

# Hebraic Insight

Learning for Life

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR FAMILIES, STUDY GROUPS, AND CONGREGATIONS

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**DIVINE APPOINTMENTS**

# Treasures, Old and New

(Matthew 13:52)



**John D. Garr, Ph.D., Th.D.**  
Editor & Publisher

## Remembering the Days of Old

A key passage in the song that Moses sang in the presence of all of Israel featured these words: “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deuteronomy 32:7). Remembering God’s majestic works in salvation history is vital to the experience of every believer, whether Jewish or Christian. It is central to our faith and to our destiny that we know who we are and where we are going. It is vital, therefore, that we know where we have been and what has brought us to the present.

Jesus underscored the truth of this matter in Matthew 13:52: “Therefore every teacher of the Torah who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” It is our connection with God’s past that gives us perspective today and points the way to the future. It is for this reason that the fourth of the Ten Commandments enjoins us to “remember.”

We must not be “forgetful hearers” but “doers” of the Word of God (James 1:22-25). To accomplish this goal, we must remember. Every Christian believer, therefore, should be thankful that God has called us to remembrance of his mighty works in behalf of humanity, especially for his chosen people, the Jews, and those who have faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Through his daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and generational memory devices, he continues to direct our path.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John D. Garr". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned over the end of the paragraph above.

## Hebraic Insight

*In-depth Bible study resources for individuals, families, and congregations focusing on the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith.*

*(Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.)*

Editor & Publisher

John D. Garr

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## REMEMBERING AND DOING

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Human beings are very forgetful. Sometimes we almost have to tie a string around our fingers to remember even important things. This is the reason that God has established many memory devices for the believer throughout the pages of the Bible. Most important among these are the appointments that God has established for meeting with his children, signposts that point us to continual renewal of our fellowship with God.



**KEY TEXT:** “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me” (Isaiah 46:9).

**SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. Only one of the Ten Commandments instructs us to “remember.” The Sabbath day, more than anything else, is, therefore, a day for remembrance, a weekly opportunity for us to stop our hectic pace and to remember the important things in life—God and our families. Discuss why God considered remembrance so important that he made it one-tenth of the Decalogue.
2. Apparently, remembrance is also time-based, with temporal markers to help us overcome our forgetfulness. Because we tend to forget the “former things long past” (Isaiah 46:9), God asks us to memorialize them. For the Jewish people such memorials are celebrated as anamneses, virtual reenactments of the events of salvation history so that remembering becomes doing. This is because God instructed them to “tell your son . . . It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:8). Consider why we have calendars to keep us on track.
3. In Numbers 15:39-40, the Israelites were instructed to attach fringes (*tzitzit*) to the four corners of their mantles so they would remember to do all of God’s instructions (commandments). This means that God uses material things as mnemonic devices to help focus our attention on important things. How do visual reminders help us overcome our forgetfulness? What are some of the visual devices help you to remember?
4. God instructed Israel in Joshua 4:3-9 to build a monument of stones in the Jordan River as a memorial to the fact that they were miraculously brought into the Promised Land by God’s hand and not by their own strength. This

was but one of many times that God's people constructed monuments. Discuss the importance of memorials to important events in history.

5. Exodus 3:15 tells us that God's personal name, Yahweh, is a memorial unto all generations. It is a memorial that our God is the "I am," the Eternal, the one whose name means "I will be there." Analyze other Divine names in Scripture and consider the ways in which those names help us to remember the goodness and grace of God that people in Bible times experienced which we also can share in like manner with them. Consider *El Shaddai* (The Almighty), *Yahweh Jireh* (The LORD, our Provider), *Yahweh Rophe* (The LORD, our Healer), *Yahweh Shalom* (The Lord, our Peace), *Yahweh Tzidkenu* (The LORD, our Righteousness), *Yahweh Robi* (The LORD, our Shepherd), *Yahweh Nissi* (The LORD, our Banner).

6. Solomon wisely instructed young people to "remember" their Creator in the days of their youth. For this reason, the Jewish people have always concentrated on memorizing Holy Scripture in their youth. Taking their cue from Psalm 1, they "meditate" in God's Word "day and night" by repeating the words of Scripture. This is the true meaning of the word *meditate* in this Psalm. Discuss how repetition of Scripture helps us memorize God's Word and inculcate it into our lives. How does "hiding God's Word in our hearts" (Psalm 119:11) help us?

7. Jude 1:17 instructs us to remember the words of the apostles. Paul was also very emphatic that believers should be established in the traditions that they had learned from the apostles (2 Thessalonians 3:6). Peter also underscored the importance of this truth (2 Peter 3:2). Consider how the Apostolic Scriptures (the "New Testament") serve as a lens that brings into focus the words of the Hebrew Scriptures (the "Old Testament").

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word זָכַר (*zakhar*) means "to remember, to recall." It can also mean "to mark," as a mark that distinguishes or calls to remembrance. It is the basis for the word זִכְרוֹן (*zikaron*), which means "memorials," which makes a distinct connection between remembrance and worship. It also connects with God's festivals when shofars were blown to call the people to remembrance that Yahweh is God (Numbers 10:9-10). The Hebrew word for festival, חֲגֻלָּה (*chagalah*), also means "to mutter," repeating in order to remember (Psalm 1:2).

**Remembrance is vital to life. Without it, we forget who we are and what we are supposed to do. The most important things that we can remember, however, are the God who created us and the instructions that he has given to us in his Word, the guidelines that will ensure our success both in the present world and in the age to come.**

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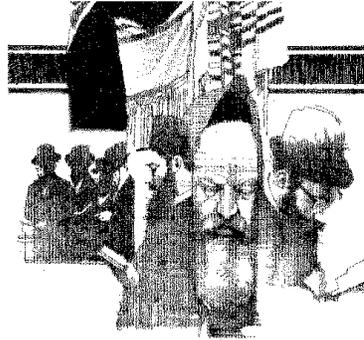
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## THE HOURS OF PRAYER

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God actually wants his children to remember to have fellowship with him daily. For this reason, he created hours of prayer to be on his sundial or clock. He actually made it very easy for everyone by calling us to prayer in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. The hours of prayer urge us to stop what we are doing in our busy lives and take the time every day to honor the God who made us by offering our prayers to him for his will in our lives.



**KEY TEXT:** “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three in the afternoon” (Acts 3:1, NIV/KJV).

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. By the time of Jesus, the hours of prayer were firmly established in the lives of the Jewish people. Two of these were based on the morning and the evening sacrifice offered in the Tabernacle and in the Temple (Leviticus 9:17; 1 Kings 18:29). Apparently the times of sacrifice and the hours of prayer were originally around 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Consider the reasons why sacrifices and prayers were made in the morning and evening. Is this the way in which we fulfill Paul’s instruction to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?
2. A third hour of prayer had been added to the Tabernacle order by the time of David, for in Psalm 55:17, we find David declaring that he would pray in the morning, in the evening, and at noon. By this time, tradition says that there were actually three daily temple sacrifices. The Jewish people believe that the morning prayer (*Shacharit*) was instituted by Abraham; the noon prayer (*Mincha*) was begun by Isaac, and the evening prayer (*Ma’ariv*) was initiated by Jacob. Discuss the importance of punctuating every day with prayer. Would this biblical practice help focus your attention on God throughout the day?
3. When Daniel was prohibited from praying by the king’s decree, he opened the windows of his chamber toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10). Does this suggest that Daniel followed King David and made the hours of prayer the focus of his daily life and his relationship with God? Consider the fact that Daniel was not ashamed of his prayer life and did not hesitate to make it public. Is Daniel’s example a good one for you to follow?
4. Apparently God placed great importance on the precise times that he had given to his people for prayer and sacrifice. The gospels tell us that Jesus was

nailed to the cross at 9 a.m., the time of the morning hour of prayer (Mark 15:25). Darkness came upon the land at the noon hour of prayer (Mark 15:33). Jesus died at 3 p.m., the time of the evening hour of prayer (Mark 15:34). Discuss the reasons for the precise timing of the crucifixion. How does this impact your thinking regarding incorporating a systematic approach to prayer in your own personal life?

