

The
Old Testament
Religious Festivals

Numbers 28—29

Sjirk Bajema

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Worship Then & Now

A Series Of Studies in Numbers Chapters 28 - 29

Introduction

To many Christians today these two chapters near the end of Numbers will be quite an unknown quantity. While they may well be familiar with much of the New Testament this cannot be said of much of the Old Testament. Certainly they will have heard of some of the stirring historical narratives – the stories of Samson, David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lion’s Den, and so on. But the details of three-quarters of God’s Word are quite foreign to them.

This is even more seen when it comes to the specific details of the public worship of God’s old covenant people. There is an extensive difference between what made up public worship then to what we have now. But to dismiss any consideration of what the Lord’s prescriptions for his people were in the past would be to miss the universal principles in worship – principles which now in many Christian churches are far from being recognised.

J.A. Thompson wrote in the *New Bible Commentary* (3rd Edition, 1970, IVP) on these chapters, “What one needs to do in these cases is to recognize behind each expression of worship the great principles. These remain and find newer expressions in the course of time. The ancient Tabernacle and its rituals and feasts gave testimony to the belief that God was in the midst of his people, that he could be approached, and that with him in the midst the people ought to order their lives in accordance with the fact that God the holy One dwelt among them. The whole system demonstrated to Israel, and to men of all ages, that sinful men may approach God through a consecrated mediatorial priesthood, that constant cleansing for sins was possible, that constant guidance for life was available and that great saving acts of God in centuries past could be remembered by noble festivals and feasts such as the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

“With the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the necessity for all the temporary forms, shadows of the true (*cf.* Heb. 10:1), was past. He was at once the sacrifice for all sins and the High Priest who offered the sacrifice. By his Spirit he guides his people today. His saving work wrought at the cross may be remembered each time men gather at the Lord’s Table ‘to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’. Yet the ‘shadows’ and ‘symbols’ of the Old Testament system, if understood as pictures of the true, have much to teach the modern Christian and they should be studied for the light they give on the great underlying principles of God’s ways with men.”

Read Hebrews 10:1-18. In which way do these verses help us understand the situation for the Israelites?

Study 1

You are His – Every Day & Every Way!

Numbers 28:1-8

1. How do you think you should prepare yourself for your future on the new heavens and the new earth?

How would you expect to live in heaven? Think about it. Perhaps thoughts come to your mind of a place of peace and joy. You've been told it's a very special place. But exactly what it will be like you're a bit lost on.

To think more of what heaven will be like, though, will help us. And especially to try and understand the Lord's pattern for paradise in the Bible, will make us able to live more fruitfully in this world.

Maybe that doesn't seem to gel with you. You're a practical, hard-working person. You don't want to get all wrapped up in this right now. You don't want to be one of those of whom it's said, "He's so heavenly-minded, he's of no earthly use!"

Still, you know you're going there, don't you? I mean, you believe. And knowing that it's actually going to be the place you end up, you'd want to be ready, wouldn't you?

Indeed, this is how Scripture so often encourages us to live. We are constantly exhorted to look up. And not only because we're going to be there one day but especially because of the One who's up there right now.

According to the writer of Hebrews, there is a proper heavenly-mindedness. This is what enabled Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to live by faith as tent-dwelling nomads in Canaan.

Now, you might be wondering what this has got to do with this passage. Aren't these verses just another in the many lists of Mosaic regulations? Aren't these simply those rules that were for God's people before Jesus came? But these words are also preparatory. They were to help get the people ready for a whole new future, just like we are so close to heaven. You see, physical Israel would soon be in the Promised Land. The very place they could be so blessed by their covenant God - the land flowing with milk and honey. Wouldn't that thought have motivated the Hebrews to look to the Lord even more? He had led them so far already. And he was going to keep looking after them – surely that would have made them so thankful! They would be so motivated to do things his way!

However, the history of Israel tells a completely different story. From a people who were given so much, the Lord received so little in return. Indeed, to study the way the Church of Christ is through the ages, is to see this. Time and again it was only his grace that allowed that to be. This is what we ourselves show with being so wrapped up with the things of this world it would be a real shock if the Lord came tomorrow. We are not honestly ready for heaven.

You Are The Lord's

So let's turn again to him. Let's learn once more the way we ought to be. Being heavenly-minded is actually of the most earthly use! Because that is living out here the way he is up there.

2. Read Numbers 28:1-8. What does this tell us about how the Lord's people are to look to him?

At the beginning of Number 28 we see the way God wants us to look up. "The LORD said to Moses, 'Give this command to the Israelites and say to them: "See that you present to me..."

"To me" the Lord God exhorts. He who stooped to love, looks to see that love returned. And if anything would typify heaven it would most definitely be the love from all within. That's his Family – the Church – after all!

It is what we know in a loving marriage. Husband and wife are united. And over and over again they know this is the best way to be. In fact, it's the only way to be!

This is what the Lord lays before his people then. He says to them that there cannot be any other way. Gordon Keddie comments, “the Lord says that worship is to be offered, ‘to me’: not to whomever you may regard as your ‘god,’ not to whatever may be called ‘God’ by somebody somewhere, still less to ‘the man upstairs’! Worship is to be given exclusively, and with the utmost sincerity and personal reverence, to the living God who reveals himself in his Word. ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’ says the Lord in the First Commandment.”

We read that in Exodus 20 verse 3. And Hebrews 11 verse 6 confirms this. It says, “without faith it’s impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Just think, what glory awaits! And it’s all because you are the Lord’s! “Be mine” declares the Lord. It’s a command. You have to do it.

