

BEYOND TODAY

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Pivotal festivals outline awesome plan for mankind

Far from being out of date or archaic, the “Feasts of the Lord” declared in the Old Testament explain the steps to salvation and our future rulership with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

For many, the word “festive” immediately conjures up various celebrations associated with man-made festivals observed in various forms around the world. Biblical festivals, however, are an entirely different matter. They constitute an integral part of the festive calendar of God’s New Testament Church, revealing the very plan of God for all humanity, not just those in countries where the Judeo/Christian teachings have been accessible.

Based on agriculture

The seven Holy Days have their parallel in the agricultural cycle of the Old Testament. The early crops reaped consist of grain, first barley and then wheat. This is called the “firstfruits” harvest. Grapes and olives are gathered towards autumn, commemorated at the time of “the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year” (Exodus 23:14-16).

God used the agricultural year to outline His plan of salvation. The climate in the Middle East allows for a long growing season, hence the words “firstfruits” and “ingathering.” Scripture makes it clear that in God’s plan of salvation some men and women will be called ahead of others, but the rest are not neglected. They don’t lose out on salvation.

From the Passover in the spring to the Eighth Day fol-

lowing the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn (Leviticus 23), these seven annual festivals are highly significant, as without these important and divinely appointed feasts, God’s Church would be at a loss as to know how the Creator of mankind intends to work out His plan of salvation for the entire creation.

Christ our Passover Lamb

God’s inspired word, the Bible, makes it crystal clear that there is only one name given through which we can attain everlasting life. Referring to Jesus Christ, we read in

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Acts 4:12, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

How is it that an individual can only be saved by that sole name? The answer is that Christ atoned for our sins by allowing Himself to be sacrificed as our Passover Lamb. As God’s Son and Creator of all things He carried

our sins on His shoulders, as we read in Galatians 3:13. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." The "curse of the law" is eternal death, the result of our sins, as Paul stated in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Each one of us bears the responsibility of having "crucified Christ" by our disobedience to God's immutable laws. The Almighty is a compassionate God and is willing to forgive if we acknowledge our part in Christ's death and turn from sin.

Only a few called in this age

Regarding the other Holy Days that God commands us to keep, the Feast of Pentecost reflects "the firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18) and "the firstfruits to God" (Revelation 14:4). Since there are individuals known as firstfruits, then there must be others who are going to have that opportunity at a later time – they could perhaps be called "secondfruits."

Notice what the apostle Paul tells us about the time schedule using his own people, the Israelites, as an exam-

ple: "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!" (Romans 11:1). In verses 5 and 7, he explains that "at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." And in verse 7 he says, "What then, Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded." In other words, the elect are the firstfruits of God's calling.

To lead a righteous life is a requirement for those who are called at this time, in this age of man. For that we need access to God's Holy Spirit, to guide us in our lives as we strive to live a way of righteousness. What is required is a character transformation, as the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." For that we need to have God's Holy Spirit take up residence in us. In addition to guiding us into all truth, if we have repented and acknowledged Christ's supreme sacrifice on our behalf and been baptised, it combines with our own human spirit making us begotten children of God (Romans 8:16).

The seven biblical festivals

Each of God's Holy Days reveals a significant step in His marvellous plan of salvation. They can be summarised as follows:

Passover represents our justification through repentance and obedience leading to forgiveness. For this we need faith in Christ's sacrifice (Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:17-19).

The *Feast of Unleavened Bread* has two sides to it. To put leaven out for these seven days represents us putting sin out of our lives with God's help. To eat unleavened bread for the same period depicts us putting on the character of Jesus Christ and being set apart as holy by Him (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Pentecost reveals the transforming power of God's Holy Spirit given to help us become more like Christ (Romans 8:4-17).

The *Feast of Trumpets* foreshadows the return of Christ in glory, when His saints will be resurrected to spirit beings and live with Him (Daniel 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 John 3:2).

The *Day of Atonement* pictures the removal of

Satan just before the millennium – a period of 1,000 years, during which Christ and the saints rule on earth (Romans 16:20; Revelation 20:1-4).

