

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES, CHRISTMAS, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This article is very ambitious. It will debunk a major Christian myth, and reveal Satan's plot to obscure the plan of God. This article will also describe God's plan and Kingdom, and our roles in it. God's plan is very ambitious, and has a happy ending.

Christmas & Satan's plot to distort God's plan

Satan is the "god of this world" (II Corinthians 4:4) who has transformed himself into "an angel of light" (II Corinthians 11:14), and his demons into "ministers of righteousness" (verse 15). In other words, Satan has deceived "the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). His lies distort God's truth and plan. For example, Jesus was not born on December 25th, and this lie obscures God's plan for mankind.

Jesus was supposedly born on December 25th; hence the Christmas celebration. However, if you remove Christ from Christmas, you're left with the pagan Roman celebration of Saturnalia. "Historians are unsure exactly when Christians first began celebrating the Nativity of Christ. However, most scholars believe that *Christmas originated in the 4th century as a Christian substitute for pagan celebrations of the winter solstice. Before the introduction of Christmas, each year beginning on December 17 Romans honored Saturn, the ancient god of agriculture, in a festival called Saturnalia. This festival lasted for seven days and included the winter solstice, which usually occurred around December 25 on the ancient Julian calendar*" (MSN Encarta Encyclopedia, web edition, emphasis mine). Aside from the pagan roots of Christmas, Jesus was not born in winter. He was born in the fall.

Mary and Joseph were forced, by a decree from Caesar Augustus, to travel to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem to register for an empire-wide census (Luke 2:1-7). It's apparent that God inspired this decree because it forced people to register in their hometowns. Joseph's hometown was Bethlehem, the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2). And Mary was in her ninth month of pregnancy. The pieces of this divine puzzle were beginning to fall into place.

Caesar would not jeopardize this census by calling for arduous travel during the harsh winter months. Even in Judea, winter travel wasn't easy. In His Olivet prophecy, Jesus warned, "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! *And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath*" (Matthew 24:19-20). Jesus recognized that the Judean winter was not the ideal time for travel, especially for pregnant women.

During Jesus' birth, shepherds were tending their flocks in the field, at night (Luke 2:8). This is an important clue because it rules out Jesus' birth in the winter: "The only indication of the season of our Savior's birth is the fact that the Shepherds were watching their flocks in the field at that time, Luke 2:8. ***This fact points to any other season rather than winter***, and is therefore not favorable to the traditional date, though not conclusive against it. The time of pasturing in Palestine (which has but two seasons, the dry and the wet, or summer and winter)

begins, according to the Talmudists, in March, and lasts till November, when the herds are brought in from the fields, and kept under shelter till the close of February” (Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, emphasis mine). The flocks are indoors during December because it was too cold. Therefore, Jesus could not have been born on December 25th.

Jesus was probably born on the first day of the *Feast of Tabernacles*, in the early fall. The Apostle John provided a significant clue. “And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

John’s book was written in Greek, and the Greek word for “dwelt” is tabernacle. The symbolism is unmistakable: Jesus was born and “*tabernacled*” among us on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in either September or October.

Jesus was born in the reign of Herod the Great. Herod died in 4 BC. Thus Jesus could not have been born after 4 BC, and many scholars place His birth in that year. If so, and if He was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus’ birthday falls on September 29th (the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles in 4 BC). Jesus died thirty-three years and six months later, on Passover day in 31 AD.

Jesus’ birthday in the fall can be logically deduced by subtracting seven months from the date of His death on Passover (usually March or April) of 31 AD. His ministry lasted three years and six months, and began around His thirtieth birthday (Luke 3:23 – Jesus was “about” 30 years old). Jesus’ ministry therefore began not on His birthday but shortly thereafter, probably no more than a month later. Subtracting six months from Passover in 31 AD (April 25th of that year), we are brought to late October. However, because His ministry began not on His birthday but shortly thereafter, we must deduct another few weeks to a month. This brings us to late September. As stated in the foregoing paragraph, if Jesus was born in September of 4 BC, and realizing that the Feast of Tabernacles began on September 29th in that year, then it’s difficult to escape from the conclusion that Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, in the early fall.

