the scapegoat, could never return to them, the scapegoat was led up to a steep cliff and thrown down. According to tradition, the red thread, which was attached to the scapegoat’s head, would turn white, thus signifying that God had accepted the sacrifices and that the nation’s sins were covered for another year. Hartman (2012) makes the following very interesting remark: “Jewish tradition tells us that for a full forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the red thread on the scapegoat’s head did not turn white. Thus from the time of Jesus’ work of atonement on the cross until the sacrifices ended when the Romans sacked the Temple, God, according to the Talmud, did not accept the sacrifices of bulls and goats! Although we cannot prove that this actually happened, it is very interesting to note that the Jewish writings contain this statement.”

All the typological sacrifices were fulfilled by Christ: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:4-6).

Our iniquity was laid upon the Lamb of God. He was led to a place outside Jerusalem where He died for our sins: “Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:12-13).

In this Scripture Paul encouraged his Hebrew readers not to hesitate in sharing the disgrace which Jesus bore, but instead to abandon the camp of Judaism and identify with the Messiah outside the camp where He brought the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world. The believer’s true spiritual destiny is not a religious system intertwined with vested human interests and self-centred leadership roles, but the forgiveness and liberty which only Christ can offer us.

### Symbolic duties of the high priest

The bull is sacrificed to purge the shrine from defilements caused by the sins of the high priest and his household (Lev. 16:6). One of the two goats is then sacrificed to cleanse the shrine from defilements because of the nation’s sin. The blood of the sacrificial animals was also sprinkled on the altar.

Before entering the Holy of Holies the high priest had to bathe his entire body and also wash his clothes as part of a purification ritual before he was worthy to enter the Most Holy Place. His garments became blood-stained because of slaying the animals and sprinkling the blood on the altar, and had to be washed (Lev. 6:27).

These practices were all fulfilled in the Messiah: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with

a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2).

On the Day of Atonement the high priest appeared before the people on three separate occasions to firstly confess his own sins and those of his household, secondly the sins of the tribe of Levi, and thirdly the sins of all twelve the tribes of Israel. This was the only occasion in the entire year when the high priest said aloud the name of God, Yahweh, embodied in the Hebrew letters JHWH (referred to as the Tetragrammaton), and also entered the Holy of Holies three times. He only came out to confess sins on behalf of all the people and to put their sins upon the head of the scapegoat.

While the high priest was in the Holy of Holies the people were in tense anticipation of his reappearance. If he stayed away too long they dreadfully feared that God had not forgiven His people and had slain their unworthy high priest. When he came out at last, the people sighed with relief and broke out in jubilant singing. On this day a trumpet was also blown, known as the Trumpet of the High Priest (*Shofar Ha Gadol*).

Craig Hartman (2012) describes the extremes of fear and jubilation on this final day of the 40-day period of repentance and the confession of sins as follows: “These acts by the High Priest were full of high drama and much suspense. The people who were gathered to observe the ritual knew well that if God did not accept the sacrifices, He would strike the High Priest dead in the Holy of Holies, and the nation’s sins would not be covered. Interestingly, a rope was tied to the High Priest in case he died in the most Holy Place. This way, his body could be pulled out without someone having to go in to get him, which would result in that person’s death. In other words, the people completely relied on the work of the High Priest. Thus, when the High Priest emerged from the tabernacle, his appearance was a cause of much celebration and joy among the people.”

This symbolic way of atonement was fulfilled by the Lord Jesus when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:25-27).

### **Substitutes for atonement**

Since the destruction of the temple in AD 70, orthodox Jews have been faced with real problems in celebrating their feasts, particularly the Day of Atonement, since after that time no sacrifices could be brought for the atonement of sins. In an effort to solve this problem, various substitutes have been introduced, e.g. prayers, fasting, a study of the law, charity, as well as man-made efforts of repentance, including personal suffering.

One’s own sufferings are considered to be a substitute, especially the sufferings of the righteous. Orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe used to practise a custom called *malkoth*, in which they inflicted upon themselves 39 lashes. The apostle Paul was on five occasions subjected to “forty stripes minus one” (2 Cor. 11:24), an ancient Jewish method of corporal punishment for transgressors. Furthermore along this theme, one’s own death is also regarded as a substitute for sacrifice, and this mistaken idea is derived from Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of His saints.” Abraham’s sacrifice of his son, Isaac, is also relied upon as a substitutionary sacrifice for atonement, but this act only foreshowed the sacrifice of the Father’s son, Jesus. There was no redemptive substance in Abraham’s act.

There is still a small segment in the Orthodox community who believe that a substitutionary death is still needed, and they give expression to this belief through the practice of *kapparoth*. The day before Yom Kippur, a live chicken is obtained and the person confesses his sins over the chicken while circling it over his head. The chicken is eventually killed and thus provide blood atonement for sins (Hartman, 2012).



The dilemma of Judaism in trying to find a legitimate basis for atonement is clearly articulated by Victor Buksbazen (1954:35): “In spite of *Yom Kippur*, the day dedicated to atonement, there is no assurance of sins forgiven in Judaism. There is longing, there is hope for forgiveness, but of assurance there is none. This only the Son of God can give to those who come to Him in faith. The Day of Atonement is only a substitute for atonement. Judaism could be best summed up as man’s attempt to justify himself by his own effort, without the atonement made by a Saviour. That cannot be done. There can be no substitute for Christ, our Atonement and Propitiator. Judaism has tried hard to find a substitute for Him.”

