



# PART I

GOD'S PATTERN  
FOR HIS PEOPLE

# INTRODUCTION



The seven major feasts set forth by Jehovah in the Old Testament book of Leviticus give a cadence, a pattern to the lives of the Jewish people. These holy days reassure the celebrants of God's divine order, piety, and supreme worthiness. Jehovah cares for and watches over His people. The feasts have provided a thread of continuity for the Israelites from the moment of their escape from Egypt, as well as offering comfort, hope, and encouragement in times of trouble. The purpose of the seven observances is to turn the focus of the people to salvation and redemption through the Messiah. The significance of the feasts, however, reaches beyond the borders of the nation of Israel and circles the globe—wherever mankind needs a prophetic and redemptive message.

# CHAPTER 1



*And Abraham said, My son, God will provide  
himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so  
they went both of them together.*

GENESIS 22:8 KJV

The Old Testament book of Leviticus, chapter 23, introduces the seven feasts the children of Israel were to observe annually. In verse two, the word *feast* can be translated as the Hebrew word *mo'ed*.<sup>1</sup> This may be a bit confusing, as many tend to picture a festival as a large gathering complete with quantities of food and a carnival-like atmosphere. In actuality, the word has a much deeper meaning: appointed time or season, appointed place, appointed meeting. We first see *mo'ed* in Genesis 1:14 in reference to the establishment of seasons during the Creation. In Leviticus, it might be suggested that the phrase “ceremonial assembly” better

describes the essence of the word. The gatherings ordered by Jehovah may sometimes have called for a celebratory meal, but that was not the primary objective of the convocation. The function of these feasts was and is to provide a representation of God's plan—in a chosen time, a chosen place, and for a very precise purpose.

In verse six, another Hebrew word is used: *chag*, a derivative of the word *chagag*.<sup>2</sup> It means to “move in a circle; to march in a sacred procession, celebrate, dance, to keep a solemn feast.” God did not ordain the observing of the various festivals to give the Israelites seven occasions to party; rather, they were to be a framework for His plan of redemption for mankind. They were designed to show His chosen people a foreshadowing of the coming of the Messiah and His role in that plan.

## THE FEASTS INTRODUCED

Since God is a God of order, the feasts did not occur haphazardly, but annually and according to the Hebrew calendar: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. In Leviticus 23, the feasts appear in the following verses:

Passover—verse 5

Unleavened Bread—verse 6

Firstfruits—verse 10

Pentecost—verses 15–16

Feast of Trumpets—verse 24

Day of Atonement—verse 27

Feast of Tabernacles—verse 34

God's flawless order of events reveals His holiness and His demands that we worship Him in certain ways. First Chronicles 16:29 (NIV) reveals how we are to respond to Jehovah:

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Mankind cannot worship a holy God any other way—except through righteousness and holiness. Why? He requires that we worship according to His precepts. He is, after all, a God who demands order, and He reveals that to His people beginning in Genesis through the last chapter of Deuteronomy. A holy God commands respect and veneration, reverence in worship, and devout consecration. But what does it mean to worship God in the beauty of His holiness?

How can we mere mortals hope to be holy enough to worship Jehovah?

Dr. Jack Hayford, chancellor of The King's University in Van Nuys, California, provides an answer. He said:

I wondered how you got beautiful enough to worship God. The Bible, in speaking of the beauty of holiness, is speaking of a **beauty that flows out of worship**. The idea of worship is intended to **cultivate** something in us . . . . Now *this* is the beauty of worship.

That **in the presence** of a God of all holiness, we might come, even though there is so much insufficiency in us and things that make us feel unworthy. **As we worship**, He will come and touch us with His life and power, and as He does, **He qualifies us** for our tomorrows . . . . In the beauty of the holiness of worship, we come and see His awesome holiness, which is **His wholeness disposed in favor of our brokenness and inadequacy**. (Emphasis in the original.)<sup>3</sup>

## AN OUTLINE FOR WORSHIP

The institution of the seven major feasts was intended to cultivate within God's creation the desire to worship Him. The holy convocations were not only public; they were a memorial to Jehovah's deliverance and provision. The nation was called together in a sacred assembly to observe, to celebrate, and to praise their Creator. At each meeting, the people were reminded of what He had done for them in delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt and leading them to the land promised to Abraham and his offspring. Stories of Jehovah's deliverance in the desert, opening a pathway through the sea, fighting their battles, giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, toppling the walls of Jericho, and others were told and retold. (It must be remembered that, in early times, all knowledge was passed down from generation to generation only through the spoken word.) These festivals and feasts helped to reveal, underscore, and amplify this knowledge of how God desires mankind to worship Him. Within these accounts were valuable lessons on sin, judgment, faith, and forgiveness.