5. The Holy Spirit was given to the church at the morning hour of prayer (Acts 2:1-4, 15) on the very day of Pentecost. This signaled God's continuing focus on the appointed times that he had set for interacting with his people. When both the Day of Pentecost and the Hour of Prayer had fully come, God delivered the Holy Spirit to his people. Consider the precise timing of God's actions. Why do you think this was significant?

6. We see the continuing focus on the hours of prayer in the book of Acts. When God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, he visited Peter with a vision at the noon hour of prayer (Acts 10:9-14), and he also appeared to Cornelius at the afternoon hour of prayer (Acts 10:3). Later, God called Paul at the noon hour of prayer (Acts 22:6). Do you think this was coincidence, or was it planned by God? Are the hours of prayer important for Gentile believers as well as for the Jews?

7. When God said to "remember" in the Fourth Commandment, it extended to much more than just the weekly Sabbath. As the concept of remembrance unfolded, God arranged it so that under this rubric there would even be daily reminders to his people of the importance of interacting with him in prayer and worship. How important is it to you that you be reminded daily and, then, throughout the day that you are to be in communication and fellowship with the God of the universe for your own spiritual strength and maturity?

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word תְּפִלָּה (*tefillah*) means "prayer." *Ha-tephillah* is the title for the most important prayer in Jewish life, the *Amidah* (so-called because it is prayed while "standing"). Featuring eighteen benedictions (called *Shemoneh Esreh*), this prayer is prayed daily in the synagogue at the three hours of prayer corresponding to the three temple sacrifices: שְׁחֵרִית (*shacharit*)—from the word for "dawn"; מִנְחָה (*mincha*)—from the flour offering that accompanied each temple sacrifice; and מְאָרִיב (*ma'ariv*)—from the word for "nightfall."

**The hours of prayer actually coincide with the traditional times for eating food. It should be easy for us to remember the times that God has set apart for us to meet with him in our prayer closets or in corporate prayer. These three times a day are constant reminders for those who are careful to remember to "pray without ceasing."**

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## THE SABBATH OF REMEMBRANCE

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The Sabbath is the memorial that God himself established at the end of creation so that his children would never forget their Creator. As a weekly memorial, the Sabbath reminds us that we have physical life solely because Yahweh created us and our world, that we have spiritual life and rest only through the Jesus, and that we will have eternal rest with the Messiah in the eternal Kingdom that will be initiated by the Sabbatical Millennium.



**KEY TEXT:** *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8, 11, NASB).*

### **SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. In creation, God established the eternal principle of remembrance: for all eternity, his children are to set apart one day each week as a time for God and family, as a time to remember. Obviously, God did not need “rest” as we know it; however, he set the example of stopping his work and engaging in “*menuach*,” which means “rest” in the context of “cessation.” Analyze the example that God set in the beginning and discuss how it applies to your life.
2. As you study Genesis 2:1-3, reflect on the eternal truth that God blessed the Sabbath as a memorial to the creation of humankind and of the world. In the first declaration of the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11), the reason given for the divine instruction was this: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth . . . and rested on the seventh day.” Develop the idea that the Sabbath is a remembrance that the universe and humanity were created by God and not by evolution.
3. The Sabbath also has a unique connection with the Jewish people, for in the second declaration of the Sabbath commandment (Deuteronomy 5:15), God said, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out.” Some have called the Sabbath the “Jewish Sabbath,” and to an extent they are correct; however, this principle existed before the command was given. Could anyone have “remembered” the Sabbath if it had not already been in existence? What does “hallow” mean? Is the Sabbath for all humanity?

4. The reformation that Jesus brought to God's religion (Hebrews 9:10) caused conflict. Discuss the addition of human traditions to God's commandment and the bondage they brought to the Jewish people in the days of Jesus as you read Matthew 12:1-2 and Luke 13:10-13. Why is it that humans always seem to require more than God does?
5. Jesus declared that it is "lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Mark 3:4) and he affirmed that he himself was "Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:5). Analyze the position that Jesus took toward the Sabbath as you read Matthew 12:10-13; Mark 2:27; and John 5:8-12, 18. Consider the fact that Jesus expanded the Sabbath from being perceived as a day of rest only into to a day of service to God and to humanity. Is it not always proper for us to love and serve God and one another, regardless as to the day of the week on which we do it?
6. The spiritual rest that the believers receive when they accept Jesus Christ and the yoke of his kingdom (Matthew 11:28-29) is a form of Sabbath. It is a rest for our souls that no amount of physical repose could possibly provide. Ultimately our rest in Jesus will culminate in the eternal life that we will inherit in the Sabbatical kingdom of God. Confirm the truth of this rest from Hebrews 4:3 and discuss its impact upon your life.
7. Sabbath is a divine principle of cessation and rest that is manifest in a Person (Jesus), a day (the Sabbath), and an expectation (the Age to Come). How does a weekly set-apart day help you remember that Jesus is the Sabbath? How does it help you realize that your life does not depend upon your own work but on God's provision? How does it focus your faith on the coming of the Messiah to establish the eternal rest of the Kingdom of God? Discuss how you can delight in the Sabbath with this knowledge (Isaiah 58:13).

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word שָׁבַט (*shabbat*) is a verb meaning "to cease, desist, rest." When the sages of Israel observed that Scripture said, "On the seventh day God completed his work," (Genesis 2:2), they wondered, "What work did God do on the seventh day?" They concluded that he created "rest." The Hebrew word for "rest" is מָנוּחַ (*manuach*), which means "tranquility, repose, and serenity," indicating that *manuach* and *shabbat* are intrinsically positive in nature. *Manuach*, therefore, has come to be a synonym even for eternal life.

**The Sabbath is a weekly reminder so that we as believers can confirm our faith that we were created by God, that we have entered into the spiritual rest of eternal life through Jesus our Lord, and that we anticipate his promised return to begin the Sabbatical Kingdom on earth that we will also share with him eternally in the age to come.**

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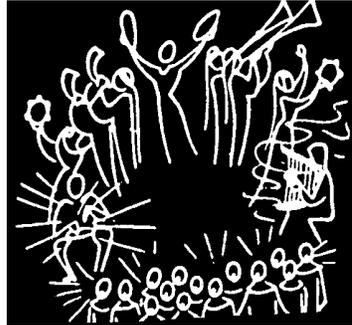
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## THE BIBLICAL CALENDAR

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In the Holy Scriptures, God has outlined a calendar of the times on which he desires to meet with his children. He has prescribed certain acts of divine service which are to be carried out by his people in praise and worship and in remembrance of his mighty acts in salvation history. This is God's liturgical calendar, an outline of the special times on which we are to remember God and to offer sacrifices of praises and worship to him.