But surely it’s no burden to be his dearly beloved? For has God ever told you to do more than what he will also give you the grace to be able to do? He who has already done so much in your life isn’t going to stop now! So let’s be his! Then we’ll have him even more!

You Are The Lord’s When Your Day Starts And Finishes

This is about how we are to be every single day. As one commentator says of this passage, “In the daily burnt-offering the congregation of Israel, as a congregation of the LORD, was to sanctify its life, body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord its God.”

4. Why does Moses begin his detailing of Israel’s public worship with the daily offerings rather than with one of the more grand festivals? Is there a divine system in this pattern?

This is pointing the Church to her Head. Some might call it positive reinforcement, but really it’s living out consistently what we are in our God - this is faith in action.

It’s still true for us today.

The worship for the Old Testament saints was through the shadow – a pointing forward – of offering a lamb at each sunrise and sunset. Yet the fulfilment with the Lamb of God himself coming hasn’t taken away from each day beginning

and finishing with him. Indeed, we have every reason for being more faithful in this. What they saw dimly in the future has become for us the most vivid light in Jesus Christ!

Looking for someone you haven't yet met is awkward. Even if you have a rough idea of what he looks like yet the reality is always a bit different. A photo doesn't tell how tall he is. But when you do finally meet him, you won't forget him! And because Jesus has come, we have in our hearts the proof that we'll know him that much more when he returns.

5. What do you think would be the danger for Israel if she did not follow these daily offerings to the Lord?

6. What is the danger for you if you do not have a daily time of spiritual devotion?

So there's no excuse for not beginning and ending the day with your Lord. You don't know him any other way, do you?

And then it's most appropriate that this fire-offering that made up the daily, regular offering, was basic to the whole sacrificial system. This was what counted most of all. That's why it is here first of all!

Think about it: How could your worship of God on Sunday have any meaning at all, unless it comes from your worship every day? Then we appreciate Sunday as the special day that it is, as much, and even more, than the Israelites did with their Sabbath.

There are tests that have shown that the last thing you do before you sleep stays with you in your sleep. And don't we know that the way we start the day makes all the difference to the rest of the day?

Have you made your sacrifice this morning? Will there be the offering in prayer tonight? Is it upon the willing altar of your life that the pure flame of his fire is cleansing?

7. Some say religion is one of those things you should keep privately to yourself. In other words, you keep it to yourself in your home. How does Numbers 28:1-8 challenge this and stir us to live for him in everything?

You Are The Lord's With Everything You Have

Look at what is happening in these verses. There isn't only the one lamb at sunrise and the other at sunset. Verse 5 says that they come "together with a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a fourth of a hin of oil from pressed olives."

And verse 7 continues this. It says, "The accompanying drink offering is to be a fourth of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb."

It's quite some meal being made for the Lord! And don't think he's doing this to keep them out of mischief. Actually, this is the most total claim of who they are! There must be a wholeness in what you give your Saviour God. Not some passing acknowledgement of a familiar tradition. That kind of custom doesn't demand anything from us. But what is here must have our constant focus.

8. Read Psalm 51. Which verses there show us that it is only when we realise the meaning underneath the ceremony that we are truly blessed?

Anyone can come to church. To do what you've always done comes easily enough. But will you enter those doors with everything you have? Are your footsteps those that make the sound of trepidation? Do your legs weigh that much heavier because it is your Saviour and Lord himself that you come to meet? You haven't just turned up there. You thought about it and you prayed for it. And you come ready for it. You have dressed appropriately. And you will give accordingly.

I mean, that you are actually physically able to come is because the Heavenly Father has given to you first of all. It is the Holy Spirit and his Word which brought you to see this spiritually. No wonder that every day the priests offered up bread and drink to the Lord. And how much don't they point to the One who is the bread of life and the living water?

These are sacrifices in our text. They show that our sin has to be paid for. That's

why they point to the one who would be the ultimate sacrifice for all our sin. That's the wrong we do every day and in every way! You are the Lord's with everything you have because it's all what he has given to you. You know that. And you also know how much he loves that you show that!

9. Do you feel something is missing when you don't have a daily devotion time? Explain why you are like that and what happens if you don't keep up regular prayer and reading of God's Word:

10. Why do you think it pleases God that we commune with him like this?

You Are The Lord's For That's What He Loves

God has created us to take delight in us. He wants us to please him. That's what the Westminster Shorter Catechism means when it says that our chief aim is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Because it's nothing to do with us! It's all about him!

In our text this thought comes through three times. Verse 2 ends in stating about the offering that it is to be "an aroma pleasing to me."

Verse 6 states it again. It says, "This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma..." And verse 8 comes back to it again. It concludes this passage, saying, "This is an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD."

It keeps coming back! And it is throughout the rest of Scripture as well. Not only does this concept occur in describing these physical sacrifices in the Old Testament, it also comes out loud and clear in the New Testament.

That aroma is what the covenant God truly loves! He so much sought after it from his people – the nation of Israel – in the Old Testament. And when it did not come from them, he gave of himself so that in the New Testament Church what he loved to receive would come!

11. Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. How do these verses affirm Numbers 28:2,6 & 8?

The sense of smell can either attract or repel. But to know that from the rotting carcasses, that we were, the Lord would yet bring forth his most sweet smelling fragrance, is to see so vividly what privilege you and I have!