This view is corroborated by Hartman (2012): “The entire Yom Kippur observance changed drastically after 70 A.D. With no temple, no priesthood, and no sacrifices, the Jewish people had to develop ways of complying with the Biblical prescription to atone for their sins every year. The rabbis thus developed a tradition that prayer, repentance, and charity (good works) would atone for the sins of the nation. While it is understandable that they would seek a new course without the temple, such a course is unfortunately not Biblical. God never changed His requirement for a blood atonement, and though they have developed interesting arguments to support their claims, careful scrutiny reveals that they are wrong. ... Synagogue services are accompanied by a day of fasting in order to ‘afflict one’s soul’. The atoning sacrifice is missing.”

### **End-time fulfilment of this feast**

Beyond the immense suffering which will be caused by the coming tribulation period of seven years (Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> year-week) there is also a divine objective which will be achieved. God said: “In their affliction they will diligently seek Me” (Hos. 5:15). Long ago, Moses also warned Israel against the end-time distress that will befall them, and admonished them to use that opportunity to get in the right relationship with God: “When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God *is* a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them” (Deut. 4:30-31).

During all the coming troubles, increasing numbers of Jews will be saved by accepting Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. However, the entire remnant of the nation will only be saved on the day when the Messiah comes, and that will be to Israel the final fulfilment of the Day of Atonement. It will be the most wonderful day in the entire history of the nation when they are all reconciled with their Messiah – a day of which God says: “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (Zech. 3:9).

The time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7) which will precede the spiritual revival of Israel, will be a particularly ominous time. In the middle of the tribulation period, Jews will flee from Jerusalem and surrounding territories and take refuge at a hide-out in the wilderness – probably south of the Dead Sea at Petra. The occasion of the flight will be the desecration of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, in which the false messiah will declare himself to be God (Matt. 24:15-22; 2 Thess. 2:4; Dan. 9:27). He will also set up an image of himself in the temple and demand universal worship of the image. When God-fearing Jews refuse to bow the knee before the modern Baal, genocide will be perpetrated against them.

Towards the end of the great tribulation, multinational forces will occupy the land of Israel and also besiege Jerusalem. Jewish fugitives will return to their beleaguered capital close to the end of that year-week, being strongly convinced that the Messiah will come on the Day of Atonement and set foot on the Mount of Olives. The seven days of awe between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* will draw to a close, and that will coincide with the end of a year-week, the time of Jacob’s trouble.

Daniel prophesied about the critical second half of the tribulation when he said: “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time ... And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up [the image of the Antichrist in the temple], *there shall be* one thousand two hundred and ninety days” (Dan. 12:1, 11).

This number of days equals 43 months, which is one month more than the second half of this

particular year-week. This extra month will most likely be taken up by the mourning of Israel after meeting the Messiah and coming under strong conviction of their sin of rejecting Him. It was customary in Israel to mourn for beloved leaders thirty days, as in the case of Aaron and Moses (Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8).

From the dark day in the middle of the week when the Antichrist will declare himself to be God, 42 months will elapse to the end of that year-week, when *Rosh Hashanah* will herald the coming of a new year and also a new year-week. Great anxiety will befall the fugitives as they approach Jerusalem, anticipating the coming of the Messiah to rescue them. They will be targeted by the forces of the Antichrist, and great chaos will prevail in Jerusalem.

Zechariah says: "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming" (Zech. 14:1). The day of the LORD refers to the end-time outpouring of God's wrath during the great tribulation, which will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. This divine intervention is described in Zechariah 14. God says: "I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half the city shall go out into captivity" (Zech. 14:2).

The ensuing days of awe leading up to *Yom Kippur* on the tenth of Tishri will be particularly fearsome. Some of the Jews will fight against the forces of the Antichrist while others will try to escape from the battlefield. Many of them will become panic-stricken and cry out: "Our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!" (Ezek. 37:11). But then, on the Day of Atonement, their salvation will come from the Mount of Olives:

"Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two ... Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, *and* all the saints with You. ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth ... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day *that* a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand" (Zech. 14:3-13).

When the dark clouds of judgement envelope Jerusalem and its surroundings, the remaining Jews will flee into the place of refuge created by the sudden rupture of the Mount of Olives. There, literally at the feet of Jesus, they will be safe. Great confusion will reign among their enemies as they are overcome by divine judgement, and they will start killing one another.

The false messiah and the false prophet, the two leaders of the worldwide rebellion against the Messiah and His people, will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:19-20). Jesus will reach out to His people in order to bless them. They will be terrified when they see the marks in His hands, and their first words to Him will be: "What are these wounds in your hands?" and He will answer them: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zech. 13:6). How will the Jews account for the fact that the Messiah will have wounds in His hands when He descends onto the Mount of Olives? How will they be able to explain where these wounds were inflicted on Him? It could certainly not have been in heaven! They will indeed look on Him whom they had pierced during His first coming. Zechariah says:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself. ... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 12:10-12; 13:1).

