

YOUTH



BIBLE

LESSONS



LEVEL 9

SPECIAL FEAST LESSON



The Spring Feasts

**SPRING FESTIVAL
EDITION**

THE SPRING FEASTS

During the tumultuous years of World War II, Winston Churchill was Prime Minister of Great Britain. In his famous address to the American Congress, he said, "It must be a blind soul indeed who cannot see there is a *great purpose being worked out here below.*" Mr. Churchill sensed that Almighty God was carrying out some great plan here on earth.

Do you know what God's great purpose for mankind is? And how He is working it out here below?

We cannot fully understand God's purpose unless we have a knowledge of God's plan for carrying out that purpose. The seven annual festivals reveal the complete plan of God.

In this lesson, we will learn about the three spring feasts which include the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. These festivals picture the first three steps in God's plan for accomplishing His purpose for mankind. As we will learn, it is God's desire for all who have ever lived to be born as spirit beings into His Family.

IN THE BEGINNING

Did you know there was a time when no one knew about God's festivals? There was a time when God had not yet revealed them to man. Adam did not know about the feast days, and neither did Seth, Enoch, Methuselah and

ABOUT OUR COVER . . .

Wine and unleavened bread are symbols used in the Passover service to represent the shed blood and broken body of Jesus Christ.

Y.E.S. Photo

Noah. No one before the Flood had even heard of them.

After the Flood, great patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph did not keep the feast days. God did not choose to reveal them at that time. Even though these patriarchs will be in God's Kingdom, the plan of God as pictured by the seven annual festivals was not fully understood in their generations.

Let's now go back to the time when God chose a man obedient to Him, whose descendants, God promised, would become a great nation. They were to become His people and represent Him. In this fascinating story we will begin to understand how God first revealed the annual festivals—and their meaning.

You may remember the story of how God began to work with a man named Abraham (Genesis 12:1-5). Through Abraham, God planned to build a nation. In the course of time, Abraham and Sarah had a son. His name was Isaac. Isaac, in turn, had a son named Jacob and then Jacob had twelve sons, whose descendants became known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

THE MOVE TO EGYPT

Joseph, who was Jacob's favorite son, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was a servant and then a prisoner in the land of Egypt. But God was directing events, and Joseph eventually became second in command of Egypt under Pharaoh. God brought this about so that the entire family of Jacob, which numbered less than a hundred at the time,

could escape a famine. They took all their belongings and moved to Egypt where enough grain to last throughout the famine had been stored under Joseph's supervision.

The children of Israel (God changed Jacob's name to Israel) made an important contribution to the economy of Egypt because they were good builders, farmers and ranchers. They rapidly grew in numbers. At first there were hundreds, then thousands, then hundreds of thousands of Israelites. But after many years, a Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who did not know or care about the Israelites. In fact, he began to fear them because they were so numerous. This new Pharaoh saw the opportunity for free labor, and made slaves of the Israelites.

The slavery in Egypt was terrible, but in spite of this, the Israelites continued to multiply. Pharaoh made the Israelites work very hard with very little rest. The people of Israel began to cry out for deliverance from the terrible burdens of the Egyptian taskmasters.

During the time they were in Egypt, the Israelites lost nearly all knowledge of God. Even though Abraham and the other patriarchs kept God's Sabbath, the Israelites in captivity did not even know which day was the Sabbath.

TIME FOR DELIVERANCE

After over 200 years of oppressive slavery, God chose a man named Moses to deliver His people. He had especially prepared Moses to lead the children of Israel to the land of Canaan. This land He had promised to Abraham and His descendants over 400 years earlier. Moses began preparing to lead the huge multitudes out of Egypt.

How many Israelite men were there at the time the Israelites left Egypt? (Exodus 12:37) _____ . We can assume there must have been about the same number of women. If there were an average of two children for every family, what would have been the total population of Israel?

Some mathematicians have calculated that the population could have been well over three million! The number of people who left Egypt would have been the size of a very large city in today's society.

While the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt, what did Moses tell Pharaoh was the reason God wanted him to let the people go? (Exodus 5:1) _____

The Egyptians had many gods. They had numerous religious celebrations. They did not see any reason to permit Moses and the Israelites to keep different days. Remember that most Israelites had forgotten their God.