Aren't these words in Numbers then such a clear and wonderful pointing to how our covenant God – Yahweh – would completely provide in the Son of his love, Jesus Christ? He alone was and is the aroma perfectly pleasing to the Lord God. So just think of how much in Jesus our lives are the pure fire God loves!

Fire also figures prominently in our text. It points to what God takes up to himself. And that's what pleases him.

Is your life being burnt up for the Great Lover of your soul? Are you brought to your knees everyday and in all kinds of ways? Have you laid your all before the One who alone can take that load?

Then those words of Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4 will surely be true for you for he says there in verse 4, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

To sacrifice truly as an Old Testament believer, in the way described in our text, took faith. It was so easy, as later history showed, to turn away from the clear word of the Lord.

And to be properly prepared now takes faith too. In our age also it's easy to turn aside from the Lord. But it won't be easy to live apart from him. For then you'll find out what happened when Israel of old went astray, in your own life.

That's not what you were made to do. That is not being his – every day and in every way!

12. What have you resolved to do because of this study? How does the diagram *The cycles of Israel's worship (1)* help you in this focus?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God that his Son was the perfect sacrifice

Confession: Those times we have slipped or lapsed in our daily devotions.

Thanksgiving: No longer are there sacrifices. We can see the whole picture now.

Supplication: For the Christians who cannot freely meet together – and who even fear to do daily devotions.

Study 2

You Are His – That’s What Sunday Says!

Numbers 28:9-10

1. Read Numbers 28:1-10. Why do you think one day in seven being set aside especially for public worship is crucial in a believer’s life?

If you go through the last four books of Moses you will find that the same things are described several times. You have the Ten Commandments given twice. You have other rules that appear again - and perhaps even again. John Calvin structured his commentaries on the four books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as a ‘harmony’. That meant he grouped all the similar passages together, even though they might be in different books. When it comes to the Sabbath day, and the worship to occur on that day, we see the same. There are other passages which address this. And when it came to the specific worship on this day Leviticus 23 verse 3 says much the same. Except that it isn’t exactly the same. For when you compare them more closely, we see that Leviticus 23 is more directly addressed to Israel as a whole while Numbers 28 and 29 speaks to the Priests. The detail in our text is actually like an instruction book.

Now that might seem strange happening in Numbers. It’s usually Leviticus we associate as the book with ‘Rules for the Priests.’

But here we need to consider the context. For this part of Numbers is chronologically getting very close to the Promised Land. They don't have long to go now. And so the Lord spells it out for them in this particular way. It is the pattern here which more than matches the pagan prescription for religion. These chapters detail things so that they should be quite taken up with the worship of the Lord. Indeed, it would be a worship and service of him that demanded of them everything! They are his!

There Is Something About The Seventh Day

We have seen that they are meant to be the Lord's with what we heard about the daily offerings. And now it's shown in the Sabbath day offerings. Verse 9 clearly begins with this. "On the Sabbath day," it states.

2. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What is similar between these two passages? What is different? Why do you think it is different?

The Sabbath day is the seventh day in the week. The day proscribed to be kept as a holy day for the Lord in Exodus 20, the verses 8 till 11, and in Deuteronomy 5, the verses 12 till 15.

It is interesting, though, that the fourth commandment in each of these accounts has a different rationale. The reason given for the Sabbath day in Exodus 20 is that it was the day God rested from his work of creation. And the reason given for it in Deuteronomy 5 is that God has taken them out slavery in Egypt with his mighty hand. This day became the constant thanksgiving to the Lord for his creating and recreating them.

3. Read Psalm 139:1-16. How does this connect with Exodus 20:8-11?

4. Quickly glean over Psalm 78. How does this psalm connect us with Deuteronomy 5:12-15?

So, this special day was because they were all made by him. That's what David acknowledges in Psalm 139. And this special day is because they have been remade by him. That's what Asaph in Psalm 78 details as he relates the Lord's redeeming them from Egypt and his guiding them through the wilderness. The Sabbath testifies to them that God saved them to worship him.

On the Sabbath day their daily worship is added to with a double offering at the tabernacle. It was an offering that, in addition to the sunrise and sunset offerings to the Lord, would probably have taken place at midday. That certainly claims the day for the Lord!

For, then, in the wilderness, all would have come to the outer court where the offering was made on the Altar of Burnt Offering. They would be there looking upon that intricately made altar, as it's described in Exodus 27. The altar made of acacia wood, with a height of one and a half metres and a width and length of two and a half metres. The altar with horns on each corner and completely overlaid with bronze.

They would see the utensils, its grating, and the bronze ring at each of the corners. There were also those poles of acacia wood for it, also overlaid with bronze. And the altar was to be hollow, made out of boards, so that it could be carried with them.

Then there was the courtyard itself. It was bordered around with curtains and posts and bases, with silver hooks and bands on the posts. And it's all top-quality linen and purple and scarlet yarn.

In that setting they were to take the time for a double offering. That would take twice as long. But then they weren't working that day. And they had received a double portion of the manna the day before.

So it was the Lord's Day – the day they especially met with him. This was the day when everything they did reminded them about him. This was the seventh day.

It is no coincidence that all the feasts of the whole year formed a cycle arranged according to the number 'seven'. The number which had its starting-point and centre in the Sabbath.