Considering that (i) the shepherds did not tend their flocks by night in the cold winter; (ii) the census probably did not occur in the winter; (iii) John’s allusion to Jesus’ birth during the Feast of Tabernacles; and by (iv) subtracting seven months from the expiry of Jesus’ ministry at Passover (in the early Spring) - we can only conclude that Jesus was born not on December 25th but in the early fall, probably in late September, during the Feast of Tabernacles. (Even if the foregoing timetables are off by some weeks, there is anecdotal evidence – in the first chapter of John, shepherds *not* tending their flocks at night in the winter, etc. – to suggest that Jesus was born in the early fall, probably during the Feast of Tabernacles.)

Some Christians may ask, “So what?” Well, God’s truth is important and relevant, and we should realize that Satan has subverted it by inspiring nominal Christians to adopt December 25th as Jesus’ birthday. “The Roman Catholic Church chose December 25 as the day for the Feast of the Nativity in order to give Christian meaning to existing pagan rituals. For example, the Church replaced festivities honoring the birth of Mithra, the god of light, with festivities to commemorate the birth of Jesus, whom the Bible calls the light of the world. The Catholic Church hoped to draw pagans into its religion by allowing them to continue their revelry while simultaneously honoring the birthday of Jesus” (*MSN Encarta Encyclopedia*, web edition). The early Roman Catholic Church might have had good intentions in trying to convert the gentiles by Christianizing pagan rituals. But in doing so, they undermined the truth of God.

Why is it important to realize that Jesus was born not on December 25th but during the Feast of Tabernacles? ***Because Satan does not want us to learn about the Feast of Tabernacles!*** Once we realize that Jesus was born during this Feast, our next logical question is, “What is the Feast of Tabernacles?” Before we can answer that question, we must first recognize the Christian relevance of God’s Holy Days and Festivals

Jesus our Passover

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For ***Christ our Passover*** also has been sacrificed. ***Therefore let us celebrate the feast***, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:6-8). In this amazing scripture, Paul labels Jesus Christ as “our Passover.” He thus uses an ancient Holy Day to describe the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus on the stake. And he urges a gentile church in Corinth, Greece to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follows Passover. In other words, he’s urging gentiles to keep a so-called Jewish or Hebraic Festival.

In urging gentiles to observe an Hebraic Festival, Paul is thus turning on its head the modern Christian belief that Jesus nailed the Law of God (including the Holy Days and Festivals) to His stake. He did no such thing: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19). Heaven and earth haven’t passed away; according to Jesus, neither have God’s laws, Holy Days and Festivals.

By calling Jesus “our Passover,” Paul demonstrated the Christian relevance of God’s Holy Days and Festivals, as found throughout the Old Testament. Elsewhere, Paul writes, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a *festival* or a new moon or Sabbaths, *which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ*” (Colossians 2:16-17). Here Paul described the Festivals as “shadow(s) of things to come...” In other words, the Festivals and Holy Days foreshadow, or predict, certain significant events. The Passover foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus “our Passover.” What, then, do the other Holy Days and Festivals foreshadow?

God’s Holy Days & Festivals

Over a thousand years before Christ, God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Afterward God revealed His Festivals and Holy Days, which occur during the spring, summer, and fall harvests. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The ***feasts of the LORD***, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, ***these are My feasts***’” (Leviticus 23:1). Notice that they’re not Jewish or Hebraic feasts; rather, they are God’s feasts.

These Holy Days and Festivals reminded the Israelites that God:

1 rescued them from slavery in Egypt (*Passover & the Feast of Unleavened Bread*);

- 2 blessed them (the *Feast of Firstfruits, or Weeks*);
- 3 will protect them when they're in battle, and has provided them with special events throughout the year, announced by the blowing of *shofars* or trumpets (hence the *Feast of the Memorial of the Blowing of Trumpets*);
- 4 will forgive them when they repent of their sins (*Day of Atonement*); and
- 5 provided for them during their forty-year trek in the wilderness, and will continue to do so (*Feast of Tabernacles* and the day immediately following this Feast, hereinafter referred to as the *Last Great Day*).