**KEY TEXT:** *“Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . Celebrate the Feast of Harvest . . . Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering . . . These are my appointed feasts” (Exodus 23:14-17; Leviticus 23, NIV).*

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Leviticus 23 presents a detailed account of God's liturgical calendar, a schedule of the times throughout the year that he appointed for his people to worship him. There were three major feasts, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17) with four additional festivals added among them, making a total of seven festivals. These were not just “Jewish festivals,” as they have been called, because God himself specifically claimed ownership of his appointed times: “These are *my* appointed feasts” (Leviticus 23:2). Evaluate this statement and its implications for all believers.
2. In reality, Leviticus 23:3 designates the Sabbath as the first feast! “These are my feasts. Six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath . . .” Since the list of festivals begins with the Sabbath, the only one of the Ten Commandments that requires God's people to “remember” is extended to include the festival times as well as the Sabbath. These are also memory devices to help God's people recall his mighty works in salvation history. How do Sabbaths and festivals strengthen your relationship with God?
3. In Exodus 12:18, the first festival is called Unleavened Bread, which begins with the Day of Passover (Leviticus 23:5). Study the events of Passover in Exodus 12. By the time of the prophets, the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread had come to be called “Passover” (Ezekiel 45:21), and this was true in the time of Jesus (Luke 22:1). Consider the fulfillment of

the Passover (Exodus 12:21-23; John 1:36). How do Unleavened Bread and Passover reveal Jesus? Discuss ways in which Christians today can celebrate Passover as Paul instructed (1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23-26).

4. During the week of Unleavened Bread and Passover, the Festival of Firstfruits was also celebrated (Leviticus 23:10-14). This festival honored God with the firstfruits of the barley harvest. The High Priest plucked up a sheaf of barley after sundown on the evening of the weekly Sabbath. Then he waved it before the Lord at the morning sacrifice. This festival was fulfilled when Jesus became the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23) and the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20). Consider the parallels between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the Father (John 20:17) and the offering of the wave sheaf.

5. The second of the three major festivals was the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost) which was celebrated fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits on the first day of the week after seven Sabbaths were complete (Leviticus 23:15-22). It was at this time that the Torah was given to Israel at Sinai, and it was also on this very day that the Spirit was given to the church. Analyze the many parallels between the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Mount Zion, both on the Day of Pentecost.

6. The fall calendar includes the festivals of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. These festivals are yet to be fulfilled. Trumpets focuses on the awakening call of the shofars and the Day of Atonement on God's sacrifice for Israel's sins. What significance do these times have for Christians?

7. God's final remembrance festival is Tabernacles or Ingathering. Consider the ingathering of everything in Christ that is to occur at the end of the age when the Messiah returns to earth (Isaiah 25:6-8; Ephesians 1:10).

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *חג* (*chag*) means "festival" or festival gathering. It comes from the same root as *חגג* (*chagag*), which means "to dance or twirl ecstatically in a circle." Festivals were also called *מוֹעֲדִים* (*mo'edim*), which meant "appointed times," that God had determined to meet with his people. It is obvious that Yahweh's "solemn feasts" were times of joy and celebration. The three pilgrimage festivals were *פֶּסַח* (*Pesach*—Passover), *שָׁבֻעֹת* (*Shavvot*—Weeks/Harvest/Pentecost), and *סֻכּוֹת* (*Sukkot*—Ingathering/Tabernacles).

**God has given us his divine appointment calendar as a reminder of the great events of salvation history, as a guideline of times on which we are to assemble to worship him, and as a prophetic outline for the life and ministry of Jesus and yet future promises that will be fulfilled when he returns and establishes the kingdom of God on earth.**

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## PASSOVER: REMEMBERING REDEMPTION

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The two greatest events in salvation history occurred on the same day—the day of Passover. Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage on the first Passover. Provision for all humanity’s salvation from slavery to sin was made in Jesus’ crucifixion on the first New Covenant Passover. Passover helps the Jews remember how God liberated them, and it enables Christians to recall that Christ delivered them from sin and death.



**KEY TEXT:** “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8, NIV).

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The story of the first Passover is found in Exodus 12:1-14. Here, God commanded each Israelite household to sacrifice its own Passover lamb. He did this rather than having the priest sacrifice one lamb for all of the people. Is this an indication that God places great value on faith in the context of the individual and the family? Discuss the implications of this fact for worship within the context of your own family.
2. Israel was instructed by God to celebrate the Passover each year forever (Exodus 12:14). God’s deliverance is so important that he wanted Israel to remember it every week on the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:15) and then once a year at Passover. Discuss the importance to the community of faith of constantly remembering God’s redemption both in weekly and in annual events. How important is it to you and your family to engage in Bible study and worship of God weekly and seasonally?
3. God promised the Israelites, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). It was no coincidence that God required the blood of a lamb to be placed on the doors of the Israelite households. Why was blood necessary for redemption (Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:11)? Since the lamb was killed on the threshold of the door and the blood was applied to the lintel and doorposts, the blood actually encircled the entry of each home. How important is it to have the blood encircling the hearts of the believers?
4. When Jesus died on the very day of Passover, it became clear to his disciples that Jesus was God’s Paschal Lamb who was to “take away the sins of the world,” just as John the Baptist had identified him at his bap-

tism. Confirm this divine truth as you study Matthew 26:2 and John 1:29. Is this why Jesus is said to be the Lamb, from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20) to the age to come (Revelation 22:3)? How does this truth add to your understanding of Passover and its value to Christian believers today?

5. Even in the final hours of his life on earth, Jesus, as a faithful Jew, was careful to celebrate the Passover as God had commanded with his disciples. Study Luke 22:1, 7-16 so you can see the importance that Jesus attached to God's day of redemption. If Jesus had great "desire" to celebrate the Passover with his disciples, should Christians not share that same passion? If we want to imitate the life of Christ, this is one good place to begin!

6. At his last Passover celebration, Jesus reformed the memorial by adding to it a celebration in remembrance of his death. Evaluate this "New Covenant Passover" as you read the words of Luke 22:17-20. This, too was a remembrance device—a commandment of Jesus that all believers of all time are to remember his death until he returns to the earth. The manner of a New Covenant observance of the fulfilled Passover is given by Jesus himself. No one should be able to err in rightly remembering the Lord's death.

7. Paul reiterated to the Gentiles the command of Jesus to remember his death. He said to Gentiles: "For Christ, *our* Passover, has been sacrificed. Therefore let *us* keep the festival" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8, emphasis added). Passover was no longer a festival limited to the Israelites as a memorial of deliverance from Egypt. Now, it was to be a festival for Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, to remember that the death of Jesus on the cross provided for deliverance from sin and death. Discuss ways in which Christians can remember and celebrate the new Passover.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word פֶּסַח (*Pesach*—Passover) probably was kin to an Syrian word *pesha* that meant "to jump over." It was likely tied with the great superstition that ancient people had regarding the danger of stepping on the threshold of a dwelling place. In this case, God had the Israelites sacrifice the Passover lamb at the threshold of their houses and had them to apply the blood around the outside of the door. God has promised to "jump over" those on whom he sees the blood of the Passover Lamb (Revelation 12:11).

**While Passover is foundational to the identity of the Jewish people, it is all the more central to the self-understanding of the Christian community. Without the first Passover, there would have been no liberated Israel. Without the first New Covenant Passover, there would be no church, the community of those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.**

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## UNLEAVENED BREAD: SANCTIFICATION

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God is utterly holy, wholly other, separate from all the gods of human imagination. Because he is holy, God also desires that his people be a holy, set-apart people who are passionate for his truth and for his will to be accomplished in their lives. In order to demonstrate this truth, God established on his appointment calendar a remembrance festival that yearly reminded Israel of his call to sanctification and holiness, Unleavened Bread.