The *Feast of Tabernacles* represents the Eden-like Earth resulting from Christ's benevolent 1000-year rule (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:6-9).

The *Eighth Day*, which immediately follows the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, looks ahead to the great judgement of all people. For many this will be the first time they have heard of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. Others may have heard but not realised the significance or understood the content of the message (Ezekiel 37:1-14). All will be judged on the same basis that the saints were judged – by the word of God found in the Bible (1 Peter 4:17-18; Matthew 11:20-24; Revelation 20:5, 11-12).

The Eighth Day also looks to the completion of God's plan and to the New Jerusalem coming down to a new Earth. At this time God the Father will also descend from heaven to dwell on the new earth with His spirit-born family (Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5).

A plan of salvation for all nations

Some may ask where that leaves those who have lived in countries where Jesus' name was never known nor His message ever preached? We are assured by the apostle Paul that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). How this will come about, given that millions have died never having known or understood the pivotal role Jesus Christ plays in their salvation, is explained by the autumn Holy Days.

The Scriptures, as cited above and elsewhere, depict that salvation and true knowledge go together. John 4:24 states: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Merely knowing the name of Jesus isn't sufficient, and that knowledge alone will save no one. An understanding of the biblical festivals, however, shows us clearly that God has a time scale for giving every human being a genuine opportunity for salvation. Without these observances we would not understand the process involved in extending salvation to all.

These annual feasts also explain the process for those who are presently uninterested in the question of salvation. This includes agnostics, atheists and unbelievers in general.

A message of hope

As for the elect, those whom God is calling to salva-

tion now carry the responsibility of helping to bring this message of hope to others. That is our appointed task and to aid us in this endeavour, God gives His repentant followers the gift of His Holy Spirit.

But there is more that we are commissioned to do, and that is to base our lives entirely on the instructions given in His Word, the Bible. As quoted above, we are to worship God in spirit and truth. That means we also need to conduct ourselves in a way pleasing to God, practicing a way of righteousness, as we are reminded by the apostle John in 1 John 3:7: "He who practices righteousness is righteous just as He [Christ] is righteous."

The annual Holy Days which the Bible teaches have their origin with God as we read in Leviticus 23:4: "These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times." These festivals are God-ordained and commanded to be observed by His people, the "firstfruits" of his salvation. Later they will be taught to all people.

To find out more about how God will bring salvation to all except those who deliberately and wilfully reject the call, please request or download our booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Gerhard Marx

Operation manual for a successful life

Humans need a detailed instruction book to achieve their maximum potential. God has provided one – it's called the Holy Bible.

Some years ago, I attended an advanced driving course. The instructor pointed out that the Highway Code is a driver's operation manual, a book of rules and instructions which, if followed, will help us drive in a way that keeps ourselves and others safe.

Almost every gadget, mechanism, or appliance that we buy comes with an operation manual of some description, and provided we follow it correctly, the item should work as intended. While mulling this over, it occurred to me that the Bible is our personal operation manual, with answers or suggested solutions to most of our questions and concerns.

We all have many doubts, dilemmas and difficulties that need to be resolved. However, when being bombarded with pressure from friends, the internet, or TV, it is easy to seek answers from the wrong place. Far better to learn from God's Word (Psalm 119:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:15).

However, simply reading the answers is not enough. We need to learn to use God's Word as our guide and put it into practice in our lives (James 1:22). To achieve this, in addition to studying the scriptures, we also need to pray regularly and keep close to God.

Safe navigation

When driving a car, we need to learn how to navigate safely so we don't cause harm to others or ourselves. In life it is the same. Navigating life's ups and downs by following God's instructions helps us avoid much sin, which could damage our spiritual potential, just as a car accident might damage us physically. When we do slip up, we need to go to God, in heartfelt repentance, to repair the spiritual damage. Failure to do so could ultimately affect our eternal life.

On the road, vigilance necessitates that we look ahead for potential hazards – children or animals on the pavement about to run into the road, zebra crossings, known



A green light doesn't necessarily mean it's safe to set off without proper care and attention. Scripture provides us with warnings so we can avoid spiritual mishaps.