God chose the Israelites for three reasons. God loved them and wanted to keep His promise to Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:6-8); the prophesied Messiah (Jesus) would come through the Israelite tribe of Judah; and He wanted to preserve His laws among mankind: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:1-2).

Preservation of the Law (which includes the Holy Days and Festivals) through the Israelites had two purposes: (i) God's law would be kept alive among pagan mankind, and (ii) an obedient Israel would serve as an example to neighboring nations: "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

The Law of God and the Holy Days and Festivals would shine through an obedient Israel. (Unfortunately, rarely was Israel obedient to God.) Therefore, the significance of God's Holy Days and Festivals transcended boundaries. They are also timeless: they reveal the plan of God, which has unfolded over several thousands of years.

The ancient Feast of Tabernacles

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'The fifteenth of this seventh month shall be the *Feast of Tabernacles*....on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. *All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God*" (Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43).

The ancient Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Israelites' forty-year trek in the wilderness. It also reminded them that God is caring: "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These

forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing” (Deuteronomy 2:7).

The Feast of Tabernacles, its prophetic significance

People could not have understood the prophetic significance of the Holy Days and Festivals before Jesus’ sacrifice in 31 AD. Only then did the apostles realize that, for example, the ancient Passover foreshadowed Jesus’ death: hence Paul’s designation, “Christ our Passover.” They also realized the prophetic significance of the other Holy Days and Festivals. In fact, they reveal God’s sequential seven-step plan for man:

1. **Passover:** Acceptance of Jesus as our atoning sacrificial Lamb that was foreshadowed by the ancient Passover sacrifice. “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5:7);
2. **Feast of Unleavened Bread:** In accepting the sacrifice of the unleavened “bread from heaven,” that is, Jesus (John 6:41), and understanding that, biblically, leaven represents sin (I Corinthians 5:7), Paul thus urges us to “*keep the feast* (of Unleavened Bread), not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:7-8).
3. **Pentecost**, anciently the *Feast of Firstfruits*: Those who have God’s Spirit are called firstfruits (I Corinthians 15:23, James 1:18, Revelation 14:4), and Jesus was the First of the firstfruits. Pentecost is also the birthday of Christianity and God’s Church, which is the collection of God’s saints or firstfruits.
4. **Feast of the Memorial of the Blowing of Trumpets:** The plan of God unfolds in these Festivals. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread point back to Christ, as does Pentecost in pointing us back to the birthday of the Church. Sequentially, the Feast of the Memorial of Blowing of Trumpets anticipates the return of Jesus and the first resurrection: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the *trumpet of God*, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:16).
5. **Day of Atonement:** What happens after Jesus returns? The banishment of Satan, itself symbolized in an ancient Israelite ceremony conducted on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The ceremony foreshadowed Jesus’ sacrifice in the first century and foretells Satan’s banishment during the Millennium. Only at that time will man be “at one” with God.
6. **Feast of Tabernacles:** After Satan has been banished, Jesus will establish His Kingdom. We shall be kings and priests in that Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). Since this Feast follows the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles foreshadows the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

7. **The Last Great Day** immediately follows the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This Day represents the second resurrection of everyone not resurrected one thousand years earlier, and the ensuing 100-year judgment period in which they will have an opportunity for salvation.