**KEY TEXT:** *“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump . . . therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven . . . of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8, NASB).*

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The Hebrew word for leaven (*chametz*) means “bitter.” The word *unleavened* (*matzah*), however, means “sweet.” *Chametz*, therefore, came to symbolize sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-7) or false teaching (Mark 8:15) because of the bitterness associated with both and because of the nature of sin. Like leaven, even a small amount of sin will permeate everything. *Matzah*, on the other hand, came to symbolize sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8). Discuss the contrast between *chametz* and *matzah* from the Festival of Unleavened Bread.
2. Leaven (yeast) is used to expand the dough of bread by entraining air to make it softer and more palatable. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, he did not allow them time to let the dough to rise; therefore, they ate unleavened bread, called “the bread of haste” (Deuteronomy 16:3). Why do you think God commanded Israel to eat unleavened bread for the Passover?
3. God used what was a matter of necessity on Passover to teach Israel a lesson and reinforce it in a yearly remembrance. Why do you think that the Israelites were commanded to remove all leaven from their houses for eight days each year (Exodus 12:15)? Was it just remembering what their ancestors ate on the first Passover, or was it a lesson regarding purity?
4. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul instructed Gentile Christians to “purge out the old leaven” from their lives, and he did so in the context of celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Consider the importance of being careful to remove sin from our lives (1 Corinthians 11:28, 31; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

5. In Matthew 16:11-12, Jesus told his disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” The leaven of which he spoke was the traditions of men that can puff one up in his own mind and bring sin into his life (Colossians 2:18). Just like leaven “puffs up” bread by entraining air and making it rise, so knowledge “puffs up” (makes one proud or arrogant). Confirm this fact from 1 Corinthians 8:1, and contrast how love builds up (the literal meaning of the word *edifies*) rather than puffs up as you compare 1 Corinthians 13:4 which observes that love is not puffed up.

6. Before Passover, each Israelite family thoroughly cleaned its house of all leaven. Because leaven was forbidden in all the sacrifices (Exodus 23:18; 34:25), believers must be careful to remove sin from their lives before they present their bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). As God’s children, we ask our heavenly Father to remove sin from our lives when it appears. He gently does so and casts it into the sea of forgetfulness (figuratively the Dead Sea). How important is it for you to take inventory of your life to remove anything unlike God? What does Paul say about “cleaning out” the old leaven of sin in 1 Corinthians 5:7? Compare this with his instructions that we “judge ourselves” so that we will not be judged of God (1 Corinthians 11:31).

7. Jesus was the bread from heaven the unleavened bread of life (John 6:33-41). He was truly unleavened, because he was totally without sin and even deceit could not be found in him (1 Peter 2:22). Discuss how Christians can imitate the life of Christ by striving to be victorious over sin and deceit. How important is it to you to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you should not be doing and/or what you should be doing and then lead you to the Father for forgiveness and mercy?

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word  $\text{חַמֵּץ}$  (*chametz*) means “leaven” or “a thing leavened.” *Chametz* was forbidden in all of the sacrifices and at Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The word *chametz* also comes from  $\text{חַמָּץ}$  (*chamatz*) which means “sour,” a picture of sin and false teaching. In contrast, the Hebrew word for “unleavened” is  $\text{מַצֶּה}$  (*matzah*), which is derived from the word  $\text{מַצֵּץ}$  (*matzats*), speaks of “greedily devouring for sweetness.” This, too, is a verbal picture of the unleavened bread of truth that is sweet to the believer’s soul.

**The festival of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by being filled full of meaning when Jesus, the Lamb of God without spot or blemish of sin, was entombed in the heart of the earth. When believers respond to his command and eat the unleavened bread in remembrance of him, they recognize that the Messiah gives them the power over sin.**

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## FIRSTFRUITS: MEMORIAL OF RESURRECTION

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During the time of the annual Passover memorial, the Israelites were also commanded to celebrate the Festival of Firstfruits. Jesus was resurrected from the dead on this very day, becoming the firstfruits of the resurrection that is promised to all those who believe in him for the forgiveness of sins. The Feast of Firstfruits is a memorial of God's power to bring forth life from the dead and to give eternal life to all those who believe.



**KEY TEXT:** “*You shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. . . . on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it [before the Lord]*” (Leviticus 23:10-11, NASB).

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The Passover coincided with the beginning of the barley harvest in ancient Israel, so God added another dimension to the story of redemption by instructing his people to offer a firstfruits memorial before the Lord during that same time. How does recognizing God as our source honor him as both our deliverer and our provider (Genesis 22:8)?
2. The firstfruit offering of each element of the agricultural harvest was, in effect, a tithe that was designed to demonstrate that the Israelites were not responsible for their own well-being but owed everything to the providing hand of God (Deuteronomy 18:4). The Hebrew word for tithe, *ma'aseh* means both wealth and a tenth. When we give God the tenth of our increase, God counts it as if we have given everything to him. Discuss the nature of tithing and giving as a memorial of God's provision. How does God respond when we give to him (Luke 6:38)?
3. The resurrection of the righteous of the earth is symbolized by the plucking up of the sheaf of barley and the waving of that sheaf before God on the day after the weekly Sabbath that follows Passover. Discuss the foundational Jewish and Christian belief in the resurrection. How does this belief differ from the perspectives of other religions regarding the status of human beings after death (e.g. monism's ideal of utter escape from existence and Platonism's ideal of escape from the material into the spiritual)?
4. Because Jesus was resurrected at the beginning of the first day of the week, he came forth from the tomb on the very day of the Feast of

Firstfruits (Mark 16:2, 9). Discuss how the timing of this event demonstrates God's attention to the details of fulfilling his Word. How important to God is it to do things on the predetermined "set times" of his liturgical calendar? Does God do everything according to the system that he established from the beginning of creation for times and seasons (Genesis 1:14)?

5. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, Paul describes Jesus as the "firstfruits" of the resurrection. In effect, he notes that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits, the "first begotten from the dead." Just as the sheaf of barley was plucked up after sundown at the end of the Sabbath and was waved the next morning at the time of the morning sacrifice, so Jesus was resurrected but did not ascend until the morning sacrifice. Confirm this truth from John 20:17. Do you think it was coincidental that Jesus resurrected on the day of Firstfruits?

6. Since Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection, he is proof that a general resurrection of all who believe in him will occur in a future time. The firstfruits is evidence that a great harvest awaits. How do you know that you will experience a resurrection similar to that Jesus experienced? Confirm the truth from 1 Corinthians 15:22-23. If Jesus is the "first begotten from the dead," will believers not be "joint-heirs" with him (Romans 8:17)? How does this truth impact your life?

7. The resurrection is more than resuscitation. It is a resurrection to "eternal life" and living in a glorified human body that will be like the body that Jesus had in his resurrection. Expand on this truth as you read Philippians 3:21. If Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection, is it not evident that the resurrection of all the righteous of the earth is certain and is yet to come? Discuss the reasons why you believe in the resurrection?

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *בְּכֻרִים* (*bikkurim*) means a "firstfruits," the "first of the crops and fruit that ripened. When Paul described Jesus as the "firstfruits" of the resurrection, he used the Greek word ἀπαρχή (*aparche*) which meant "the first portion of the dough." Jesus totally filled the Feast of Firstfruits full of its greatest significance and meaning when he became the first human being to be resurrected in a glorified body, demonstrating that all believers will be similarly resurrected in bodies like his own to be in the presence of God forever.