So the whole Hebrew year was regulated according to the division of time established at the creation into weeks, months, years, and periods of years. It was a pattern that went from the weekly Sabbath to the monthly Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and the year of Jubilee. One commentator notes that, "into this cycle of holy periods, regulated by the number seven, and ever expanding into larger and larger circles, there was embodied the whole rotation of annually recurring festivals, established to commemorate the mighty works of the Lord for the preservation and inspiration of his people."

He goes on to point out that this was done in three ways. The first of these is that the number of yearly festivals added up to exactly seven, of which the two leading feasts lasted seven days.

In the second place he says that in all the feasts, no matter whether they were for one day or for seven days, there were only seven days that were to be observed with sabbatical rest and a holy meeting. And, thirdly, he notes that the seven feasts were formed into two large festal circles, each of which consisted of an introductory feast, the main feast of seven days, and a closing feast of one day.

Now, that's some detail! But it all comes back to seven. The Lord clearly lays out how it must all come back to him! While we now have the Spirit in our hearts, because of what Christ has done, they then had to be guided from the outside. It was in following this pattern of seven that their faith was blessed and built up. Every time there was a revival in the Old Testament Church this is what they went back to.

There Is Something To Set Apart This Day

Well, there is something about the seventh day alright. But, then, there is also something to set this apart.

Here we consider what the text describes as being done on the Sabbath and when it was done. Because we read in verse 9 that they were to “make an offering of two lambs a year old, without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil.”

Comparing this with the daily offerings described above the text, in verses 3 till 8, we see that, apart from the drink offering, this was exactly double the daily offerings. And it was to also have double the effect because of the time it would take and when it would be done.

5. When you compare the special offerings for the Sabbath and add to that the regular daily offerings performed what impression are you left with?

6a. When do you think they would have carried out the Sabbath day offerings?

6b. How do you think this helps us as to when we should have our worship services?

The morning and evening sacrifices would have begun and ended the day with the Lord. We have seen how much they guide God's people to be focused on him all the time. But with the Sabbath day offerings the whole day itself is being taken up with resting and recreating in him. Just as we all need a break physically from our weekly work, so then we also need to have a break spiritually. But it is not a break to do what we want. Then it wouldn't be spiritual at all! Rather, this is a day when both the physical and spiritual come together in a special way.

This is why the strongest evidence is for the Sabbath offerings being carried out at midday. So it would be three times this day that the people gathered together to worship the Lord their God. Thrice they assembled. Three times the call went out to the Church then to join in the public worship of Yahweh.

The impact of this was brought home to me by what someone said to me some years ago. In a meeting, he noted that nowhere does the Lord command us to worship him twice on his day. That's true. But not the way he thought - because sometimes God calls us to worship him more than twice, as we see here.

The whole day is his, isn't it? So as often as we are called to worship that's as many times as we ought to be together in public worship. If the Lord is there where his people are gathered together in his Name, as Matthew 18 verse 20 says, then that's where we have to be.

This also addresses the growing practice there is amongst churches to have a service on the Saturday night. For example, when Christmas was on a Sunday recently, many churches didn't have any services at all! Because what they are really doing is to leave the whole Sunday free for the people to do whatever they want to do. And then no day is his - for your daily worship becomes worthless if it's not looking towards your weekly worship.

What happens on Sunday should be the highlight of your week, because it is doing what pleases God most of all. And when you do that you will have your blessing too. Moses in Deuteronomy is quite clear about that. But only because the Lord is first!

There Is Something This Day Does To All Days

Exodus 31, when it commands observance of the Sabbath, says in verse 17 that it was on this day that the Lord ceased from work and was refreshed. There is no doubt that this is a day set apart. And neither is there any doubt that this is a day that gives you a whole new start. You will receive tremendous blessings for every day.

This is what the prophets later describe. In Isaiah 58, the verses 13 and 14, we read, “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way, and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD.”

But especially we note how Isaiah ends verse 14. Because it is there the Lord is speaking. He promises, “and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

There is also that scene we met in Psalm 134. The service of the priests was described there in verse 1 as ministering “by night in the house of the LORD.” For as long as the faithful worship of the Lord was found in his people so long would the blessing of the Lord be there. This is indeed what verse 3 confirms in that psalm, for there we see the Lord blessing those so looking to him.

7. Read Isaiah 56:1-8. How does this passage bring out the extent of God’s blessing the keeping of the Sabbath Day?

8. Read Mark 2:23-3:6. How does this help tell us what we should and shouldn’t do on the Christian Sabbath Day?

When you faithfully keep the Sabbath you find the true meaning to your life. And how obvious isn’t that in an age and a place where Christians have so much deserted this command of the Lord? Because they’re doing as they please. It’s a day that’s no different to them. They don’t get a break! Now, there is the other extreme too. The Pharisees showed this in Jesus’ time with the many extra rules they laid upon the Sabbath. And church history gives us examples since then of Christians who have imposed man-made regulations on top of what the Lord commanded. They don’t get a break either.

In all this we see that the Lord knows us better than we know ourselves. Constantly throughout Scripture he tells us that he's thinking of us. Don't we hear that with what Jesus says about the Sabbath in Mark 2? In verse 27 he addresses the Pharisees by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Because what is this one day in seven apart from recognising what God has done in creating and re-creating his people? Take away what we are in him, and nothing else fits in! No wonder Christianity seems so ineffectual in this place!

This is why Jesus went on in verse 28 of Mark 2 to say, "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." It's him that this day is really all about. When we hear about these offerings being sacrificed on the day Israel remembered their being saved from Egypt, we're immediately drawn to the far greater salvation done by Christ on the cross. That's what Old Testament Israel looked forward to every time they assembled together on the last day of the week. Even though the sight of the saints was then dim, they knew the Messiah was coming. While they lived in shadows, they knew the substance was coming.