The Holy Days and Festivals reveal God's plan for us. The Bible doesn't provide us with a complete description of God's plan. His plan did not begin in the Garden of Eden nor does it end in the twenty-second chapter of Revelation. However, the Bible does describe a certain phase of that plan. This phase began with Jesus' sacrifice in 31 AD and ends in the transfer of God's throne to a transformed earth, described in Revelation 22. This phase of God's plan is revealed in His Holy Days and Festivals, and it includes the establishment of God's Kingdom on this earth, shortly after Jesus returns. *This event is foreshadowed by the ancient Feast of Tabernacles.*

Jesus in the first century AD

Jesus' mission was multipurpose. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus died so that we may "not perish." He became our sin offering: "God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering" (Romans 8:3). Jesus' sacrifice removed the penalty, or curse, of the Law from us: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Because sin is defined as the transgression of God's Law (I John 3:4), and because everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), we're thus doomed without the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

Jesus also became the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5), and the firstborn into God's family. This implies that there will be others, who are collectively known as the Church. Jesus built His Church, and sent them (and those who succeeded them) to "make disciples" of all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). (For understanding on the Church, and the meaning of life, please read our article entitled *Pentecost & the Meaning of Life.*)

Jesus also attempted to reclaim Israel. "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). When confronted by a Canaanite woman, Jesus responded, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). However, "those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

Jesus did not destroy God's law by nailing it to His stake. Just the opposite: "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21). In fact, Jesus spiritualized the Law of God. Keeping the letter of the Law was no longer enough; we must keep both the letter *and* spirit of the Law. For example, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). In other words, in God's eyes, unjustifiable and extreme anger is a sin. Lust is also a sin: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

By overcoming Satan's temptations, and by achieving victory on the stake, Jesus qualified to become our High Priest. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our

weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). As High Priest in heaven, an empathetic Jesus acts as our Counselor who pleads for mercy when we repent of sin. Conversely, Satan is like the vengeful, unfair and malevolent prosecutor who “accuses” us “before our God day and night” (Revelation 12: 10).

Despite these manifold reasons, Jesus always returned to one dominant theme: the Kingdom of God. ***“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose”*** (Luke 4:42-43). And, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and ***proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom***, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23; other examples are found in Matthew 9:35, Mark 1:15, etc.). In addition to such explicit messages, Jesus delivered several parables concerning the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:30-32, Mark 4:11, etc.).

The Befuddled Disciples

Jesus’ disciples were young and zealous. They believed that Jesus would overthrow Roman rule and thus restore the Davidic kingdom of Israel. During Jesus’ last supper, they argued about whom would be greatest in the new kingdom of Israel: “And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest” (Luke 22:24). Some wanted to be the equivalent of our secretaries of State, Defense, and Treasury.

In many ways the disciples were clueless. They did not understand that Jesus had to die: “For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.’ But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him” (Mark 9:31-32). Nor did they understand that Jesus would rise three days after His crucifixion: “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead”” (Mark 9:31-32).

Indeed, Jesus began to open their eyes after His resurrection: “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He *opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:45-47).

After His resurrection, Jesus opened the minds of His apostles. Only then did they begin to realize that Jesus was not sent to overthrow the Romans, or to reestablish the Davidic Kingdom of Israel then and there. *Rather, they began to understand that Jesus will return to establish the worldwide Kingdom of God.*

Jesus and His Kingdom

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. ***He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and***

upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Jesus did not establish His kingdom in the first century. But He will do so in the near future: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness ***He judges and wages war.*** His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS’” (Revelation 19:11-16).

Where’s the location of Jesus’ Kingdom? On the earth, of course: “Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and *all the holy ones with Him!* In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. ***And the LORD will be king over all the earth;*** in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zechariah 14:1-9).

Jesus returns; then what?

At the moment Jesus returns, God will resurrect the “dead in Christ.” Paul stated that “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (I Corinthians 15:22-23). When Jesus returns, His dead saints will rise, and the living saints will be changed: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the *dead in Christ will rise first.* Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). (For understanding on the biblical resurrections, and for a description on the state of the dead, please read our article entitled *Destination Heaven or Destination Earth?* Also, request our free audio cassette, "The Three Resurrections.")

Jesus, His resurrected or changed saints (including people in the Old Testament), and His angels will fight the nations gathered at Megiddo (the famous battle at Armageddon), in northern Israel. (For understanding on Armageddon and end-time events, please read our article entitled *Biblical Prophecy Explained.*) Jesus will then banish Satan (foretold in the Day of Atonement;

please read our article entitled *The Day of Atonement & Satan's Fate*). Afterward, Jesus will establish His Kingdom.