**The Festival of Firstfruits teaches us the lesson that God requires the first and the best to be presented to him. That is why God gave his only begotten Son to die for the sins of humanity and then to resurrect from the dead as a demonstration of the divine promise that all the righteous will stand in the last day in the resurrection.**

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## PENTECOST: TORAH AND SPIRIT

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Pentecost is the annual festival that helps the believer remember the giving of God's Word and his Spirit to teach and to empower them for divine service. At Sinai, Israel received God's Torah (instructions), imparting to them his eternal truth. In Jerusalem, the congregation of the Messiah received the impartation and gift of the Holy Spirit who then dwelled in them for the purpose of leading and guiding them into all of God's truth.



**KEY TEXT:** *“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let my people go that they may celebrate a festival for me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1, Tanakh). “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1, 4, NKJV).*

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Pentecost is the second of the three annual pilgrimage festivals outlined on God's calendar in Leviticus 23. This was the festival that Israel first observed at Mt. Sinai in fulfillment of God's command to Pharaoh: “Let my people go so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the desert” (Exodus 5:1). While everyone is aware of God's order: “Let my people go,” few know that the purpose for releasing the Israelites was so that they could “celebrate a festival” to their God. Discuss the importance of spiritual freedom, not just for freedom's sake, but to worship God.
2. For Israel, Pentecost was actually the completion of the Passover Exodus experience, the very reason for their deliverance from Egypt. The Israelites were not really free until they joined in covenant with God at Sinai. It was then that an insignificant nomadic people became God's kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). Confirm this truth and consider its impact upon you and the freedom you have from covenant with God.
3. At Pentecost God thundered the Ten Words (the Decalogue), giving his instructions for life to the nation of Israel but also for the whole world. Evaluate the Ten Commandments as a summary of God's Word on how to love God and how to love one's fellowman. Consider how the world was impacted by the Torah as you read Romans 2:15.
4. Jesus fulfilled all the festivals connected with Passover, including the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Festival of Firstfruits. Then he

spent the next forty days, the first four-fifths of the Festival of *Shavuot* (“Weeks” or Pentecost), intensely instructing his disciples “in the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). (Pentecost, which means “fiftieth,” actually encompassed the fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits and was consummated “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1). Discuss the precision with which God fulfilled Pentecost.

5. After Jesus’ ascension, the 120 disciples waited in Jerusalem for the Comforter that Jesus had promised (John 14:26) that would “clothe” them with “power from on high” (Luke 24:49) to “be witnesses” unto Jesus (Acts 1:8). The 120 believers in Jesus, like their fellow Jews, “counted the omer” (the days between Firstfruits and Pentecost) waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them as they were assembled on Mount Zion. Why was this precise day chosen by God? Consider how the first New Covenant Pentecost when God gave the Holy Spirit correlates with the first Pentecost at Sinai when God gave Israel the Word.

6. The function of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8) and to lead God’s people into truth (John 16:13). Discuss the way in which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their sinful nature and their need for repentance. Then, analyze how the indwelling Spirit helps Christians to fulfill the instructions that are set forth in God’s Word: the truth.

7. Like Israel at Sinai, the church was “in one accord” when the Holy Spirit came. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). He does not manifest himself among his people until they come together in unity, which is not sameness or uniformity but cohesion in the midst of diversity. Consider the importance of being in unity in order to see the manifestation of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 12:11).

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *שבועות* (*shavuot*) means “weeks” and was the term that commonly referred to the seven complete weeks between the Feast of Firstfruits and the final day of Pentecost (meaning “fiftieth”). The word *shavuot* is from the word *שבת* (*shabbat*) which means “Sabbath” and can also stand for “week.” The term *πεντήκοστή* (*pentecoste*) was used in the Apostolic Scriptures to designate the Feast of Weeks because the final day of this festival was its “fiftieth.” Like their fellow Jews, the earliest Christians celebrated Pentecost.

**Pentecost is a reminder on God’s calendar that helps believers remember the importance of God’s Word and Spirit. The Word that came on Pentecost at Mt. Sinai is confirmed through the Holy Spirit that was first given to the church on Pentecost at Mt. Zion. God continues to seek those who will worship him in Spirit and in truth.**

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## TRUMPETS: ROSH HASHANAH

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The Feast of Trumpets is the first of three divine appointments that occur at the end of the Jewish agricultural harvest. It also marks the beginning of the civil year, called *Rosh HaShanah*. The clarion call of the shofar called Israel to repentance, the beginning of a ten-day time for introspection and repentance in preparation for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the highest and holiest day on the Jewish liturgical calendar.



**KEY TEXT:** “*Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets*” (Leviticus 23:24, NASB).

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The Feast of Trumpets is called a reminder or memorial (Leviticus 23:24). As such, it is another of the memory devices that God designed to focus Israel’s attention on him and his Word. Numbers 29:1 declares that this was a day of blowing trumpets (*teruah*), sounding an alarm. The term *teruah* also means “joy,” indicating that the Feast of Trumpets is both a time of seriousness but also a time of joy. It also marked the civil new year (*Rosh HaShanah*), the time to begin preparation for *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). Discuss how blowing shofars commands attention and respect.
2. In biblical times, the trumpet that was used most often was a shofar, a ram’s horn. The shofar traces its history to the story of the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, when Abraham prepared to offer his son as a sacrifice to God. As the angel stayed Abraham’s hand, God provided a ram caught by his horns in a thorn bush (Genesis 22:13) as a substitute for Isaac. How does the shofar symbolize vicarious atonement, the substitution of an innocent victim for the intended or demanded sacrifice of another?
3. The shofar came to symbolize repentance in Judaism. Its penetrating, mournful sound, along with its curved appearance, indicated the bowed heart and the bent knee of the penitent person who seeks forgiveness and restoration to God. Analyze this concept and discuss how humility impacts repentance.
4. The shofar was also used in time of war. Consider the impact of this instrument in the classic battle of Gideon’s three hundred as you read

Judges 7:16-22. Discuss also the story of the fall of the walls of Jericho when the priests of God blew the shofars as they marched around the city (Joshua 6:20). Does the blowing of the shofar provide more than just musical accompaniment to the worship exercises of God's people, or do you think there is power in the shofar blast?

5. An assembly of the people of God was called by the blowing of the trumpets (Numbers 10:2-3, 6). Compare this function of the shofar with the prediction of Joel 2:1, 15 that the shofar is to be blown in Zion to prepare for the Day of the Lord. Is there a connection between the blowing of the shofar to assemble Israel and the "midnight cry" of Matthew 25:6? How does sounding the alarm of the Feast of Trumpets prepare for a new day in both Israel and the church?

6. Jewish sages have predicted that at the coming of the Messiah, God will again blow the shofar to awaken the nations and prepare the way for the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. This truth is established in the words of Zechariah 9:14. This is the great trumpet of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 24:31. Discuss the sounding of the shofar that signals the beginning of the time of universal peace on earth as the Messiah comes.

7. The shofar is also connected with the signal for the resurrection and the end of the age. Discuss the shofar blast that Paul called the "last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52. Consider the vision of John in which he saw seven angels sounding seven trumpets with the seventh trumpet making this proclamation: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). Evaluate possible connections between the Feast of Trumpets and the resurrection and the end of the age.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word יֹבֵל (*yovel*) means a "ram" or "ram's horn." It is clearly connected with the word שׁוֹפָר (*shofar*) in Joshua 6:5 where the terms are used synonymously in the same sentence. The Feast of Trumpets, however, is actually called "Memorial of Blowing" (זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה—*zicharon tervah*) with the use of the shofar implied. The Feast of Trumpets, then, is a memory device that raises the clarion call that summons God's people to attention, instructs them in their need for repentance, and calls them to the service of God.