When God first appeared to Moses, how did He reveal Himself? (Exodus 3:4) _____

What did God say His name was? (Exodus 3:14) _____

THE TEN PLAGUES

After God revealed Himself to Moses, He set out to reveal Himself to the rest of the Israelites, and to show His great power to them and the Egyptians. God performed ten great miracles, sending plague after plague upon the land of Egypt because Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go.

How many of the ten plagues can you remember without looking in the Bible. Write down those you can remember and then look up the rest. You will find them in Exodus, chapters 7-11.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

The tenth plague—death of their firstborn—dealt a terrible blow to the Egyptians. It was only after this plague that Pharaoh finally freed the

Israelites. This last plague has much to do with the Passover, the first of God's festivals.

GOD'S CALENDAR

Before learning about the Passover, let's first notice what God told the Israelites about His calendar. When did God say His year is to begin? (Exodus 12:2) _____

The month referred to here has two different names. The Hebrew name for it is Abib, and the Babylonian name is Nisan.

This month begins in the spring of the year. During the spring, there is a period of time when the day and night are approximately of equal length. Astronomers call this the vernal equinox.

God's year begins in the spring on the new moon near the time of the vernal equinox. On the calendar we use today, that will usually come sometime between the middle of March and the middle of April. This is the time when plants are starting to bloom, leaves are coming on the trees and the grass is turning green.

THE FIRST PASSOVER

After first telling the Israelites about His calendar, God then began to prepare them for the Passover. What were the Israelites to do on the tenth day of the first month? (Exodus 12:3)

What were they to do four days later on the fourteenth day of the month? (Exodus 12:6)

At even, or at dusk as the Jewish translation has it—between the two evenings, or between sunset and dark—the Passover lamb was to be killed.

Then what were the Israelites to do with the lamb? (Exodus 12:8) _____



A full moon as it appears on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

Y.E.S. Photo

After cooking the meal, the Israelites were to eat the Passover lamb that night, the beginning of the fourteenth day of the first month.

Did God intend for the Passover to be observed just this one time, or each year forever? (Exodus 12:14) _____

The children of Israel were commanded to keep the Passover annually as a memorial to remind them of that eventful night when God sent the death angel to kill the firstborn in the land of Egypt, including animals. The Passover was a reminder that the death angel *passed over* the Israelites, sparing the firstborn of those who obeyed God by killing a lamb and sprinkling the blood on their doorposts.

The Passover which the Israelites were commanded to keep, pictured a great event that would occur hundreds of years in the future.

CHRIST KEPT THE PASSOVER

When Jesus Christ was on earth over 1900 years ago, did He observe the Passover? Where in the New Testament do we find examples of Christ keeping the Passover during His

ministry? (John 2:13, 23) _____

What about late in His ministry? (Matthew 26:17-20) _____

These verses show that Jesus did observe the Passover.

During the Passover in A.D. 31, the night before His crucifixion, Christ changed the way in which the Passover was to be observed in the future. He instituted new symbols and taught His disciples what these symbols represented. Members of God's Church today keep the Passover in the way Christ instructed His disciples to keep it that night.

At the beginning of this lesson, we emphasized that God is working out a plan. The Passover pictures the very first step in God's plan of salvation. As we will learn, it pictures Christ's sacrifice which makes it possible for our sins, and the sins of all mankind, to be forgiven.

PASSOVER GIVEN NEW MEANING

To help us understand the meaning of the Passover, let's first read about something Christ taught earlier during His ministry. What was this new teaching that many at that time did not understand? (John 6:53-56) _____

When Christ first spoke these words, those who heard Him did not understand (verses 60-61). So what did many of His disciples do? (John 6:66) _____

Even though Peter and the others who were to become apostles did not immediately understand, what did Peter, speaking for the rest of them, say? (John 6:68) _____

Christ gave this new teaching early in His

ministry. Apparently He never explained the meaning until the night of the Passover just before He died. On that night, Jesus explained what He meant by eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

In John 6:53, Christ said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." What did He mean? Christ certainly did not mean to literally eat His flesh and drink His blood!