They called that the 'Day of the Lord.' That would be a day when the Law that had been on the outside would be permanently written on the inside. Instead of what was written for the priests under the old covenant to do we have what the ultimate high priest of all has done in the new. In the words of Joel chapter 3, that would be the day that began a new day.

9. Why do we now have the one day in seven on the first day of the week instead of the last day of the week?

10. How does 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and Revelation 1:10 help us here?

We live on the other side of that Day. Jesus Christ fulfilled in himself all the offerings that were made on the Sabbath Day under the old covenant. Because of his doing and dying and rising from the dead on the first day of the week we live under a new covenant. Now the Christian Sabbath day is the first day of the week because it is the beginning of a whole new age.

And yet we live in that Day, because while Christ has come he is still to come again. So every Christian Sabbath we look forward to that Day. For while it's true we worship now on Sunday because of Christ's rising from the dead, it's also the first day of the week because eternity is yet to come.

11. How has this helped you to appreciate what God has given you in the Christian Sabbath Day? In what way has the diagram *The cycles of Israel's worship (2)* helped in this focus?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for his wisdom in the structure he gave Old Testament Israel which his Son fulfilled

Confession: For when we have not honoured the Lord's Day.

Thanksgiving: For the provision of Sunday for our resting and re-creating in the Lord

Supplication: For the revival of our nation and world back to the Lord's pattern for the week.

Study 3

You Are His – Time Itself Tolls It!

Numbers 28:11-15

1. Share with the group a time when you were particularly struck by the concept of time itself. What did that occasion particularly bring home to you?

We can easily take time for granted. And when I say “time” I don’t only mean how we spend each day, but also the type of calendar we use. Because, how often do we think about that?

Well, unless we knew about it, we wouldn’t think about it at all. And who of us knows about the kind of calendar we use? Ah, you say, it’s the Gregorian calendar we use - the calendar that has 365 days and irregular months. But this is the Roman calendar, also known as the Western Calendar. It is a calendar based on the earth’s rotation around the sun. And it has been with us in one shape or another since 45 B.C. Its most recent adaptation is called the Gregorian Calendar and it occurred in 1582.

Before that, however, the common calendar was the lunar one. That was more consistent than the Gregorian calendar. For with that calendar the months were always the same length. Because that calendar doesn’t correspond with the sun, though, it means that the lunar month which starts on a particular day in a month this year will fall on a different day next year. We find that out with the date for Easter. Each year it’s on a different date. Sometimes the difference can be as much as three weeks! This is because Easter is calculated on the lunar calendar.

It is because of this that we know Passover occurs in the same week as Easter. And we can tie down Ascension and Pentecost to exact days.

So, strictly speaking, the Sabbath that the Orthodox Jews insist on keeping and the Seventh Day Adventists make a big fuss about often isn’t actually on the proper day! Because the lunar calendar would have it falling on other days of our week just as much as it actually falls on Saturday.

Mind you, I’m sure they’d have some explanation for this. Like, for example, you shouldn’t be too literal about these things! Anyway, we divert a little here. The point is that the ancient Hebrews had a different Calendar. This was a calendar which had for its beginning the first day of each month. In comparison, the beginning of our calendar is the 1st January. That equates to a full cycle around the sun.

The ancient Hebrew’s calendar, however, matched up with the cycle of the moon. So when just the barest crescent of the moon showed up in the night sky it was the new moon.

There are some interesting parallels that we can have here. For what is it that we often do as we’re about to begin a new year? Don’t we have those traditions encouraging reflection upon where we are and where we’re going? We talk about our New Year’s resolutions. We sing ‘auld lang syne’, which is a toast to those you’ve known in the past – those who are dear to you. Well, here the Lord lays down the traditions which will keep his people focussed upon him.

2. What would be the specifically Christian traditions during the year that help focus believers on their Lord?

3. Read Colossians 2:6-23. How does this passage tell us of what is the vital aspect to our time – and, indeed, to every period in human history? Where in this passage does it point us beyond these Old Testament sacrifices to their fulfilment?

4. Read Numbers 28:1-15. What similarities are there to the daily and Sabbath day offerings? What is different? How do you think the differences mattered in regards to the pagan new moon worship?

The New Moon Starts Them Looking Up

In the land they are about to enter, Israel will find people who also celebrate the new moon. In fact, the pagan rituals there were quite involved at that time. They had a whole multitude of astral deities they worshipped then in superstitious adoration. Because that's what it was – superstition! They did it out of fear.

Now, what they did may have seemed to be quite free. They got into all kinds of drunken and immoral behaviour. But how much don't we know that that actually traps people? There is no joy there, only that terrible tormenting of realising so soon after physically and spiritually that this gives no peace. Indeed, how often weren't their gods seen to be at war with each other?

For God's people, however, there wasn't to be any of this superstition. This was no Friday the 13th type superstition. There is nothing to be scared about here. This was actually giving this new month over to the Lord. It was all about loving the One who loves you so much!

Like we do with having a public holiday on New Year's Day so this day was to have definite place within the covenant community. Because, like the Sabbath day offerings, this offering on the first day of the month was additional to the daily offerings.