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awkward junctions and other dangers. By adjusting our vehicle's speed and direction accordingly, we avoid accidents. Life is no different in that we will face situations and circumstances where we must make decisions. With the guidance of the Scriptures, we can more often than not make the correct ones (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Prepare to stop

During the training we discussed the purpose of traffic lights. Our instructor asked what the red light signified. "Stop!" we all answered.

Next, we were asked to clarify what green meant. "Go!" we responded in unison. However, this time we were all wrong. A green light signals that it may be safe to proceed with caution. Other aspects to consider include, "How long has it been green?," "Is it about to change back to red?" or "If it has only just gone green, could other

drivers still be clearing the junction?"

The lesson was always, "Be prepared to stop," not "Go!" In life we need to be weighing up our circumstances and situations, being prepared to stop a particular course of action or thought process to avoid sinning. God's word is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" so we do not stumble (Psalm 119:105).

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Keeping God in heart and mind

The psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). To keep God's laws and statutes in our hearts always, we must be familiar with them, just as a driver must remember the Highway Code. Applying that knowledge in our day-to-day existence will stave off many of life's troubles.

Jesus Himself, quoting from the Old Testament, stated: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). We should be familiar with God's words and be constantly checking we are applying His instructions correctly in our lives. The Christians in Berea were praised for confirming that all they had been told was indeed from the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12).

If we have accepted the call of God through Jesus Christ, have been baptised and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, we have become a begotten child of God. Ahead lies the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. To avoid spiritual crashes during our walk with Christ we must learn to think ahead, using God's Word as our guide, being prepared to stop when we see sin up ahead, and turn away from it so as not to be ensnared.

With God's help and guidance many of the difficulties we all face each day can be handled safely, allowing us to achieve the journey's end, the goal of the Kingdom of God.

To learn more about achieving success in life, please request or download our booklet *Making Life Work*.

Stuart Hull

From glory to glory

In the last issue we compared the Japanese art of kintsugi to the “repairs” effected by Christ in us when we repent. Precious as that repair may be, God the Father ultimately plans to glorify us as He glorified Christ.

Throughout the New Testament Christ’s disciples expressed a desire to know when He would return. They asked on the Mount of Olives, “. . . What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Christ’s first coming was to address the problem of sin and how to cleanse mortal human beings so they could become children of God. Christ paid the death penalty for all those who repent and submit themselves to Him as Lord and Master, as the writer of the book of Hebrews explained: “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

Some of Christ’s parables depicted Him going to a far country, receiving a kingdom and then returning to set up the Kingdom of God on earth and to reward His faithful servants (for example Luke 19:12-27).

Christ promised to return to set up God’s Kingdom and to bring eternal life – perfection – to His followers.

Salvation, immortality, and the Kingdom of God

Salvation is the transformation from a fleshly, mortal human being to a glorified, immortal child of God. Notice how the book of Hebrews expresses it: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy [Christ] and those who are made holy [repentant and converted human beings] are of the same family” (Hebrews 2:10-11, NIV).

Have you ever grasped this before? Those who enter the Kingdom of God are all “of the same family” – God’s family! All are God’s children, brought “to glory” – a glorified state of immortal spirit (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) – by Him. This is what salvation is all about. “So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises’ . . . And again he says, ‘Here am I, and the children God has given me’” (Hebrews 2:11-13, NIV).

That Jesus is not ashamed to regard them as His own

brothers (and sisters) shows just how personal this family relationship is. Those who enter the Kingdom of God will share even God’s divine nature for all eternity (2 Peter 1:4). God will make those who enter His Kingdom fully like Jesus Christ!

The apostle John is explicit: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-3).

“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Yes, human beings who enter the Kingdom of God will be given the glorious honour of being like the resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16-17, King James Version).

Paul’s letter to the Church of God in Colosse confirms that “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Potential for salvation for all

Paul further explains that all will eventually be resurrected. He showed that this will occur in stages: “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 Corinthians 15:23-24).