**The shofar itself is an instrument of remembrance that points back to the ram substituted for Isaac. It summons both Israel and the church to God's service, heralding the time of repentance and renewal. Finally, it points to a future time when the shofar alarm will signal the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.**

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## ATONEMENT: REMEMBERING REPENTANCE

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Because God understood the weakness of human frailty, he established on his remembrance calendar one day each year for dealing with the failures of his chosen people as a community. This was the Day of Atonement, the highest and holiest day of the Jewish year, the only day of the year when the High Priest alone entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for his sins and for the sins of all the people of Israel.



**KEY TEXT:** “On exactly the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of atonement . . . to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God” (*Leviticus 23:27-28, NASB*).

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures is both a God of justice (Psalm 145:17) and a God of love and mercy (Psalm 145:8). Because of the sinful state of humanity, God has always provided atonement for the repentant. Evaluate the system that God enacted in Israel to atone for the sins of the people. How was this system parallel with what God initiated in the Garden of Eden to atone for Adam and Eve’s sin (Genesis 3:21)?
2. On the Day of Atonement, the Jewish people afflict themselves with fasting and prayer, with introspection and repentance, seeking reconciliation with God and man. It is understood that full reconciliation with God cannot take place unless wrongs done to fellow humans be resolved by repentance and restitution. Jesus maintained this understanding in his ministry (Matthew 5:24), and John reiterated the idea in 1 John 4:20. Discuss the importance of restoring of broken human relationships when one approaches God to ask for forgiveness of sins against him.
3. In biblical times, the means of atonement on this day of memorial was the offering of two goats, one that was sacrificed and the other on which the High Priest confessed the sins of Israel so it could take them outside the camp as the scapegoat. Discuss this system from Leviticus 16:7-10.
4. God will never reject a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18; 51:17). Those who come to him in repentance, he will in no wise cast out (John 6:37), for it is his will that all should come to repentance and justification before him (2 Peter 3:9). Discuss the love and mercy of God and his open arms

extended to those who repent. Is this why Jesus was free to forgive the sins of people who came in faith to him (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5)?

5. In Hebrew, the word for repentance is *teshuvah*, which literally means “turning.” Consider the truth that all God really wants from those who have sinned and strayed from his ways is for them to recognize that they are going the wrong way and turn around and return to him. Discuss the everlasting tender mercies of God that the prophet revealed in Jeremiah 3:12. Is God the harsh judge that so many people have depicted, or is he a loving Father who welcomes his children home?

6. Consider these steps in repentance: *recognition* of sin, *remorse* for sin, *return* to God, and *resolve* not to repeat the sin. It is not possible to repent unless one recognizes that he has sinned. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin (John 16:8). Likewise, one cannot repent unless he is has remorse which Scripture calls “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Repentance, then, is the act of returning to God which the prophets so graphically and poignantly described (Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 3:22; Hosea 6:1; Malachi 3:7). Finally, true repentance is proven when one resolves never to repeat the sin and follows through with his commitment. Discuss this process of repentance and consider how it has worked in your own life to help you be an overcomer, a victor over sin.

7. The Prophet Zechariah spoke extensively of a still future Day of Atonement when the fountain for sin that was opened at Calvary will be reopened to Israel in the time of the Messiah (Zechariah 13:1). He also noted that the people of God would look on the one whom they had pierced (Zechariah 12:10). Paul declared that in this time, “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). Discuss the Deliverer who will come to Israel.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew term יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים (*yom ha-kippurim*) means the Day of Atonements, which was prescribed by God in Leviticus 23. The word *kippur* comes from the word כִּפַּר (*kaphar*), which means to “cover, purge, make reconciliation.” God formulated a means by which he could “cover” and thereby “atone” for the sins of his people. The agent that covered sin was blood, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). This is why it is the blood of Jesus that atones for the sins of the all humanity.

**The Day of Atonement was the time of memorial on which God covered the sins of his people Israel. It prefigured the time when the Son of God would become both the sacrificed goat and the scapegoat and thereby make atonement for the sins of Israel and the world in the day when God will reconcile to himself all who are repentant.**

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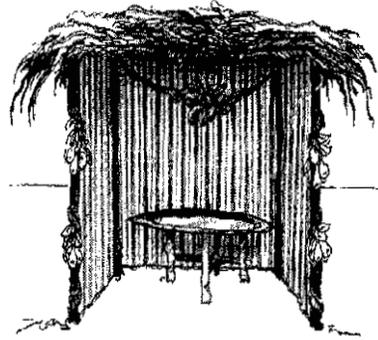
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## TABERNACLES: THE CONSUMMATION

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Tabernacles is called the festival of our joy, the time of memorial for the greatest celebration of the year. It was the feast of ingathering when thanks was given for all the bounty of the year's harvest. It was also the feast of booths, when the Israelites lived in temporary structures in order to remember their sojourn in the wilderness. It is the universal festival when all men, both Jew and Gentile, come together to celebrate God's goodness.



**KEY TEXT:** *“The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD” (Leviticus 23:33, KJV).*

### **SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. The Feast of Tabernacles, the last of the seven biblical festivals, marked the end of the agricultural year (Exodus 23:16). It was called Tabernacles because the Israelites were instructed to live in booths, or huts, for seven days to recall and experience the rigors of life during their journey out of the land of Egypt toward the Promised Land (Leviticus 23:39-43). The “tabernacles” symbolized the transience of human life and the people’s utter dependence upon God. They also made all the people, rich and poor, equal. Discuss the symbolism in this exercise.
2. The tabernacle that the Israelites used was called a *sukkah* (pl. *sukkot*—hence the name of the festival: *Sukkot*). These were designed to be very temporary dwellings to demonstrate to the Israelites the rigors that their ancestors endured as they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. Right in the middle of their most joyous celebration, God injected a measure to demonstrate the importance of trust in his provision for his people.
3. Tabernacles was the greatest memorial of the year with exuberant expressions of joy and worship to God, with singing and dancing and great praise. It was even called “The Feast” and “the Festival of Our Joy.” Positioned at the end of the agricultural year in an agrarian society, it was also named “Ingathering,” the complete harvesting and storing of the produce of the land. Naturally, this was a time of great celebration and joy for the people. Consider the importance of celebration and the expression of joy when it comes to honoring God at his appointed times.
4. It was at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon’s temple

was dedicated (1 Kings 8:22). Consider the significance of the dedication of God's house at the time of Tabernacles. What was the significance of the supernatural manifestation that accompanied the dedication (1 Kings 8:11)? How did Israel rejoice over God's dwelling among them during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles?

5. When Jerusalem was restored, the scroll of the Torah was read to the assembly of Israel by Ezra during the Feast of Tabernacles as the people of Judah began the arduous task of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:6). Ezra read the entire law, beginning on the day of the Feast of Trumpets (Nehemiah 8:1-14). Evaluate Nehemiah's command to Israel to be joyful, for the joy of the Lord was their strength (Nehemiah 8:9-10). This was in context of God's command to Israel that they "rejoice" before the Lord for seven days during Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40).

6. The Feast of Tabernacles might be called the festival of consummation, for it points to the ultimate ingathering when all the nations of the earth will be required to celebrate the festival in honor of the God of Israel (Zechariah 14:16-18). Establish the fact that the Festival of Tabernacles is a "forever" festival (Leviticus 23:41).