Remember Christ and His disciples were eating the traditional Passover meal with the lamb and unleavened bread. During their meal, He passed out small portions of the unleavened bread and said, "Take, eat; this is [this represents or is a symbol of] my body" (Matthew 26:26).

Then what did Christ do? (Matthew 26:27)

With the Passover meal they also had wine. Jesus said that it stood for, or represented, the blood that would pour from His body before He died.

The disciples now realized what Jesus had meant by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They now understood that Christ intended the symbols of unleavened bread and wine to represent His body and blood.

From that time forward, they would no longer kill and eat the Passover lamb, but would observe the Passover as Christ had instructed them.

FOOT WASHING INSTITUTED

Christ also began another important observance on the night of Passover. Before partaking of the bread and wine, what did Christ do? (John 13:4-17, summarize these verses) _____

The disciples were astonished—Christ had never done this before! It was a common custom in the time of Jesus for a servant to wash the feet of guests before they entered a home. People wore open-toed sandals and their feet would get dirty from walking on the dusty roads. It was an act of service to wash the feet of guests.

Christ showed that He had come to earth to serve mankind. By washing the feet of His disciples, Christ showed that they should be willing to serve each other. Did Christ tell His disciples to follow His example and wash one another's feet? (Verse 14) _____

That is why God's Church today continues to observe this important part of the Passover service. What did Jesus say would happen if His disciples followed these instructions? (John 13:17) _____

BREAD SYMBOLIC OF CHRIST'S BODY

Let's learn more about the meaning of the bread eaten during the Passover service. What did Christ tell His disciples the unleavened bread symbolized? (Matthew 26:26) _____

When you bake unleavened bread, it does not puff up as regular bread does. Unleavened bread stays flat. On the night Christ instituted the unleavened bread as a symbol of His body, He took it and *broke* it before eating. This was symbolic of something very important that would happen to Christ.

What happened to Christ before He was crucified? (Mark 15:15) _____

When the Romans scourged someone, they whipped him with a leather whip, sometimes called a cat-o'-nine-tails. Usually, there were nine pieces of leather to a wooden handle. Many

times small chunks of bone, metal or wood were tied into the leather. When someone was scourged, he usually received 39 lashes with such a whip. Needless to say, his body would be racked with pain from being torn open and beaten.

You can read a prophecy about the terrible pain Christ would suffer prior to His crucifixion by reading Isaiah 52:14 and Isaiah 53:3-5. Summarize what these prophecies showed would happen to Christ. _____

Why did Christ have to be beaten? (I Peter 2:24) _____

By suffering the pain of scourging, Christ made it possible for our physical sins—the breaking of health laws which result in sickness and disease—to be forgiven. It is for this reason that God will heal us when we are sick, provided that we follow God's instructions in James 5:14-15. Write these instructions in the blanks below. _____

WINE SYMBOLIC OF CHRIST'S SHED BLOOD

What is the special significance of the wine that is drunk during the Passover service? (Matthew 26:28) _____

When Christ died, the way was made possible for us all to be forgiven of our sins. Why was it necessary for His blood to be shed? (Hebrews 9:22) _____

In Old Testament times, animal sacrifices were a type of the sacrifice Christ would make when He offered up His life. God never intended animal sacrifices to be offered

permanently because there is no spiritual forgiveness resulting from these sacrifices (Hebrews 10:4). Animal sacrifices were intended to give the Israelites, who did not understand God's truth, something physical to do as a reminder of sin until the Savior would come.

The animal sacrifices for sin in the Old Testament pictured the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of the sins of all mankind. Copy down the main points in the following verses which will help you to better understand. (John 1:29) _____

(I Corinthians 5:7) _____

(Hebrews 10:10, 12) _____

(I Peter 3:18) _____

These verses show Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins and that His sacrifice had to happen only once. After Christ died to pay the penalty of death for the sins of mankind, it was no longer necessary to offer sacrifices as the Israelites once did. The wine then is symbolic of the shed blood of Christ. This reminds us of the wonderful truth that all sins can be forgiven if we repent and ask God for forgiveness.