Hartman (2012) says that the ultimate *Yom Kippur* for the nation will come at a heavy price –

two-thirds of the Jewish people in the land will be destroyed (Zech. 13:8). The remaining one-third will come out of the fire of cleansing and be saved. God will give to the remaining Jewish souls a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26), forgiving their sins forever (Jer. 31:34). Paul spoke of this time of the outpouring of God's spirit upon the nation of Israel when he wrote, "... all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). This future time of national cleansing and restoration will culminate with the Jewish people accepting Christ as their Messiah and finally saying, "The LORD is my God" (Zech. 13:9).

The entire remnant of Israel will be saved and their enemies judged. But this will not only be a Day of Atonement and reconciliation with the Messiah for Israel, since the remnant of the Gentile nations will likewise be saved and become great supporters of Israel in the kingdom dispensation. In Zechariah's chapter on the second coming of Christ and the judgement of the nations, good news is included for survivors among the Gentiles who turn to Christ for salvation: "And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16).

When the Antichrist, the false prophet and their multinational force encounter Christ and His heavenly army at His second coming (Rev. 19:19-21), it will be "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). But those who survive this judgement will, like the remnant in Israel, turn to Jesus Christ in deep mourning and sincere repentance. That will also happen on the Day of Atonement when Christ will come down from heaven to judge His enemies and save those who realise their folly and then accept Him as Saviour:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:29-31).

This will be the transition into a new dispensation in God's plan of salvation for humanity. The kingdom of God which was previously not of this world will now be manifested on earth in all its power and glory. Christ will rule from Jerusalem and His saints will rule with Him.

## 11. The Feast of Tabernacles

The last of the seven feasts, to be celebrated for seven days, is also of great significance and reflects on the culmination of the redemptive work of the Messiah. This feast vividly expresses the joy which the Messiah brings to individuals, to the people of Israel, and ultimately also to the nations of the world:

“The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. ... And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God. So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD” (Lev. 23:34; 40-44).

This is a joyous feast that is celebrated annually after the harvest to thank the Lord for all His goodness during the preceding year. But the feast also reflects on the time, long ago, when the Israelites were delivered from their Egyptian bondage and found spiritual protection under the blood of the paschal lamb. After leaving Egypt, they dwelled in booths in the wilderness and were divinely protected against many dangers. Furthermore, the feast has a definite future perspective as it clearly reflects on the coming of the Messiah. When He comes, the final harvest of the kingdom of heaven will be gathered and the enemies of His kingdom destroyed.

On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), the rabbis read Zechariah 14 in the synagogues. This chapter deals with the following themes:

- the coming of the Messiah and all His saints (verses 4, 5);
- the kingship of the Messiah (verse 9);
- the exaltation of Jerusalem (verses 8-11);
- the destruction of Israel’s enemies (verses 12-15); and
- the participation of the other nations in the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem during the Messiah’s reign of peace (verses 16-18).

*Sukkot* was one of the three major occasions on which God commanded the Israelites to assemble at the temple in Jerusalem and present their sacrifices and offerings. They were warned not to appear before the Lord empty-handed: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deut. 16:16).

We should also be reminded that after the harvest of God has been gathered, we will appear before the judgement seat of Christ, and we should not go empty-handed to that appointment. The Holy Spirit enables us to do works that have value for eternity, and we have to dedicate ourselves to doing the work that has been entrusted to us. Those who fail to heed the commands of the Lord towards fruitfulness will be saved as through fire, with no works that are acceptable and thus able to withstand the fiery test (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Since their exodus from Egypt, Jews have been observing *Sukkot*, many of them keeping the command: “You shall dwell in booths for seven days.” For the duration of the feast they dwell in small tabernacles or booths which are crudely constructed with plaited branches. The roofs are thatched to provide shade during the day, but in such a way that they can still see the stars at night.

People who attend the celebrations carry a *lulav*, which is made of branches of palms, myrtles and willows. Peter Colón (2001:13) says: “A local Jerusalem custom was to tie them using a golden thread.” These branches were waved in the temple during certain parts of the service. Besides the *lulav* they also carried a citrus fruit (*ethrog*) which is symbolic of the fruit of the

Promised Land. Is the joy of the Lord also our strength and do our lives reveal something of the heavenly kingdom's glory which we are expecting?

Christians should be reminded that after our salvation from the bondage of sin we should live like sojourners and pilgrims who are on their way to a better land. In that sense we are also living in booths or tents. We should not make this world our permanent home and invest all our time and money in gathering earthly riches which will be of no value when the Messiah's kingdom is revealed.

### **A blessing for the Gentiles**

During the feast many sacrifices were offered in the temple as sin-offerings – bullocks, rams and goats. A total of 70 bullocks were sacrificed during the feast which, according to the rabbis in ancient times, were sacrifices for the 70 nations of the world. The aim with this sacrifice was that the Gentile nations would convert to the God of Israel, finding safety under the wings of the *Shekinah* glory of the Lord which resides in the Most Holy of the temple.

The liturgy of the feast includes a prayer asking that the Gentiles would also come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. This is why Christians from various countries have decided to confirm their solidarity with Israel by going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. In 1980, the year in which Jerusalem was reinstated as capital of Israel, 1 000 Christians from 20 countries decided that they would participate in the feast. They were greatly surprised by the warm welcome which they received from religious leaders in Israel. These leaders declared that to them it was further proof that the coming of the Messiah (i.e. His first coming which they are still expecting) is drawing near. The publicity which this event enjoyed was overwhelmingly positive, and the Christians were asked to take part in the Jerusalem March through the streets of the city. They were also given the place of honour ahead of the Israeli army.