The Kingdom will be based from Jerusalem, and the “law” and “word of the Lord” shall go forth from there (Isaiah 2:2-4). The Kingdom’s extent will be worldwide (Isaiah 11:9).

What will we do in this Kingdom?

Eye “has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him” (I Corinthians 2:6-9). What has God prepared for us?

- 1 “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). This implies immortality.
- 2 “He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11). This, too, implies immortality.
- 3 “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, *to him I will give authority over the nations*; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father” (Revelation 2:26-27).
- 4 “And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10).

God has prepared a Kingdom for His children: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ***For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*** For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--***heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together***” (Romans 8:12-17).

God is creating children. His Spirit interacts with our spirit (the “spirit in man” – Job 32:8, I Corinthians 2:11) to create a new creature in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We are thus begotten, or conceived, by God. This is analogous to human creation. When our fathers’ sperm united with our mothers’ egg, we were conceived and born nine months later. Likewise, God’s Spirit unites with our spirit to create a new spiritual creature in Christ. We are spiritually conceived but not yet born. The nine months we spend in our mothers’ womb is analogous to the lifetime we spend nurturing this new creature in Christ. We feed it through Bible study, prayer, fasting, and obedience to God.

Although our temporal bodies decay daily, this new creature in Christ is renewed: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the

things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:16-18).

Paul contrasts our fleshy bodies, which he calls “*tabernacles*” or “*tents*,” with the spiritual new creature in Christ. “For we know that if our earthly house of this *tabernacle* were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (II Corinthians 5:1-4). We “groan” in our temporal tabernacles (bodies), forever yearning for the day when our spiritual bodies will emerge. The difference between our physical and spiritual bodies is almost indescribable. “There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (I Corinthians 15:40-44).

Paul referred to our temporal, fleshy bodies as *tabernacles*, as did Peter: “Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this *tabernacle*, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this, my *tabernacle*, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me” (II Peter 1:13-14). (A modern rendering of this scripture: “I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”)

Paul and Peter were older men when they wrote these words. They reflected on their own mortality. Apparently Peter was in the last years of his life (“shortly I must put off this, my tabernacle...”). Paul was comparing the frustrations of life (“for we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened...”) to the glory we’ll assume when Jesus returns. *They referred to their decaying, fleshy bodies as temporary tabernacles. Thus the Feast of Tabernacles also symbolizes our sojourn in these temporary, fleshy bodies.* But the word “temporary” implies that something eternal is awaiting us.

We cannot inherit the Kingdom of God in our temporal tabernacles (bodies). But the new creature in Christ will: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (I Corinthians 15:50-52).

At the resurrection, this new creature in Christ is born. If we’re living when Jesus returns, we’ll be changed. If not, God will resurrect us, or rather, the new creature in Christ. We’ll shed our temporal tabernacles (bodies) and be clothed with immortality. This will occur in the “twinkling of an eye.” At one moment, we’re flesh; at another, spirit beings. Jesus described the spirit body to Nicodemus: “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:7-8).

God created a family when He resurrected Jesus, the “firstborn from the dead” and the firstborn into God’s family. On the first day of Pentecost He added to His family. When someone repents and is baptized, he or she receives the Holy Spirit, which unites with the “spirit

in man” to create a new creature in Christ. This new son or daughter in Christ is conceived at baptism, and born when Jesus returns. *Until then, we live in fleshly tabernacles, that is, temporary bodies that decay daily. The Feast of Tabernacles thus pictures our sojourn in our fleshy, temporary tabernacles (bodies) until we are either resurrected or changed when Jesus returns.*

What about the rest of the people?

“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). The *first resurrection* (described by Paul in I Corinthians 15) is of the just, the dead in Christ. If we’ve accepted Jesus and if God’s Spirit has united with our spirit to create a new creature in Christ, then God will resurrect or change us when Jesus returns.