Christ assuming power as King is preceded by the resurrection of “those who are Christ’s at His coming”! Throughout this chapter, Paul explains when and how we can enter the Kingdom of God: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;

nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [in death], 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” (verses 50-53).

This is the awe-inspiring purpose for Jesus Christ’s birth, life, death and resurrection – the resurrection of many, many more to eternal life to “inherit the kingdom of God”! (verse 50). Christ’s followers are to “inherit,” or enter, the Kingdom “at the last trumpet” (verse 52), the great blast that signals Christ’s return to rule the earth forever (Revelation 11:15). “For as the lightning comes

from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be . . . 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” (Matthew 24:27, 31).

We see that immortal life in His Kingdom is made possible by Jesus Christ, “Who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Salvation equates to entry into the Kingdom of God – we become literal, spirit-born members of the God family. To study this important subject further please request or download our booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *Why Were You Born?*

Adapted from the booklet The Gospel of the Kingdom

Famine – an unintended consequence?

War is never pleasant, causing destruction, death and despair. Often, though, it impacts further afield causing more extensive suffering, potentially on an unimaginable scale.

Jesus Christ plainly predicted that famines would precede His second coming (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11). Famines frequently follow wars since such violent events disrupt the planting and harvesting of crops, as well as their distribution to markets.

The book of Revelation clearly shows this link. A red horse depicting war is followed by a black horse indicating famine (Revelation 6:3-6). The apostle John records: “I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice . . . saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine’” (verses 5-6). A denarius was equivalent to a day’s wage for an ordinary man. Food will become so scarce, it will cost a whole day’s wage to buy a small amount.

A forerunner of these events can be seen in the current sad situation in Ukraine. Both Russia and Ukraine are major exporters of food products. For instance, of global production these countries provide: sunflower oil – 64%, wheat – 23%, barley – 19% and maize (corn) – 8%, according to *Our World in Data* (ourworldindata.org/ukraine-russia-food).

On April 14, Kristalina Georgieva, International

Monetary Fund managing director, confirmed that the war in Ukraine was already causing food shortages in parts of Africa and the Middle East (imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/04/14/sp041422-curtain-raiser-sm2022).

Furthermore, modern agriculture is highly dependent upon manufactured fertiliser. Russia and Ukraine are major producers and suppliers of fertiliser, as well as its raw materials. Less fertiliser means less food. The outlook is bleak – especially for poorer countries. It is to be hoped that peace talks, or sanctions or both may bring a speedy end to the crisis, although, it is already too late to plant this year’s crops.

Although not directly linked to the war in Ukraine, even inhabitants of more prosperous countries like the United Kingdom are already having to choose between “heating and eating.”

In the longer term, the return of Jesus Christ will lead to a world free of both hunger and war (Amos 9:13 and Micah 4:3).

To study these horsemen and their implications further please request our booklet *The Horsemen of Revelation*.

Philip Perry



Q Colossians 2:14-15 speaks of the “handwriting of ordinances that was against us” (KJV). Paul said Christ nailed this to the cross. What was this?

FAQ

A The Greek expression translated “handwriting of ordinances” is *cheirographon tois dogmasin*. *Cheirographon* refers to “a hand-written document, specif[ically] a certificate of indebtedness” and can be translated as *account, record of debts* (BDAG Lexicon). So Colossians 2:14 means that the sacrificial death of Christ “cancelled the record of our debts” – the death penalty of our sins (*Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domains*).

The Revised Standard Version helps clarify the meaning: “Having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Likening the “handwriting of ordinances” to some-

thing comparable in our modern justice system, it would be the formal written order of a death sentence, after the presentation and weighing of all evidence against us.

Thus, Colossians 2:14 speaks of our death warrant, issued for spiritual crimes (sin, or breaking God's law). God commutes the death sentence when a person repents of sin and seeks His forgiveness. Paul's wording is a dramatic characterisation of the benefit of Christ's sacrifice, which effectively nails the “death warrant” bearing our name and the sins we committed to *His* cross, taking the death penalty on Himself. Forgiveness is more than a pardon, for the penalty for our spiritual crimes wasn't merely set aside. It was paid in full by Christ's death.