On the last day of the feast, the International Christian Embassy was established in Jerusalem. This embassy represents Christians who acknowledge Israel's biblical mandate to the land, and also liaises with the Israeli Government. They are involved with the relocation of Jews from other countries to Israel, particularly the immigration of thousands of poor Russian-speaking Jews. Activities at the embassy are initiated daily with prayers for the safety of Jerusalem, as commanded in Isaiah 62:6-7 and Psalm 122:6 – "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem".

The following year (1981) saw a tremendous increase in the number of participants as 3 500 Christians from 35 countries attended the Feast of Tabernacles; 400 of them were from South Africa. Interest in the feast continued to increase, and at the turn of the century about 6 000 pilgrims from more than 80 countries were in attendance.

Please note that the attendance of this feast, although not prescribed for Christians, is a voluntary act of showing solidarity with Israel, but specifically in a Messianic way. The Christians hold their own feast in which Jesus is honoured as Messiah, and they also choose a specific theme for every year, related to an aspect of Israel's restoration. Orthodox Jews allow them this liberty in terms of Zechariah 14:16. The two feasts, the orthodox and the Christian, are celebrated concurrently but in different ways.

### **The well of salvation**

The pouring of water in the temple was one of the highly significant rituals of the feast. A priest was specially appointed to bring water from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher (cf. John 9:7). The water was poured by the high priest into a basin at the foot of the altar. From another pitcher wine was poured into the same basin. The water and the wine mingled together and flowed through special pipes to the Brook of Kidron.

The significance of the pouring of water was twofold. First, it was a symbolic and ritual prayer for abundant rain. Summer was at an end. Winter and the rainy season was about to begin. Israel then, as now, depended on abundant rain to produce enough food – hence the prayers for rain. Prayers are still offered in synagogues for abundant annual rains. The pouring of water was a visual act to demonstrate God's grace in sending rain. Secondly, the ritual of water libation went beyond the merely physical: it was prophetic and Messianic in its hope, looking forward towards

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel as well as believers from all nations under the reign of the Messiah-King (Buksbazen, 1954:40-41).

But what is the symbolic significance of the mixing of water and wine in the basin at the foot of the altar? The wine refers to the blood of Christ which was shed for our salvation – representing the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). The water is indicative of the Messiah as the source of our new life (John 4:14). The mixing of the water and wine, after which it flowed away, alludes to the fact that His life was laid down and His blood shed for our redemption. In the tabernacle was a laver where the priests washed their hands after offering the sacrifices, resulting in the water being mixed with blood. That was the proof of a completed sacrifice. After Jesus had died on the cross, water and blood flowed from His side as a sign that He had died and laid down His life for us (John 19:33-34).

John 7 describes the celebration of a Feast of Tabernacles in which the Lord Jesus participated and offered Himself as the true source of the water of life. Many Jews expected the Messiah to be revealed during a celebration of this feast, and for that reason the brothers of Jesus urged Him to attend: “Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing ... Then Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come” (John 7:2-3, 6). There was still a big harvest that had to be gathered in Israel *and* among all nations before it would be time for the final harvest feast.

The Jews were expecting Jesus at the feast, knowing that He claimed to be the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. So He went up to Jerusalem secretly to address the disputed question of His Messiahship: “But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, Where is He? And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, He is good; others said, No, on the contrary, He deceives the people. However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught” (John 7:10-14).

Quite a number of people believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but their spiritual leaders did not share their views: “And many of the people believed in Him, and said, When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?” (John 7:31). Towards the end of the feast, referring to the spiritual significance and Messianic fulfilment of the libation sacrifice, Jesus plainly revealed who He was:

“On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, Truly this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ [the Messiah]. But some said, Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of Him” (John 7:37-43).

The misapprehensions of people about Jesus could easily have been corrected by investigating the real facts about His place of birth, His person and His works. But Jesus did not refute the wrong allegations about Him – it is the obligation of every person to search the Scriptures. It is also up to us to probe the subject of the Messiahship of Jesus. If we don’t, we stand to lose eternal life and all the blessings of the Lord which were promised to those who believe in the Messiah. That is an incredibly high price to pay for ignorance.

### **Songs of salvation**

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles was a very joyous occasion. The ritual of water pouring was conducted daily and climaxed on the seventh day, which was the great and final day of *Sukkot*. This day was referred to as *Hoshana Rabba*, the Day of the Great Hosanna, and has a special Messianic significance. The pouring of water from the golden pitcher took place amidst

the blasting of the trumpets by the priests and the singing of sacred music by the Levites while the people waved their palm branches and chanted the Hallel – Psalms 113 to 118. The following are the closing words of Psalm 118:

“Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God *is* the Lord, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You *are* my God, and I will praise You; *You are* my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever” (Ps. 118:25-29).