Yet, it was even more than the Sabbath day offerings. For if the Sabbath day offerings at mid-day put the focus of the day clearly on the Lord and his will for that day, imagine how much this even bigger offering turned the people to the Lord. There are more than two lambs here! Verse 11 says there are two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old! So, there were seven lambs – all of them male – and the ram and the two young bulls. This is equal to the biggest offering of any time in their church year! The Lord takes seriously his Lordship over time.

Indeed, isn't this what we say with the acronym A.D. when we speak of a particular year. For example, this year is the year 2017, A.D.. The letters A.D., stand for 'Anno Domini'. This is Latin for "in the year of our Lord." It recognises that our present era of time is based on the traditional date for the birth of Jesus Christ.

Imagine what a contrast the people of Israel would have been with the nations around them, when they worshipped like this? They were following a clear and solemn pattern in looking up to their covenant God, while those around become completely intoxicated in their selfish pagan rituals.

It is no surprise, then, that, over time, this day became almost like a feast day. Trade became suspended on this day, as Amos 8 verse 5 says. The deeply religious Israelites went to hear the prophets teach this day, as 2nd Kings 4 verse 23 tells us. Many families and households presented yearly thank-offerings on this day, which 1st Samuel 20 verses 6 and 29 details. And even later still, the most devout remembered this day by fasting (Judith 8:6 – Judith is one of the books found in the Apocrypha, an historical but uninspired set of books found in the Roman Catholic Bible versions).

So they went so far as to break their fasts to eat, because it so much resembled the Sabbath. This is what the prophets speak about, as Isaiah (1:13), Hosea (2:13), and Ezekiel (46:1) state.

On the new moon day, God's people looked up. They laid themselves before the One who holds everything in his hand. As the psalmist says in Psalm 89 verse 37, the moon is "the faithful witness in the sky." And in Psalm 104 verse 19, he says, "The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down."

So, as well as starting and ending each day worshipping the Lord; as well as ending each week coming together before him; they also took this other time – the beginning of their earthly time – to look up to him.

5. In the monthly offerings, as well as the two lambs, there were two young bulls, a ram, five extra lambs, and more fine flour and wine offered up. What would that have done for the people of Israel as they participated in these over against the pagan new moon worship?

6. How does the one male goat presented to the Lord as a sin offering add a completely different element here?

7. Read Psalm 40. Where do we see in this psalm the connection with the sin offering?

The New Moon Keeps Them Opening Up

Did you notice what else different is happening on this day? In fact, this other different thing is a major difference altogether! For the bulls and the ram, and the extra five lambs, were more than before. But they were still burnt offerings to the Lord. Now, though, there is another kind of offering – a ‘sin’ offering. That’s what the male goat in verse 15 is said to be.

The number of burnt offerings have lifted this day on a higher level than the daily offerings and the Sabbatical offerings, because the new moon starts them looking up. But now this other offering has them opening up what they are within. For the ongoing worship of the Lord couldn’t be that pleasing aroma without this confession of their sin. Psalm 51 is quite clear that the heart of true worship is humbled hearts.

This would be particularly seen with one of their annual feasts but it’s also here because no time period can be without it. In fact, to miss it out or to not do it from the heart means we would be cutting ourselves off from the Lord. So important is this that in Leviticus 4 the sin offering where an equivalent animal is used, the offering is made for when one of their leaders sinned unintentionally. When that man has broken one of God’s commands by omission this is the offering that has to be made.

We can take it then that this offering is on behalf of the sins of all of Israel done unintentionally. If it were done intentionally there's a whole range of other offerings to be made. And then there is the punishment that needs to be meted out as well.

So the new month begins with this recognition that we have sinned – not only knowingly but also unknowingly. We are so inadequate we must confess what we don't know we have done wrong as well as that which we do know.

You can see how everything is put in the Lord's light. On our own we would only slip away from him. Then we would be in the dark!

But this keeps us humble before him. Then they can truly be blessed, for no one who is full of himself can honestly worship this way. This is what David said in Psalm 40. He took it to the heart of the matter. In verse 8 he prayed, "To do your will, O God, is my desire; your law is within my heart."

But here is where there is the fundamental difference between the ancient saints and us today. The point at which they were with the Lord was very much wrapped up in where their leaders stood before him. Or should I say, if their leaders bowed before him?

That's why these offerings, extensive though they were, could only be shadows of the things that were to come. Colossians 2 verse 17 is clear about that. For the substance is found in Christ.

We can use an analogy here – a comparison. You see, the moon's light is only reflected sunlight. And it's only a very partial reflection even at the best of times. In the same way the new moon offerings are only a small thing compared with when the Son himself would come! Malachi 4:2 says of that time, "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall."

Those offerings are only a shadow. No matter the quantities of the offerings made they were nothing compared with the ultimate offering of himself Christ will make! Even though there were 113 bulls, 32 rams, 1086 lambs, over a ton of flour, and a thousand bottles of oil and wine the priests offered every year it all paled into insignificance in the light of the Son. He takes every sin that ever there was, or will be, and nails it to the cross!

8. We have seen that the ancients were dependent on following closely the prescriptions in the law and having godly leadership in order to do that. Does this mean that somehow they lacked something from the Lord in comparison with us of the new covenant age?

9. What did keeping to the Lord God's framework then do for them?

10. How do we keep to the Lord's framework for looking to him today?

Those ancients weren't sold short. The Lord gave them what they needed when they needed it if they in faith obeyed his Word. Then they were richly blessed in a physical way that gives us a foretaste of what we may have spiritually now, and certainly what we will have physically and spiritually upon the new heavens and the new earth!