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH OBSERVED THE PASSOVER

In I Corinthians 11, we find that the New Testament Church kept the Passover. Read I Corinthians 11:23-30, and then make a few brief notes of the main points. _____

Now write down verse 26. _____

This verse shows that New Testament Christians were observing the Passover. But how often? Paul simply says, "As often as you eat . . . and drink . . ." (verse 26). Many people interpret this to mean as often as you *want* to eat and drink.

But what did Paul really mean? What season of the year did Paul write the letter to the Corinthian Church? Turn back to I Corinthians 5 and read verses 6 and 8. These verses reveal the time of the year Paul wrote this epistle.

It was in the spring that he wrote the members at Corinth. The above verses show us that the Church was observing the Days of Unleavened Bread when the letter was written. In I Corinthians 11 Paul corrected the Church because some members were not properly observing the Passover. Some were eating too much. Others were drinking too much wine—some even getting drunk.

The Church had not been observing the Passover every week, or as often as they wanted, as some suppose. Verse 26 shows that the members were commemorating the historic event of the death of Jesus Christ. And this was to be done once a year!

The Passover reminded the Israelites of the night the death angel "passed over" and spared their firstborn. Today, the Passover reminds God's people of the night Christ gave His life for our sins. Baptized members of God's Church today follow Christ's instructions to observe the Passover annually—on the night Christ observed it. Every year God's people keep the Passover service shortly after sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month of the new year.

THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Now we come to the second festival of the year. It is called the Days of Unleavened Bread and pictures the second step in God's plan. This festival shows that after our past sins have been forgiven, we must come out of sin and strive to

obey God and keep His commandments. The Days of Unleavened Bread are a seven-day spring festival which remind us of this important lesson.

Let's go back to the Old Testament and see how the Days of Unleavened Bread began. This will help us to better understand what the festival pictures for us today.

What were God's instructions concerning the Days of Unleavened Bread? (Exodus 12:15-17, summarize these verses) _____

Did the Israelites eat unleavened bread during the exodus from Egypt? (Exodus 12:33-34, 39) _____

Do you know what leavening does to bread? If your mother bakes bread or rolls she can tell you what must be put into the dough to make it rise. There are three main ingredients which can make bread dough rise. Do you know what they are?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there are two holy days or annual Sabbaths. The Passover is not a holy day. It is celebrated in the evening, but normal work may be done the following day. Beginning with sundown on the fifteenth day of the first month, there is an annual holy day. And there is another one seven days later. On these two holy days we are not to work. We should attend Church services.

There are seven special holy days during the year. Two come during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The third holy day during the spring season is Pentecost. Then in the fall there is the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

After God sent the death angel through

Egypt on the night of the Passover, the Egyptians finally let the Israelites go. The Egyptians urged them to leave quickly. The Israelites did not have time to bake bread or to make other preparations before they left. So during the daylight part of the fourteenth, after the Israelites had observed the Passover, they prepared to leave.

When did the Israelites leave Egypt? (Exodus 12:42) _____

They left on the night which began the fifteenth day of the month. What do you suppose the moon was like that night? _____

Knowing that the months begin with a new moon and that the cycle of the moon is approximately 30 days, what would the moon have been like that night?

If you have a nice clear night on the "Night to be Much Observed," as it is still called today, be sure to take special note of the moon. It's bright and full at the same time each year. On the "Night to be Much Observed" the Israelites could see how to travel by the light of a bright full moon.

In God's Church today, families and friends gather together for a night of feasting and fellowship on the "Night to be Much Observed." We remember that more than 1400 years before Christ, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, but on that night they left and became a free people.

**KEPT BY
THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

What did Paul write to the church members at Corinth about the meaning of leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread? (I Corinthians 5:6-8, summarize these verses) _____

Many churches today feel there is no longer any need to keep God's festivals. But what did the Apostle Paul tell the Church of Corinth

about observing the Days of Unleavened Bread? (I Corinthians 5:8, first part of the verse) _____

_____.

Surely, Paul would not have told them to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread if he had not wanted them to. The letter to the Church at Corinth was written about twenty-four years after Christ's death. The New Testament Church Christ founded continued to keep this and the other annual festivals!