Messianic Jews, as well as others who have a good knowledge of Hebrew, derive more meaning from the terminology of this feast. Buksbazen (1954:41-42) explains: “From the words ‘Save now’ (Heb. *Hoshana*) this day was known as the ‘Great Hosanna’. It was peculiarly Messianic in nature, a prayer for the speedy salvation through the Messiah. This is why our Saviour was greeted on another occasion with the waving of palm branches and the words, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, meaning, ‘Save us, Son of David’. This is important for the understanding of what happened when the Lord attended the temple service on the day of the ‘Great Hosanna’. It was while all this was going on, the pouring of the water from the pool of Siloam into the altar basin, the blasting of the trumpets by the priests, the singing of Psalms by the Levites, and the prayers of the people, ‘Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord’, when the Messianic fervour was at the highest pitch, that the Lord Jesus stood in the temple, crying: ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink’. ... The Messianic claim of our Saviour was clearly understood by all. It must have come like a bolt from the blue. Here was the One claiming to be the answer to the fervent hope and prayer of long centuries and many generations. Could He, the carpenter of Nazareth, be the long expected Messiah? ‘So there was division among the people because of Him’ (John 7:43).”

Jesus Christ is indeed the Lamb of God who did not only come to save His Jewish people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), but He also took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Throughout the entire church dispensation, countless numbers of people from all nations found salvation through the atoning death of the Son of David. During the coming tribulation period it will be no different. In his end-time vision, John saw “a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9).

The spiritual status and origin of these believers is stated beyond any question: “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). They will also be present when the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated in the kingdom of the Messiah, Son of David and also Son of His heavenly Father. Throughout the millennial reign of the Messiah from the restored throne of David, members of all nations will annually come to Jerusalem to celebrate *Sukkot* (Zech. 14:16).

In connection with the liturgy of *Sukkot* there was another definite indication which Jesus gave to the Jews that He was the Messiah. During the reciting of Psalm 118 on the feast they said, among others: “Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Psalm 118:26). When Jesus prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and His ascension, He said to the Jewish leaders: “... for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!” (Matt. 23:39).

In modern celebrations of *Sukkot*, Jews have introduced new rituals to replace some of those that were part of the temple service. One such custom is the striking of branches from a willow tree in an effort to shed all its leaves, which represent sin. A prayer for salvation is first prayed, after which the willow branches are struck three times on the benches of the synagogue. With each falling leaf a sin is believed to fall away from the one who prays.

In the absence of a fountain of living waters where they can be cleansed of all sin, and faith in the One who was nailed to a wooden cross for the sins of the world, orthodox Jews resort to other practices and rituals to symbolise deliverance from sin. The shadows of Messianic prophecies are still preferred by many Jews above the substance of their fulfilment in the Lord

Jesus.

## The light of the world

Another important feature of *Sukkot* was the illumination of the temple in Jerusalem. Four giant candlesticks, 50 cubits high (about 75 feet) were set up in the court. Golden bowls were placed upon the candlesticks, each one containing a large amount of pure oil. Worn-out clothing of the priests and Levites were used for wicks. Because of these brilliant lights emanating from the candlesticks, the Temple Mount and surrounding parts of Jerusalem (the Old City) were brightly illuminated. The pilgrims to the feast also brought torches and lights.

What a fitting symbol of the Messiah, who said: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life ... As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5). With a view to His ascension He said to His disciples: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

After the return of the Messiah, the light of His righteous kingdom will shine forth brightly from Jerusalem: "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isa. 60:1-3).

The return of Jesus and the revelation of His kingdom will be the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. Believers will all praise God for having saved them from the bondage of sin, and for having protected them in this dangerous and evil world. They will thank and praise Him for the great harvest of believers that has been gathered into the kingdom of heaven. Great joy will prevail when God's plan of salvation, which started with the sacrificing of the Passover Lamb, will be consummated with the institution of the Messiah's millennial reign in Jerusalem.

John Parsons (2012:2) says: "If the High Holidays focus on the Lord as our Creator, our Judge, and the one who atones for our sins, the festival of *Sukkot* is the time when we celebrate all that the Lord has done for us. Prophetically understood, the seven days picture *olam haba*, the world to come, and the 1,000 Millennial Kingdom age. If Yeshua was born during *Sukkot* (i.e. *conceived* during Chanukah), then another (and prophetic) meaning of 'the Word became flesh and tabernacled with us' (John 1:14) foretells the coming Millennial kingdom, when the King Messiah will again 'tabernacle with us' during His reign from Zion."

## Certainty of the Millennium

Many people question the belief in a literal Millennium on earth after the coming of Christ. However, a study of the feasts of Israel, particularly the Feast of Tabernacles, makes it abundantly clear that the dispensation of the kingdom is still future. Remembering the words of the prayer the Lord Jesus taught us, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), the following are the most important characteristics of the Messiah's future reign of peace on earth:

- God will rule on earth through the King of kings, Jesus Christ. A theocratic world government will be established (Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 19:15; Dan. 7:13-14).
- Christ will reign on David's restored throne in Jerusalem and Israel will be the hub of the world (Ps. 2:6-12; Zech. 8:22; Isa. 2:2-3; 24:23; 33:17, 20-22; Dan. 7:27). His government will be characterised by righteousness and equity (Isa. 1:26-27; 32:1-2; 16:17; Jer. 23:5-6).
- Israel's capital, Jerusalem, "the city of our God", "the city of the great King", will be the centre of worship for the whole world and all nations will converge there to worship God through Christ the King of kings (Ps. 48; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 14:16-20; Isa. 66:18-23; Rev. 19:16).
- The saved remnant of Israel will rejoice in the Lord and evangelise the entire world (Isa. 12:3-6; 40:9; 51:11). They will make the world fruitful (Isa. 27:6) and God will be honoured (Isa.