7. Even in the kingdom to come, Tabernacles will be a festival for all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike. Everyone will come up to Jerusalem to worship God in this final remembrance festival. Consider the ingathering of everything in Christ at the end of the age (Isaiah 25:6-8; Ephesians 1:10). Evaluate the fact that the restoration of the church at the end of the age is described by Amos 9:11 as a rebuilding of David's *sukkah*. Discuss Tabernacles and the end of the age and the Messianic kingdom on earth when the tabernacle of God will be with men (Revelation 21:3).

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word for tabernacle, סֹכֶת (sukkah), literally means "a thicket, a covert, or a "booth." This etymology stresses the rude or temporary shelter to be used during this festival." The structure in which the Israelites were to live for eight days each year was designed to bring remembrance to them of how fragile human existence is and how utterly dependent they were on God. Interestingly, John used the same structure to describe Jesus' incarnation, saying that Jesus "tabernacled" (Greek σκηνώ—*skenoo*) with us.

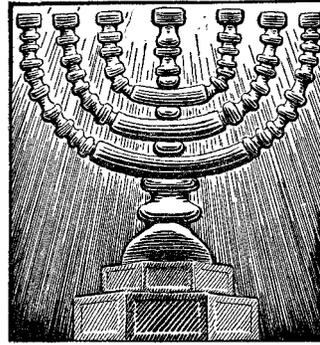
**Tabernacles is a yearly memorial to God's bounty and provision for his people. It speaks of blessing and celebration. For Christians, it also points to the greatest tabernacle in history when the Son of God "tabernacled" with humanity. For all of God's people, Tabernacles points to the coming Messianic age of ingathering and universal peace.**

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## HANUKKAH: DEDICATION AND LIGHT

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Hanukkah is today one of the very prominent remembrance celebrations for the Jewish people. It memorializes the triumph of God's people over one of the most insidious attempts to destroy their faith that ever challenged Israel. Its imagery speaks of the miracle of the light that God always produces when dedication is manifest in the lives of his chosen people. Dedication always and inevitably produces the light of God.



**KEY TEXT:** *“At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon” (John 10:22-23, NASB).*

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In 164 B.C., the Maccabees overcame Antiochus IV, the Selucid king who had called himself Epiphanes (God manifest). He had first made an attempt to syncretize or blend Hellenism, the philosophy/religion/politics of the Greeks, with faith in the God of Israel; however, in frustration, he ultimately demanded that the Jews worship Zeus. He even sacrificed swine on God's altar and murdered countless Jews who opposed him. This was the most insidious invasion of Israel in history because it was a subtle attempt to compromise the faith of Israel by blending it with a system that was inimical with biblical truth. Is there ever an excuse for compromising truth? What lessons can Christians learn from Antiochus' reign of compromise and terror?
2. After their victory, the Jews began the work of rededicating the temple. During the process, they sought to relight the menorah. When they could find only a one-day supply of sacred oil, they decided to light the lampstand anyway, and miraculously, it burned for eight days! Discuss the fact that dedication always produces the miracle of light.
3. Hanukkah comes from the Hebrew word *hanakb*, which means “dedication.” This word is also the name of Enoch, the patriarch who walked with God and was translated (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Consider the importance of dedication in respect to gaining eternal life.
4. The word *hanakb* also means “to narrow.” Evaluate the concept of dedication as a process of walking the narrow road that leads to life (Mat-

thew 7:14). Dedication is involved in sanctification, the process whereby one experiences being set apart to God by walking in truth. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17), and Paul said that sanctification is a “washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Discuss the way in which we are dedicated to God.

5. Though Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, it recalls a righteous stand for truth and justice. Evaluate the importance of remembering Hanukkah for Jews and Christians. What can Christians learn about their own experience with God from the events that precipitated the need for the rededication of the temple and the actions of that dedication process?

6. The only place where Hanukkah is mentioned in Scripture is John 10:22 where Jesus joined with his Jewish family and community in celebrating the festival in Jerusalem. Consider how Jesus used the commemoration of Israel’s victory over a man who claimed to be God to reveal that God had become human in the person of his only begotten Son. Discuss John 10:30-39 in the light of the setting in which Jesus’ teaching took place: the victory over Antiochus who claimed to be God. How did Jesus use a remembrance practice of his Jewish community to contrast and reveal divine truth about his own deity as the Son of God?

7. Much of the imagery of Hanukkah, including Antiochus’ pollution of the temple, is mirrored in Daniel’s visions of the end of the age and the coming of the Messianic kingdom. Compare Daniel 9:20-27 and 8:23-25 with Matthew 24:15. Discuss how Antiochus fulfilled the prophecies of Daniel and how he is a prophetic symbol of the personification of evil in the abomination of desolation at the time of the coming of Jesus.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *חֲנֻכָּה* (*hanukkah*) is seen in the “dedication” of the altar in Numbers 7:84. It is derived from the word *חָנַךְ* (*hanakh*) which means “to dedicate” or “to narrow.” The word is also the basis for the name of Enoch, *חֲנוֹךְ* (*Hanokh*). In John 10, the Greek word *ἐγκαινία* (*egkainia*), meaning dedication or consecration is used to translate the Hebrew word *חֲנֻכָּה*. It is clear that Jesus joined with his Jewish compatriots in celebrating God’s deliverance from idolatry and the rededication of the temple with the miracle of the light.

**Like the seven Torah-based festivals, Hanukkah is a memorial event that is designed to call to remembrance God’s deliverance of his people from the tyranny of idolatry and the miracle of his light that ensued when men and women of God stood for divine truth and dedicated their lives to his service by promoting righteousness in their land.**

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## PURIM: DELIVERANCE FROM GENOCIDE

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One of the most poignant and majestic stories in the Bible is that of Esther, the young Jewish girl who became queen of the greatest kingdom on earth and subsequently put her own life and future on the line in order to save all of her kinsmen from certain death. Each year, the Jewish people celebrate the Festival of Purim as a memorial and remembrance of this great act of radical faith and devotion that saved them from genocide.



**KEY TEXT:** *“Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14, NASB).*

### SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Purim, the first of the post-Torah festivals of Judaism, is celebrated on the fifteenth day of Adar on the Jewish calendar (usually during March). The basis of the festival is found in the book of Esther. Though the observance of Purim was not commanded by God, Scripture says that the Jews, at the behest of Mordecai and Esther, “established and made a custom for themselves . . . so that these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation” so that “their memory [would not] fade from their descendants” (Esther 9:27-28). Rehearse this dramatic story of deliverance as you read the book of Esther.
2. The story begins with an account of the way in which God orchestrated the elevation of a young Jewish girl, named Hadassah (Esther was her Persian name), to be queen of the most powerful nation in the world. Is this not evidence that God, indeed, establishes rulers as the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13:1? Discuss the concept that God is in control of everything in the world, including the rise and fall of political figures.
3. Esther 3:8-9 reveals the diabolical plot that was designed to kill all of God’s chosen people. Haman, the prime minister of Persia, had had his ego bruised because Mordecai the Jew refused to bow in his presence because the Jewish people understood that they should bow or worship only the God of Scripture. This evil man then hatched an insidious plot for Jewish genocide because all the Jews in the world lived under the Persian kingdom at that time. Analyze Haman’s murderous designs.
4. One of the most famous lines in all of Holy Scripture is Mordecai’s

advice to Esther in the face of the impending genocide of her people: “Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). Though Mordecai believed that “deliverance [will] arise for the Jews from another place,” he understood that God had prepared and positioned Hadassah for just such an occasion. Esther put her life on the line for her people, and God orchestrated their deliverance. Discuss the way in which God prepares people for certain times. Consider this in light of God’s statement in Amos 3:7: “Surely the LORD God does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”

5. The core issues of this story, Haman’s pride and Mordecai’s humility, demonstrate the truth that God resists the proud and exalts the humble (James 4:6) and that pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Discuss the way in which human pride can enflame a person to do unthinkable things to other people. How does one ensure the fact that he will not be caught up in such passion? Consider other examples of this truth, such as Pharaoh who defied God’s instructions to “let my people go.”