The converted Christians and saints of the Old Testament (Abraham, Moses, Ruth, etc.) will rise first: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:16). The rest of the dead (the majority of mankind) will rise a thousand years later, after the millennial rule of Jesus and His saints. “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*” (Revelation 20:4-5).

The rest of the dead – who are they? Obviously, they include people who weren’t resurrected one thousand years earlier, in the first resurrection. They did not receive a chance for salvation in their lifetimes, and died before receiving Christ.

God isn’t calling everyone today. “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them’” (Matthew 13:10-15). Moreover, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).

God will resurrect or change the converted saints upon Jesus’ return. They’ll reign with Christ for a thousand years. Then God will resurrect people who were not part of the first resurrection. They weren’t converted in their lifetimes. God will offer salvation to them. They’ll learn the truth. They’ll get to know the real Jesus. Over a 100-year period (Isaiah 65:20), they will be given the same chance for salvation that we enjoy today.

“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17). God is judging people who have His Spirit. He judges us according to our works and the words

written “in the books” (Revelation 20). Which books? The Greek word for ‘books’ is *biblios*, from which we derive the word “Bible.” God, then, is judging us according to the words and laws written in the Bible. Because God is consistent and fair, He will judge people resurrected in the second resurrection by the same measurement, that is, the Bible. Judgment is a process, not a sentence. Over our lifetime, God judges us according to our works and the words written in the Bible. *Over a 100-year period, people resurrected in the second resurrection will be judged similarly. This 100-year period is known as the Great White Throne Judgment.*

The Last Great Day

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for *seven days* to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the *eighth day* you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it’” (Leviticus 23:33-36)

The Feast of Tabernacles lasts “seven days.” However, the day immediately following the last day of the Feast is considered holy by God. The “eighth day” is one of God’s Holy Days. It was on that Day that Jesus “stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

The seven-day Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes:

- 1 The establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth; and
- 2 Our sojourn in temporary tabernacles (bodies) until we’re either resurrected or changed when Jesus returns (I Corinthians 15, I Thessalonians 4, etc.)

The eighth day, or the day immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles, is known as the *Last Great Day* (John 7:37). This Day symbolizes the second resurrection following the Millennium, in which everyone not resurrected one thousand years earlier will rise and be given a chance for salvation.

God will give them a period of time in which they’ll have the same chance for salvation that we enjoy today. This period of time is known as the famous *Great White Throne Judgment*. Judgment in this sense is not a sentence. Rather, it’s a period of time in which they’ll be given God’s truth, and a chance for salvation. The prophet Isaiah alluded to this period of time: “For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. *Nor more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.* They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of

the Lord, and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord" (Isaiah 65:17-25).

A happy ending

God's Holy Days and Festivals reveal a phase of His plan for mankind. The *Feast of Tabernacles* represents our sojourn in temporary tabernacles (bodies) until we are either resurrected or changed when Jesus returns. As the sixth step in this phase of God's Plan, the Feast of Tabernacles also symbolizes the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth.

The seventh and final step of this phase is the *Last Great Day*, which anticipates the second resurrection, the ensuing 100-year Great White Throne Judgment period, and eventually the transfer of God's throne to a transformed earth. Thereafter, a new phase of God's plan will begin. And we'll be an integral part of that Plan. What does it involve? What will we do? No one knows. Indeed, it's beyond our imagination (I Corinthians 2:6-9).

At the beginning of this article I said that God's plan has a happy ending. Let me rephrase that: the phase of God's plan pictured in His Holy Days and Festivals (beginning with Jesus' sacrifice on Passover and ending with the transfer of God's throne to a transformed earth) has a happy ending. But this is only a phase of God's Plan. His plan has no happy ending because it never ends. God is eternal. His plan is therefore eternal. And if we have God's Spirit and are thus His children, then we, too, will become immortal (in the first resurrection, when Jesus returns; not a moment earlier). How do I know this? Simple: I know the spiritual and prophetic significance of God's Holy Days and Festivals. And now, so do you!

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