Imagine a court official hammering the certified copy of an execution order with your name on it onto the stake upon which the Romans crucified Jesus, and which was splattered with His life's blood – to show that you do not have to die for your spiritual crime. That's the striking illustration Paul presented in Colossians 2:14.

Those who would have us believe that it refers to the cancellation of God's law violently misrepresent Paul's powerful teaching analogy. Again, likening it to our modern justice system, their characterisation would be like saying that commuting the death sentence of a criminal ended all laws against crime. The lack of common sense is obvious.

Q Is drinking alcohol a sin?

FAQ

A No, it is not. The Bible teaches that it's the misuse of alcohol that is a sin (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3). One of the most telling scriptures on the subject is Judges 9:13, which says, “wine . . . cheers both God and men.” Psalm 104 presents alcohol use in a positive light: “And wine that makes glad the heart of man” (verse 15). It's also noteworthy that Christ's first public miracle was turning water into a fine quality wine (John 2).

Christ instructed Christians to take wine as part of the Passover service (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). In the context of this instruction, Paul corrected some of the Corinthian Church for getting drunk at the Passover (1 Corinthians 11:21). Clearly, they were using fermented wine in the observance of the Passover, or it would not have been possible for them to become inebriated.

Of course, people with an inherent proclivity toward alcoholism should not use alcohol, even in moderation. But most people can use it without issues.

Let the Bible Answer...

Does the Bible identify Who created all things?

God created the heavens and the earth: Genesis 1:1; 2:4; Isaiah 45:18; Revelation 4:11; 10:6.

Jesus Christ was the member of the Godhead who created all things at the direction of the Father: John 1:1-3, 10-14; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9 (King James Version and New King James Version); Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2.

The physical heavens and earth were created from spirit: Psalm 33:6; 104:30; Hebrews 11:3.

Angels were created: Ezekiel 28:11-15. This was before the earth was made: Job 38:4-7.



Letters From Our Readers

Refreshing and enlightening

Thank you so much for the word of God and its exposition. My wife and I are truly blessed by the magazine. We look forward to it.

Reader in Coventry

I would like to thank you for all the information you give me about the word of God.

Reader in Southport

How refreshing to have a religious magazine that deals with history and modern times as well as quoting scriptures.

Reader in Gillingham

I find the literature very poignant, challenging and illuminating. I find that my faith is getting stronger all the time. Many thanks.

Reader in Aylesbury

Thank you for the magazines sent to me. They have changed my outlook on life a lot.

Reader in Hull

Thank you for sending me *Is the Bible True?* Your booklets always give me more learning and information. I find them very enlightening. I have gained knowledge through studying the Bible with the help of your booklets.

Reader in Manchester

Message on the address carrier

Thanks for the deep message about "Will Christ find faith on the earth?" It's very important to be sensitive to what God has said to us in His word. We need faith. We need to

live our lives by faith. The question is: how the church can keep faith until the return of Christ to the earth?

Reader in Glasgow

Editor's comment: We hope the booklet You Can Have Living Faith will answer this question for you.

Suicide

Thank you very much for my free booklets for my [relative] who tried to commit suicide.

Name and address supplied

Editor's comment: We have also sent you a copy of our Bible study aid on understanding and preventing suicide. We pray that it will be of help to you and your family.

Russia and Ukraine

Where are Ukraine and Russia in the Bible? What does the Bible say about these people and who are they?

Reader in Orpington

Editor's comment: To address this topic we have a new Bible study aid, which should shortly be available in print. In the meantime it can be read online at ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/russia-and-bible-prophecy.

Several articles in the May/June Beyond Today magazine cover the appalling events in Ukraine.

Challenging questions

The questions on the test for Lesson 10 of the *Bible Study Course* were difficult but I loved it, as it makes me study and learn even more, even if I didn't get the answers right.

Student in London

How this work is supported

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