In the time of this passage, they were being well prepared for taking possession of the Promised Land. By dedicating all their time to the Lord, he would bless them in this land flowing with milk and honey. But as soon as they took their eyes off the Lord, if they were to fall into those pagan ways, then every day would be a curse.

Moses in Psalm 90 verse 12 prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It was by keeping to the Lord's days that they would grow in knowing God and doing his will. Going the other way only meant your days were definitely numbered!

But the exhortation comes to us also. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 warned us about this. He says in the verses 15 and 16, "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

Of course Paul didn't mean that time itself is bad, but he was talking about the danger of the world we live in.

We need to think about how we spend our time. And then think about how the Lord could find you if he came back at any time. Would you always be found doing his will? Or would you quickly switch off that program you were watching, hide away that magazine or book you were reading, or suddenly stop whatever else you were doing?

If you had to do that, you wouldn't be redeeming the time for the Lord. It is all his time, isn't it? And aren't you his – all the time?

11. How has this study helped you appreciate the time God has placed you in? In what way has the diagram *The cycles of Israel's worship (3)* helped in this focus?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for the gift of time and his control of all of our time.

Confession: Acknowledge that we have not always used the time he gives us in a wise way.

Thanksgiving: Thank God that tomorrow is another day and so the Lord gives us new opportunities to serve him.

Supplication: Plead for us to put into place a firm discipline with time and to use whatever time we can for prayer, reading God's Word, meditating upon the things of him, and come together in worship of him and fellowship with his own.

Study 4

You Are His – His Deliverance Proves It!

Number 28:16-25

1. As a New Zealander what particular day of the year stands out for you? Why does it have such significance for you as a citizen of this land?

In the life of every nation there is a special day at least once a year. This is a day when the special identity of that country is remembered.

For some it is their Independence Day. That commemorates when they were able to throw off their colonial masters. For others it may be the date that their land was first settled. For others still, their national day is the anniversary of when a treaty was signed acknowledging the rights of the natives of that country. That day is a public holiday.

There will be unique events organised for that day. And it will specifically focus on how that has made them the people they are today – whether Americans, Kiwis, Portuguese, Taiwanese, or Aussies!

Old Testament Israel had such a day too. This was a day which certainly celebrated their freedom from foreign oppression. But it wasn't a liberation done through some of their own countrymen. For it was God Himself who in the tenth plague against Egypt killed all of their first born eldest male offspring – animal and human. He saved his people and those others who feared him through their painting the blood of year old male lambs upon the side and tops of the doorframes of their houses. Exodus chapter 12 tells us that as God's Church then looked to him in that act of worship, he blessed it with redemption.

What a salvation it was too! That very night the Lord rescued his people from the land of slavery, the house of bondage. They were free – free to now serve the Lord their God.

There we see the difference this day is to all those other national days. Because those earthly nations celebrate a freedom of certain rights and privileges their citizens have. This day, though, means that Old Testament Israel had no rights but simply the privilege to witness to the Lord God through its worshipping and serving him.

Now, in the passage for our study, we are about to hear of what would be done by the priests over the next seven days. But let's notice what first of all happens on the evening of the fourteenth day. This is the Lord's Passover referred to in verse 16.

It was the remembering of this event privately that happened on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. Deuteronomy 16 verse 6 says that in their families they must celebrate it when the sun goes down, on the anniversary of the departure from Egypt. And that's certainly what was detailed in Exodus 12. There is some detail there as to what happened on the first Passover and how that is to be remembered.

2. Read Numbers 28:16-25. Where do we find the early account of what is remembered here? Read that passage out. Why could this be considered a special day for Israel?

3. What would be the equivalent day for God's covenant people today? Which Scriptural passage supports your view on this?

This Feast Recalls The Lord's Passing over

They celebrate the Passover on the second Sabbath of the first month. Then the next seven days are set aside to really bring home to them what that event involved. Because they were, in a way, reliving it. For seven days they ate their bread without yeast in it.

While yeast may make the bread taste nice, it took more time then to bake the bread. So it would have been a week without the women having to get up early in the morning, and work for at least three hours to get the baking done.

For they would first let the bread rise with the yeast in it for 45 minutes; then the intense kneading for ten minutes; followed by a second rising time of 45 minutes; after that a further intense kneading for ten minutes; and then a final 45 minutes rising.

Instead, this week it was the flat and hard loaves quickly made which was all they could have. They were remembering they had to be ready to go at any time. There could be nothing that held them back!

Naturally, this would have got lots of questions from the kids. They would have been curious when you did that really thorough search through your home looking for any possible yeast. But especially I don't think they would have liked that bread!

That asking the question about what this means in Exodus 12 verse 26 has today become a tradition amongst Jews. But it was not meant to be a set part of the ceremony.

It is similar to when Moses spoke of tying God's commandments on their hands and foreheads in Deuteronomy 6. That wasn't meant actually to mean they have those phylacteries physically on those parts of their bodies, as Orthodox Jews do today.

Rather, the question was to come out naturally, as your children will ask you questions about why you do things differently than the world around them, especially what it means to be Christians in this world. And if your children aren't asking you that, you really have to wonder if you are truly living by God's Word!

So the children then couldn't really miss how important this occasion is. I mean, there was a holiday of seven days! No kids would forget that, would they?