LEAVENING SYMBOLIC OF SIN

Leaven is used in the Bible as a symbol of sin. Paul said a little leaven leavens the whole lump (I Corinthians 5:6). Just as a little bit of yeast makes a whole batch of dough light and airy, so just a little bit of sin will spread in our



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The early grain harvest pictures the "firstfruits" God is calling now.

lives. But we must try to get rid of it. We have to "unleaven" our lives and begin to obey God by keeping His commandments.

This is not something we should do just seven days a year—it is the way we should live all the time. One who is 12 or 13 years old is normally old enough to realize that he has wrong thoughts and temptations. People may often be tempted to lie, cheat, steal, smoke or take drugs. But one must resist these temptations and turn away from them. Just as Israel left Egypt, so we have to leave those things that are sinful and wrong. The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that we should be striving to put sin out of our lives and to live God's way of life.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

We now come to the last spring festival—the Day of Pentecost. This festival pictures the third step in God's plan. Unlike the other festivals which fall on the same day of the month each year, Pentecost must be counted. In fact the New Testament name for Pentecost comes from two Greek words meaning "fiftieth (day)."

This festival is also called the "Feast of Weeks," or the "Feast of Firstfruits." It is called the Feast of Weeks because seven complete weeks must pass after the Sabbath, which usually falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread, before Pentecost is to be kept. It is called the Feast of Firstfruits because it celebrated the early spring harvest of grain.

COUNTING PENTECOST

How is the day on which Pentecost is observed determined? (Leviticus 23:15-16) _____

_____.

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the high priest conducted a special ceremony which signaled the beginning of the spring harvest.

On the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the high priest waved a small sheaf of grain. This was the sign for the Israelites to begin the spring harvest. This “wave-sheaf offering” pictured the time when the *resurrected* Christ would ascend to heaven to be accepted by His Father as the very *first* human to be actually born of God.

Beginning with the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Israelites would count fifty days which would mark the end of the early harvest. The day thus determined always falls on a Sunday—exactly fifty days from the Sunday during which the wave-sheaf was offered. This day is called Pentecost!

THE MEANING OF PENTECOST

Perhaps you already know that God’s festivals revolve around the harvest seasons. An understanding of the harvest seasons in the land of Palestine will help us to understand what the Day of Pentecost pictures in God’s plan.

In the land of Palestine where the ancient Israelites lived, two annual harvests occur. First is the spring harvest of firstfruits and then the big fall harvest, occurring later in the year.

The spring harvest represents only a small part of the whole year’s ingathering of crops, whereas the fall harvest is when the majority of the crops are harvested.

Does Pentecost, also called the “Feast of Firstfruits,” show that Christians—those whom God calls before the Second Coming of Christ—are His “firstfruits”? (James 1:18) _____

The “we” in this verse refers to those in God’s Church. How did they come to know God’s way of life? (John 6:44) _____

During the past 6,000 years of human history, God has not called most human beings

to His way of life. People in many parts of the world today worship false, pagan gods. In other parts of the world, people worship no gods at all—they are atheists.

Though these people do not know God or understand His truth, they will have their chance to know Him and live His way, and to become a part of His Family after the Second Coming of Christ. Just as the spring harvest is smaller, the number of people God is calling now—the “firstfruits”—is small compared to the billions who will be born into His Family after Christ comes.

HOLY SPIRIT GIVEN ON PENTECOST

Pentecost, the third step in God’s plan, also pictures His people receiving the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:1 we notice that the disciples were gathering together in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31. In an awesome display of power, God gave His Holy Spirit to the disciples on that day. Their receiving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost marked the beginning of the New Testament Church!

It is the Holy Spirit which enables those in whom it dwells to overcome sin, to understand God’s truth and to grow in God’s character. At Christ’s Second Coming, they will be born into the Family of God as the “firstfruits” of God’s *spiritual* harvest. They will then be perfect, having the very character and nature of God, and be composed of spirit.

As a young person in God’s Church, you are growing up with a knowledge of God and His great purpose and plan for mankind. What a rare and wonderful opportunity God is giving you now. Even though you are still young, you are learning about God’s way of life.

So rejoice that you are learning the meaning of the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. In the Fall Festival Lesson you will learn about the fall festivals which picture the final steps in God’s plan.