28:5; Zech. 8:20-23).

- Satan will be securely bound so that he cannot deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-4).
- Peace will prevail everywhere. There will be no more war or military training and weapons will be recycled for peaceful uses (Isa. 2:4; 9:7; Mic. 5:4-5; Hos. 2:18).
- The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9-10; Hab. 2:14).
- There will be no disease (Mal. 4:2; Isa. 33:24).
- People will live healthily and actively to a great age – like the antediluvians. A 100 year-old person will be regarded as a child (Isa. 65:20-23).
- Nature will greatly benefit since the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 will be lifted and the whole of creation, which since then has been groaning, will be set free from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty (Rom. 8:19-22; Isa. 55:12-13; Joel 3:18).
- The earth will produce food so prolifically that planting the next crop will take place before the previous one has been fully harvested! (Mic. 4:3-4; Amos 9:13-15; Isa. 65: 21-23; Ps. 65:9-13).
- Harmony will prevail in the animal kingdom. The wolf will lie down with the lamb and the lion will eat straw like an ox – they will “not hurt nor destroy” each other – because the Lord will make a new covenant with the animals that will change the physiology and aggressive nature of the carnivorous predators into the physiology and gentle nature of herbivores (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos. 2:18).

Israel as a nation called by God renders indisputable proof that the Millennium has not yet dawned. Biblical prophecies of Israel being conclusively re-gathered to their land, spiritually revived, elevated above all nations and abundantly blessed, have never been fulfilled (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:1-4; Ezek. 36:24-28; Isa. 60:1-22; Hos. 14:5-8; Rom. 11:26-27). On the contrary, no nation has suffered and survived anything like the prolonged worldwide dispersion, disdain, persecution, hatred and efforts towards genocide which the people of Israel have during the past two millennia. God’s promises never fail – they will be honoured in the Millennium.

### **Birth of the Messiah on Sukkot**

It is fitting that the biblical connection between the birth of the Messiah and the Feast of Tabernacles should also be discussed here. So much confusion is surrounding Christmas celebrations in the world today, that the biblical roots of the celebration of Christ’s coming to the world have virtually been obliterated.

The annual Christmas festival on the 25th of December has been wrongly scheduled. It is also a perverted and highly commercialised feast which is celebrated by Christians and non-Christians alike. As the world increasingly lays claim to this feast, the tendency is to continue distorting its implied Christian character by mixing it with heathen practices. In some cases Christ is even removed from the name of *Christmas* by cancelling His name with an X and renaming the feast *Xmas*.

The decision to move the celebration of the Messiah’s birthday from a previous date in April to the present date of 25<sup>th</sup> December, was taken way back in the fourth century during the reign of Constantine. Official recognition had been given to Christianity, and to make it more acceptable to heathen communities, some of its traditions were adapted and synthesised with heathen religious traditions.

In the pre-Christian heathen world, 25 December was the day on which *The Feast of the Invincible Sun (Invicti Solis)* was celebrated. The winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere occurs on 22 December. Sun-worshippers then started conducting various rituals to the sun-god to invoke him to turn back. People believed that if the sun continued on its southerly course, darkness, cold and death would befall humanity. On 25 December, when the sun starts its journey back, great jubilation erupted. People danced around green trees, became drunk and

presented gifts to one another.

Christmas was moved to 25 December on the premise that the Messiah is the Sun of Righteousness. Although the intention may have been to Christianise the Babylonian Feast for the Invincible Sun, the two feasts really became intermingled. One of the results of this syncretism is that two idols, Bacchus (the god of liquor) and Mammon (the god of money), are receiving great prominence in modern Christmas celebrations.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the feasts of Israel are really the feasts of the Messiah. Biblical evidence indeed suggests that Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles. The following clues in events leading to the birth of the Messiah, are relevant:

An important indication is the time when Zacharias, a member of the priestly family of Abijah, conducted his duties in the temple. 1 Chronicles 24 contains an account of the allotment of two weeks of temple service to each of 24 families in a fixed schedule: "This was the schedule of their service for coming into the house of the LORD" (1 Chr. 24:19). The eighth family in the group of 24 was that of the priest Abijah (1 Chron. 24:10).

The first month in the cycle was Nisan, which is the first month in the religious calendar (Ex. 12:2, Lev. 23:5). According to this schedule the family of Abijah was the eighth group, and was therefore due for service in the second half of the fourth month in the Jewish calendar. It was to this family that the priest Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, belonged:

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah ... So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord" (Luke 1:5, 8-9).

While he was busy with his task, an angel appeared to him and said: "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" (Luke 1:13).

The rest of the events are closely associated with this announcement:

"Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months ... Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary ... The angel said to her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever ... Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible. Then Mary said: Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:24, 26-27, 30-33, 36-38).

Zacharias' encounter with the angel, and his wife's conception shortly afterwards, occurred in the second half of the fourth month in the religious calendar (June in the Gregorian calendar). Six months later, in the second half of the tenth month (about the time of the present Christmas celebrations), Mary conceived. Nine months later, in the second half of September, Jesus was born.

