

GOD'S GREAT MASTER PLAN

(Part 1 of 3)

[Originally from the Good News Magazine, May 1980, as prepared by Richard H. Sedliacik, edited by the Bible Fund editors]

God has a master plan by which He is bringing about the fruition of His awesome purpose for mankind. And his Son, Jesus Christ, plays the central role in God's little-understood plan for man. God's plan is outlined in the form of *seven annual* festivals, which Christians are to observe for a vital purpose.

Just as the weekly Sabbath pictures the Christian's goal of entering into eternal "rest" as a glorified, Spirit-born member of God's Family, these annual observances give the step-by-step overview of how God will *work out* His master plan for man. Each festival vividly portrays a great event in God's plan, and the yearly observance of these special days further impresses the knowledge of His plan on God's people, *reminding* them of their part in it.

It was not until just after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt that God revealed His annual festivals. Through Moses, God formally introduced these festivals to His nation Israel - His "*Church in the wilderness*" (Acts 7:38).

Since throughout most of human history man has been close to the soil in providing his sustenance, God originally used the yearly agricultural harvests of Israel as symbolic types of His *spiritual* "harvests" of mankind.

In the "promised land," which came to be known as the land of Israel, there was a spring harvest followed by a much larger fall harvest. Today, we can understand from the teachings of Christ and the apostles that God intends the spring festivals to illustrate to His Church yearly, the fact that all of those He has called to become His Spirit-begotten children since Christ's first coming are only the "first fruits" – only the relatively *small beginning* of His great spiritual harvest of human beings into His glorious Family.

Later, as pictured by the festivals of the much larger autumn harvest season, God will call the rest of the *billions* of humanity to salvation and sonship in His glorious Family!

A summary of these annual festivals is found in Leviticus the 23rd chapter. Let's commence this three-part introductory study of God's annual festivals and learn exactly what they signify for us today.

1). Who does the Bible say originated these annual festivals? Lev 23:1-2, 4.

Notice that these are not the “feasts of the Jews” or “feasts of Moses,” as some have erroneously assumed. They are God’s *own feasts*, which He originated and gave to His people to keep year by year.

2). Did God specifically say that His annual feasts were to be observed in addition to the weekly Sabbath? Lev 23:37-38.

3). What is the first festival to be observed each year? Lev 23:5. When did God institute the very first Passover? Ex 12:1-14.

The Festival of the Passover begins God’s great master plan for mankind. Although the original Passover was to be a memorial to remind Israel of God’s intervention in delivering them from slavery in Egypt, it also pictured, in *advance*, the great sacrifice – the crucifixion and death – of Jesus Christ (“our Passover lamb” – 1 Cor 5:7, 1 Pet 1:19) for the sins of mankind. After His death, the Passover became a *memorial* of that sacrifice, for Jesus became the reality that the Passover lamb had foreshadowed.

4). What new way of observing the Passover did Jesus institute shortly before His death, and as He ate the Passover lamb with His disciples? Luke 22:8, 14-20.

While instituting the *new symbols* of the wine and bread – the wine picturing His shed blood for the forgiveness of our spiritual sins, and the bread symbolic of His body, which was broken for our physical healing (1 Pet 2:24 – Jesus gave a command, “This *do in remembrance of me*” (Luke 22:19). The Passover was now to become a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. And He wanted Christians to especially “remember” it once every year of their lives.

5). What completely new ceremony did Jesus also institute in connection with this New Testament Passover observance? John 13:2-17, especially verses 14-16.

Notice that this ceremony of the washing of the disciples’ feet had nothing whatsoever to do with the Old Testament observance of the Passover. It was then being instituted for the very *first time* by Jesus Christ Himself. He took this last-minute opportunity to institute an observance that His disciples were to keep annually from that time forward. But why?

Foot washing depicts the attitude of *humility and service* to others that Christ always exhibited, and which He desires that every Christian should strive to imitate (verses 16-17).

6). What observance follows immediately after the Passover? Lev 23:6-8, Ex 12:15-20.

7). Were the first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread “holy” days on which the people were to assemble themselves, much the same as we would on a weekly Sabbath day? Ex 12:16, Lev 23:3. Were the people to rest on these two annual holy high days of unleavened bread? Lev 23:7-8, Ex 12:16.

8). Did New Testament Christians observe this Festival? 1 Cor 5:7-8. What is the obvious meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Verses 1-2, 6-7.

A study of these passages in 1 Corinthians 5 shows that the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which the Corinthian Christians were observing, pictures the *putting away of sin*. Leavening, therefore, is a biblical type or symbol for *sin* (verse 8), because sin, like physical leavening used in bread to make it rise, not only can cause a person to swell with vanity and become *puffed up* in God's sight (verses 2, 6), but can also *spread* throughout a group of people.

Paul warned the Church of God at Corinth that they should put out of their fellowship the person whose sin was known to all (verse 1). Paul urged decisive action because, as he reminded them, "... a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (verse 6).

Permitting sin to continue unabated and openly before all the congregation would, in time, cause others to gradually let down and begin slipping back into former sins.

We saw that the Passover is to remind us that Jesus paid a tremendous price for our past sins. He offered something more valuable than anything we could even collectively offer – the sacrifice of His perfect, sinless life.

So, the Days of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follow the Passover, remind us that we must strive to put all sin out of our lives. This Festival pictures putting the "leaven" of sin away from us and our renewed resolve to live in harmony with God's laws from now on.

9). What is the next annual Festival that God ordained? Lev 23:9-16. Was this another Holy Day of rest on which the people were to assemble themselves? Verse 21.

10). What new name was given in the New Testament to this Old Testament Festival of "Firstfruits"? Acts 2:1.

Pentecost is a Greek word which means 50. This is the only annual Sabbath whose exact calendar date is determined by counting. The first New Testament Pentecost occurred on the 50th day after Christ's resurrection.

11). Shortly after His resurrection, did Jesus promise His disciples they would soon receive the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:4-5. Are Spirit-begotten Christians therefore the "first fruits" of God's great master plan? Jas 1:18, Rom 8:23.

The New Testament Festival of Pentecost is observed in *memory* of the momentous first arrival of the Holy Spirit from God (Acts 2) to beget repentant believers in Christ. Thus, this first Pentecost marked the beginning of the New Testament church of God. It was the first time God made the Holy Spirit available as a begettal.

It was on this first Pentecost that the “firstfruits” of God’s small spiritual “spring harvest” began to be “planted.” These new Christians were begotten by the power that was to help them grow spiritually, thus preparing them to be born into God’s Family at Christ’s coming.

God knows that for us to overcome our human weaknesses, to be thoroughly and successfully “unleavening” our lives, our puny human willpower and abilities are not enough. We need the supernatural strength of His Holy Spirit to help us overcome. This is the third step in God’s plan to help us fulfill life’s glorious purpose.

(This subject to be continued)