6. One of the ironies in this story is that Haman died on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). How does the saying, “Give a man enough rope, and he’ll hang himself,” apply here? Is this not an example of the divine law of reciprocity manifest in a negative form: “A person will reap only what he sows . . .” (Galatians 6:7-8). Consider the importance of sowing good seed in good ground to have joy in reaping.

7. Esther 9:31 established the annual celebration of Purim so Israel would remember that God had miraculously intervened by the courage of one Jewish girl to save his people from certain genocide. Consider ways in which you can celebrate Purim and make its events meaningful in your life.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word פּוּרִים (*Purim*) comes פּוּר (*pur*), which means a “lot” or a “piece.” It was so named when the festival was initiated following the deliverance of the Jews from genocide by the bravery of Queen Hadassah and her cousin Mordecai. The festival is called Purim because as part of his evil plot to kill the Jewish people, Haman cast lots to determine the day on which to exterminate all the Jews in the world. With the intervening hand of God and the bravery of Esther, it was Haman, not the Jews, who died on that day.

**God is never surprised by the unfolding events of history. Nothing transpires without God’s having first revealed to his servants the prophets the good or the bad that is to come. He always initiates plans and prepares the way for his children to follow him in faith so that they can ensure that they not only survive but also are blessed.**

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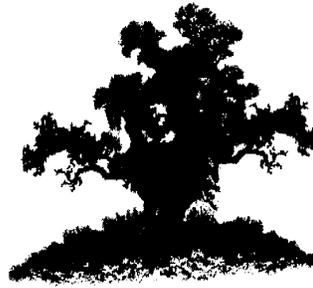
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## SH'MITA AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

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In the Hebrew Scriptures, God left instructions to his people that established parameters for their enjoying the land in which he had placed them. He commanded them not to till the soil during the seventh year of every seven-year cycle, providing the same kind of rest for the land that he did for the people (Sabbath). Then, every fifty years, God called for a Year of Jubilee, a year of freedom and blessing for everyone.



**KEY TEXT:** “*You shall sow your land for six years and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it and the wild animals may eat what they leave. You shall do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove*” (Exodus 23:10-11).

### **SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. Not only did God provide daily, weekly, and seasonal remembrances for his children in which they were to worship their God and demonstrate their reliance upon his provision for their lives, he also directed that they observe special years of celebration every seven years and every fifty years. The first was called the *Sb'mita* (a sabbath for the land); the second was the Jubilee. Consider how important it must be to us as believers that we continually remember God throughout our lives.
2. The *Sb'mita* year is evidence of God's concern for the earth, which was first demonstrated when he created human beings and assigned them with the task of “serving” and “keeping” the earth. The Hebrew word *abad*, which is translated “till” in most versions, actually means to serve. Indeed, it was only through serving the earth that human beings had dominion over all the earth as God promised. Evaluate the concept of servant leadership—dominion through service, (Matthew 23:11).
3. The *Sb'mita* year was God's plan for soil conservation, allowing the soil to rest so that it would be more productive. This is similar to the way in which observing Sabbath makes human beings more productive. Discuss the idea that God demands respect for everything and everyone.
4. In the ancient agrarian society, it was also a means of permitting the poor, as well as the landowners, to profit from the land. The *Sb'mita*

year confirmed this truth: “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine” (Leviticus 25:23). Discuss the concept that all the land belongs to the Lord and that all the people should profit from it (Psalm 24:1). Compare this with God’s instructions that the Israelites leave the corners of their fields for the poor (Leviticus 19:9). What principles of the *Sh’mita* year do you think will prove profitable to you and your life?

5. God promised the Israelites that if they would let the land rest during every seventh year, he would “command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and [the land] shall bring forth fruit for three years” (Leviticus 25:21). Discuss the blessing that comes from being obedient to God’s instructions even if and especially when we do not understand them.

6. The Year of Jubilee represented a generational statement by all of the Jewish people of their utter dependence upon God and his provision for their lives. It also confirmed their understanding that the land that God had given them still belonged to God. During this year, every person was to return to his own property (Leviticus 25:13). Prices for exchange of goods between neighbors were to be established and then set for the next fifty years. In this year, all debts were cancelled, just as they were in the *Sh’mita* year (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). Those who had indentured themselves as servants of others were freed in the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39-41). The Jubilee ensured that slavery would never become an institution in Israel.

7. Interestingly, the signal for the Year of Jubilee was the blowing of the shofar on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) of the fiftieth year (Leviticus 25:10). The Year of Jubilee was so holy that it began on the Day of Atonement! Consider the fact that the sanctity of the land and the freedom of all people are among the highest and holiest values to God.

#### WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word שְׁמִיטָה (*sh’mita*) literally means “release,” and speaks of the release of the land from the grip of the landowner so that the land may have rest. The *sh’mita* year was actually called “the LORD’s release (*sh’mita*).” It also involved the cancellation or “release” of all debt among the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 15:2). Interestingly, God commanded that the Torah should be read during the Feast of Tabernacles in every *sh’mita* year so that his instructions regarding the release would be clearly and fully understood.

**God does not want his people to hold what he has put in their hands with an iron grip. Everything belongs to the Lord; therefore, everyone must be ready to return everything to God when he wills it. The *sh’mita* and Jubilee years were designed to ensure that everyone would “release” what was God’s and not oppress his neighbor.**



HEBRAIC CHRISTIAN

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Hebraic Christian Global Community's mission is to facilitate the move of God to restore the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith to all believers without any distinction as to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or denominational affiliation. We seek to extend the dominion of God through the interconnectivity of individuals, ministers, ministries, congregations, organizations, and denominations, demonstrating the practical unity of the body of Messiah by standing unequivocally for biblical truth, speaking with a community voice, and serving both the Hebraic heritage community and the church at large by means of corporate action, collaborative ministry, and strategic planning.

An untapped dynamic force exists around the world in Christian believers who have been impelled by the Holy Spirit to return to the faith of Jesus and the apostles by restoring the church's Hebraic foundations. This latent force is an unvoiced multitude made up of scattered and isolated individuals and small communities that need, even yearn, to join together in a more consolidated witness—in this case, to the truth about Christianity's long-lost biblical roots.

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Hebraic Christian Global Community proposes to be such a comforting and challenging voice, and we propose to do it as a still, small voice of confirmation, not a thundering tempest of condemnation and judgmentalism. We propose to help all the believers in the world understand that their faith is inherently Jewish because it is faith in the Jewish Messiah, anchored in the Jewish Scriptures, established in the God of the Jews, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Jesus said, “salvation is from the Jews.” We understand that every authentic expression of Christian faith that is being experienced by believers everywhere has a Jewish root. All we have to do is to help our fellow Christians discover these truths for themselves. As we perceive the need of God's people and the timing of God's move to meet that need, we find that we are aligning ourselves with God's purposes in the earth. We do so in awe of the responsibility that this calling entails, and we do so with great humility, recognizing that in biblical terms, we have been called as stewards of the mysteries of God and as servants of all of God's people. Meeting the human need for spiritual renewal is the highest calling in the service of God and humanity.

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