Since Zacharias' turn of service in the temple, 15 months (6+9) elapsed until the birth of Jesus – that is one year and three months. Within the framework of the religious calendar of the Jews, this period expired between the second half of the fourth month and the second half of the seventh month in the following year. The birth of Jesus therefore coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles: "The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD" (Lev. 23:34).

There is also circumstantial evidence supporting this information on the time of Jesus' birth. The shepherds were still sleeping outside in the field – something they did not do in mid-winter, because of the cold: "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields,

keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:8-12).

As indicated earlier, Jesus showed Himself as Messiah at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. To those who accepted Him, a new life is given which results in streams of living waters flowing from their hearts. At His second coming when this feast is fulfilled, the joy of His people will be like an overflowing fountain.

We should experience some of the joy of *Sukkot* right now, despite the fact that the greatest blessings of Christ’s kingdom are yet to be bestowed upon us when He comes again. David thanked the Lord for the blessings that he received while still in a mortal body: “You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand” (Ps. 16:11; NIV).

## 12. The Final Victory of the Lamb

The final triumph of the Lamb will occur at His second coming when He will return to earth in power and majesty to judge his enemies in the battle of Armageddon, condemn the Antichrist and false prophet to the lake fire, have the devil bound and incarcerated in a sealed pit, save a remnant of Israel and the nations, and establish His reign of peace on earth. Many of these great eschatological events are described in Revelation, and one would presume that John would have given preference to royal titles to describe Christ in His exalted position as God and King – but he refers mainly to Him as the Lamb.

The basis for Christ's victory and supremacy is found in the first of the seven feasts, which is His capacity as the Lamb of God who gave His life to save lost humanity by bearing the death penalty for their sins on the cross, thereby delivering them from the power and claims of the Evil One. In Revelation, He is described 26 times as the Lamb. Other names and descriptions are also used, but His position as Lamb dominates in this final book of the Bible.

It is appropriate to conclude this book with a few excerpts from Revelation in which Christ's position as Lamb is emphasised, as well as His related offices as the Firstfruits and High Priest:

*The firstborn from the dead.* The message of Revelation comes from "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 1:5-6). He is the faithful witness in all things, past, present and future, who washed us in His blood and offers us a great and wonderful future in His kingdom. He is the firstborn from the dead, and because of this we know that we are serving a living Christ who existed before everything else, and who also holds the end of everything in His hands. He wants believers to take notice of the fact that He is "the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life" (Rev. 2:8). He died on behalf of us and came to life again, thereby conquering the last foe, death. All who believe in Him will not suffer loss through the death of the body, but will rise from the dead and live forever in God's kingdom.

*The whole world will see Him coming.* "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" (Rev. 1:7). During the past two millennia, the disciples of the Lamb were sent out into the entire world to preach the gospel of salvation to all nations. When He comes back in glory as Judge and King of kings, every eye will see Him and all people will be held accountable for their lives – specifically with regard to their relationship with Christ as Saviour. After the terrible judgements of the Day of the Lord, the surviving people from all nations will mourn for Jesus and confess their sins. Among them will also be a godly remnant of Israel, "who will look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him" (Zech. 12:10). The mourners from all nations will be saved and enter the Millennial kingdom of the Lamb (Matt. 24:29-30; Zech. 14:16).

*He will appear in royal and priestly apparel as Judge, King and Priest.* His glory will be great, His knowledge perfect, His insight unrestricted, His judgements severe, and His mercy boundless. In his visions on the future, John saw "One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters" (Rev. 1:13-15).

*The Lamb is in the midst of His church and knows all their works.* Through His disciple John Jesus sent messages to His church on earth: "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works" (Rev. 2:1-2). He knows all our actions and even the most hidden thoughts and intents of our hearts, and will judge us accordingly.

*The saints will glory in the shed blood of the Lamb through which they were saved and cleansed, and acknowledge that He is worthy to open the scroll of God's judgements upon the wicked.* "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals ... Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb ... And they sang a new song, saying: You are

worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:5, 8-10). The Lion from the tribe of Judah, Immanuel (God with us) who was incarnated in the royal family of Israel, first appeared on the scene in the form of a lowly servant and Lamb of God to offer Himself as a propitiation for the sins of the world. Only He has a God-given right to judge all people who despised God’s offer of salvation, and will therefore open the scroll to judge the wicked. The power of the kingdom of darkness will be utterly broken. Those who belong to the Lamb will glory in the fact that He has redeemed them with His blood. They will be co-heirs of the kingdom of the Lion of Judah who will reign from David’s throne in the city of the great King. From these facts it is evident that the Lamb who was born in Israel has a worldwide mission and also a worldwide kingdom. The seven feasts of the Lord, therefore, also have a worldwide application and a New Testament fulfilment.

*The tribulation saints will wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).* Although they will die as martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11), they will prevail against the Antichrist spiritually by virtue of the power given them by the Lamb: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11).

*The judgements of the Lamb will result in a terrifying tribulation on earth.* When devastating earthquakes and other natural disasters strike the earth, people will know that these are divine judgements because they have rejected the Lamb of God’s offer of salvation: “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:12-17). The wrath of the Lamb awaits all those who wilfully sided with His enemies, and they will find themselves in the “seven awful days” of divine judgements after the rapture. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:3).