Seven is God's number of fullness, perfection, and completion. In Genesis 2:2-3 (NKJV), the importance of the number seven is stressed:

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Perhaps the most detailed showcase is found in the book of Revelation—sometimes referred to as the “Book of Sevens”—where God revealed to John seven churches, letters, spirits, lampstands, stars, seals, horns, angels, trumpets, thunders, crowns, plagues, golden bowls, and kings. In the seven feasts, we see the portrayal of death, deliverance, salvation, provision, praise, empowerment, and safety. Most of the feasts have fulfilled prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah; a few have not.

Over time and with the Diaspora, the festivals eventually became only a series of empty ceremonies and were subject to condemnation by the prophets, those men in Israel who were called upon to deliver God’s Word to the people. The prophet Isaiah delivered a scathing indictment to the Israelites in Isaiah 1:11–14 (NKJV):



“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.”

In 1 Samuel 15, God gave specific instructions to King Saul to destroy the Amalekites—sparing no one and no animal. Saul almost fulfilled Jehovah’s instructions; but being *almost* obedient is not being completely compliant. Rather than destroying everything in his path, Saul spared the Amalekite king and the best of the animals. When Samuel the prophet approached the Israelite encampment, he heard the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep. Marching into Saul’s presence, Samuel demanded to know why the

Israelite king had not followed God's direction. Like many a leader, Saul first blamed it on his troops and then tried to buy God's favor:

But they are going to sacrifice them to the Lord your God. We have destroyed everything else. 1 Samuel 15:15 NLT

Far from being pleased with Saul's response, Samuel had some harsh news for the ruler:

What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the Lord, he has rejected you as king . . . . Since you have rejected the Lord's command, he has rejected you as king of Israel. 1 Samuel 15:22–23, 26b NLT

Rebellion not only robbed Saul of his kingdom, it ultimately deprived the Israelites of their relationship with

Jehovah. Not all turned aside from worshiping God; not all were deprived of hearing His voice. Some remained faithful; some followed His precepts. Many, however, were left to wander aimlessly away from the One who loved them despite their sins. He would prove that love in the most unexpected of ways, and even then only a remnant would believe.

### THE SCARLET THREAD

The encounter between Rahab and the Israelite spies in Joshua 2:9 and their response in Joshua 2:18 (KJV) provides another illustration of the salvation offered by Jehovah:

And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you . . . Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

The scarlet cord suspended from Rahab's window was symbolic of her faith in the God of the Israelites, representative of her belief in the stories she had heard of His power and deliverance. She had not only chanced the loss of her life, but those of her family by hiding the Hebrew spies and providing a way of escape for them. Her reward was a place in the lineage of Christ as the mother of Boaz, the great-great-grandfather of David.

There is a scarlet thread interwoven through the pages of the Old Testament. It, and the prophecies also contained therein, present an unimpeachable picture of the Messiah from birth to death and resurrection. His birth in Bethlehem was foretold in Micah 5:2 (KJV):

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Messiah was to be born of a virgin:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and

bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14 KJV

In other scriptures, we read that there would be a fore-runner (Malachi 4:5–6; Isaiah 40:3); the Messiah would be rejected by men and crucified with criminals (Isaiah 53). Psalm 22 presents a detailed picture of the crucifixion. These are only a few of the more than three hundred prophecies given hundreds and sometimes thousands of years before the coming of the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled each one during his thirty-three years on Earth. He would be welcomed by some, rejected by others: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” John 1:12 KJV.

Jesus completed the Feast of the Passover when He was crucified. When He was placed in a tomb borrowed from Joseph of Arimathaea, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was realized. The Feast of Firstfruits was satisfied when Jesus rose from the dead; and the Feast of Pentecost was accomplished following Christ’s ascension in Acts chapter 2 as the approximately 120 gathered in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit. Only three feasts remain to be fulfilled in the present day: Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles.

God's plan did not begin with the birth of a baby in Bethlehem; it began before He laid out the foundation of the world and spoke it into being. Jehovah provided a perfect picture of the plan when He gave Moses the design for the feast days to be observed by the Israelites. He wanted them to see the shadow of what was to come, and revealed it to prophets, priests, and kings long before the angel appeared to a young virgin named Mary. The prophet Amos inscribed:

Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless  
He reveals His secret to His servants the  
prophets. Amos 3:7 NKJV

God's timing is never random, something left to the whim of mankind. No, it is the meticulous unfolding of a covenant plan that began in Genesis and will conclude with the last verse of Revelation. In all sixty-six books, we are presented with one snapshot after another of the revelation of Jehovah's grace and mercy and His plan of redemption through Jesus, the Messiah.

In succeeding chapters, we will examine each feast, how it was established, the meaning associated with a particular festival, and how it points to those prophecies concerning the Messiah.