*When the Lamb reveals His kingdom on earth after His second coming His marriage supper will be celebrated here on earth, thereby showing His bride to the world, who will reign with Him.* “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (Rev. 19:7-9). Paul also eagerly looked forward to this day: “When Christ, Who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). In the same way in which the Jews were taught to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles every year, thereby looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, we should also have a prophetic expectation of the coming of Christ and the revelation of His kingdom. “Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:20).

*For true believers, all suffering and pain will come to an end when the Lamb makes all things new, including a new heaven and a new earth; but for the wicked there will be everlasting pain and sorrows.* “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And He said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable,

murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:2-8). Those whose lives are permeated by the leaven of sin, being completely dominated by it, are still in “the bondage of Egypt” and are not on the journey of the liberated people of God who are on their way to the Promised Land.

*Entrance into the New Jerusalem can only be gained through the Lamb.* “And the city was pure gold, like clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones ... And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass” (Rev. 21:18-21). The city and street of the New Jerusalem are built of pure and transparent gold. The foundation stones of the wall are decorated with precious jewels that vary from crystal clear stones to deep red sardius, green chrysolite and sparkling blue sapphire. In the high walls that surround the city are twelve gates made of pearls – each gate is a single pearl. The idea of a tear is conveyed by a pearl, since its formation is associated with pain and suffering. When the oyster is injured, a shiny pearl is formed in the wound. When the feet and hands of the Lamb of God were pierced by rough nails and He gave His life on the cross, the gates of paradise were again opened to fallen humanity. On the merit of His tears and suffering He became a precious pearl to us, which in itself is a gateway to the New Jerusalem. Through Him we can enter into the kingdom of heaven and delight ourselves in the glory of the Lord.

*The Lamb will be the light of the world, and also radiate God's holiness and glory.* “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light” (Rev. 21:22-23). No temple will be needed in the New Jerusalem, since the temple service and all its furniture only played a preparatory role pending the coming of Christ. A bright light will shine from the throne of God and dispel all darkness. During the first coming of Christ He was also the light of the world, but people were offered the choice of following or rejecting Him. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). It will only be after the forces of darkness will have been obliterated by judging the wicked, condemning the Antichrist and false prophet to the lake of fire and binding the devil, that the light of Messiah will shine forth into all the corners of the universe, illuminating the lives of all people.

*The Bible concludes with a final invitation to everyone to receive eternal life.* “And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). The Lord Jesus is the only water of life to a spiritually dying world, and invites all of us to partake of this water. As He has done while attending the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, he still invites all people to come to Him and drink of the water of life (John 7:37). “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Rev. 21:6).

### **What should we do?**

In the light of Revelation’s solemn message it is all the more incumbent on us to purposefully study God’s plan of salvation for humanity, also as foreshadowed by the seven feasts. The point of departure is the sacrifice of the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). This gift has to be accepted in faith. Together with the surrendering of ourselves to Him, we should search our lives and then confess and forsake all the leaven of sin. Proceeding from there, it must become a way of life to be conformed to the resurrection life of Christ, as He alone can empower us to walk in newness of life. The enduing with power from on high was given on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

If we can testify of all these blessings, and have fully surrendered ourselves to walk in the Spirit, we should engage ourselves with the Great Commission of evangelising the world. While doing that, we should always be mindful of the fact that the dispensation of grace is drawing to a close, and soon the Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled when the harvest of believers will be gathered in heaven. Down here on earth, the seven years of the tribulation period will elapse, causing untold suffering to millions of people who shunned the Lamb’s invitation to salvation.

At the end of the tribulation period, the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled when the Messiah will return, set His feet upon the Mount of Olives, save the remnant of Israel and the nations, and institute His reign of peace. The fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles will be the revelation of His kingdom!

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## About the author



In August 1978, Johan Malan was appointed professor of Anthropology at the University of the North (presently the University of Limpopo) near Polokwane in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, and in January 2006 he retired. He and his wife, Wilma, now live in Mossel Bay. They have two married sons.

As the son of a missionary, the late Rev. J.S. Malan, Johan was taught by his parents to revere the Bible as the inerrant and literally inspired Word of God. This resulted, among others, in accepting Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world, while also literally accepting the hundreds of biblical prophecies related to the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel as the Chosen People.

Johan combined his biblical interest in Israel with his scientific research of various cultures, including that of the Jewish people. In 1993, he and his wife visited various *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* in Israel to conduct research on communal lifestyles (Malan, 1994, 1995). The following kibbutzes and other communal villages were visited where relevant information was kindly supplied by members of the various management committees: Ramat Rachel on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem, Neve Ilan (meshek) and Shores (moshav) on the Judean hills west of Jerusalem, Ein Gedi on the shores of the Dead Sea, Nof Ginosar on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret), Ein Gev at the foot of the Golan Heights east of the Sea of Galilee, and Lavi on the mountains of Lower Galilee.

Supplementary information was acquired from Yad Tabenkin, the Research and Documentation Centre of the United Kibbutz Movement, while a literature study was conducted in the library of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Information on the religious principles of orthodox *kibbutzim* was gained from Rabbi A.L. Jacobs of East Talpiot in Jerusalem. Various Messianic Jews were consulted, as well as staff members of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.

Johan's biblical interest in Israel gave rise to the writing of various articles and books, many of which are made available on his website: [www.bibleguidance.co.za/](http://www.bibleguidance.co.za/).