But it was a bit of a different holiday to the ones you know about. No normal work would be done. Each of those seven days the priests would offer up the same number of sacrifices as they had on the new moon day. Everyone who was physically able was expected to be there.

And what sacrifices they were! For seven days the very best was offered up to the Lord. The bulls and rams and lambs were all without defect. While the people were eating that hard bread the Lord got the best!

So it was a holiday alright. Because what is a holiday but a holy day? That is the original meaning of the word. And on these days God's people were to meet with him.

This was all preparing Israel for taking over the Promised Land. For they had only once so far celebrated the Passover. The third occasion didn't happen until the days of Joshua in Joshua 5, forty years after the second time in Numbers 9.

There would be a difference the next time, though, because then it would be the festival of the Unleavened Bread. Last time the Passover had simply been a sacrifice.

We see here the progression of God's line through the Old Testament. These people he is making into a nation – a chosen people, a royal priesthood. And exactly so that they would declare the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light!

Perhaps you recognised the words I have just quoted. They are from the Apostle Peter's first letter. And while it may seem strange to put the New Testament into the Old like this, isn't that exactly what the Lord is doing here?

There is a line he is drawing through covenant history. It is a constant progression that will lead to Christ's coming. And how much isn't that clear since for the seven days of the festival there is also a sin offering. So the people must be ceremonially clean at all times.

When verse 23 speaks about preparing these offerings in addition to the regular morning burnt offering it confirms the special character of each of those days. In this way the constant sacrifice for sin pointed to the ultimate sacrifice Christ would be.

4. Which event in the life of the Church after Christ has now taken over the Passover – and thus become the equivalent new covenant sacrament?

5. Which New Testament passages tell us this? Write them down and read them out:

6. How often should we celebrate this new covenant sacrament? Give reasons for and against your view:

This Feast Starts The Cycle Of All Feasts

As the saints then were dependent on these outward forms of worship it's also important to see the position of this feast. Here and in Leviticus 23 the Passover Feast is mentioned first.

Now, we might think that is because it is in the first month of the year. But there is more to it than that. We saw in the verses 11 till 15 that the Jewish calendar was lunar rather than solar. So the month was more emphasised than the year. But there were still the four seasons found throughout the twelve months – or thirteen months if they were catching up. And which season do we have here? Ah, it's the northern hemisphere spring. Growth is in the air. The birth phase of the harvest begins.

In fact, 49 days after the Passover it would be the Feast of Weeks. That is also known as the Feast of Harvest. That was when God's people celebrate the harvest by bringing its best to him.

But the Passover is where it begins. And where their church year ends is with the biggest festival of them all – the Feast of Tabernacles. That is a feast we will come to another time, though.

So what the Feast of Unleavened Bread meant then was the complete dedication of their year to the Lord who had saved them. This meant quite some commitment. And that is shown through the many years Israel did not celebrate this feast – the years when they had fallen away from the Lord and turned to worshipping other gods.

It was not easy carrying out the Lord's will this way. It meant going all the way to where the tabernacle or temple of the Lord was.

This is what Deuteronomy 16 verses 5 and 6 point out. There the Lord declares through Moses, "You must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the LORD your God gives you except in the place he has chosen a dwelling for his Name."

We see this cycle shown by the times of revival in Israel's history. Hezekiah after purifying the temple celebrates the Passover in 2nd Chronicles 30. And Josiah in the most thorough going reformation of them all, also does the same in 2nd Chronicles 35.

It is the Lord's redemption that first puts us on the path to being blessed by him in all those other ways. No wonder the apostle Paul speaks of Christ's saving work as the first-fruit in 1st Corinthians 15.

7. How do you know that the Passover can only ever be a temporary ceremony?

8. Read Hebrews 10:1-18. How does that show us the Passover festival is indeed a passing sacrament?

This Feast Looks to The Ultimate Feast

In 1st Corinthians, in chapter 5 verse 7, Paul has said that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. It was what Jesus himself alluded to during that last supper he had with his disciples. Because that supper was really the last Passover!

Then, while our Lord is dying on the cross it is noted that none of his bones were broken (John 19:36). This is a direct allusion to Christ being the fulfillment of the Passover lamb.

Already in the Old Testament we can see that the Passover was only a temporary ordinance. The failure of God's people then to keep these ceremonies according to his Word showed that salvation couldn't come to them this way.

And it was never meant to either. As Hebrews 10, verses 3 and 4, says, "Those annual sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

But that letter goes on further to declare the ultimate fulfilment. The verses 5 till 7 of Hebrews 10 state, "Therefore, when Christ came into the world he said, 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me: with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'"

By that will we have been made holy, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all! He fulfilled perfectly all that God demanded for being made right with him.

This is shown in Luke 22 when the Lord Jesus, during the Passover, took bread, gave thanks and gave it to us. In verse 19 there he said, "This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me."

So the Lord's Supper is now the feast the New Testament Church remembers. While the Lord God used his powerful arm to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt he worked the most powerful force of all in delivering us from sin through the doing and dying of his own dear Son. While Deuteronomy 5 verse 15 tells the Old Testament Church that they are to rest on the Sabbath day because the Lord brought them out of Egypt, the New Testament Church worships on the day that Christ Jesus rose from the dead. Sunday is the Lord's Day.

The Passover celebrated the Independence Day of Old Testament Israel. It was physically and spiritually their 4th of July!

But the death of Christ is now our spiritual liberation. The apostle Paul says of the Lord Supper in 1st Corinthians 11 verse 26, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

It is the fulfilment of the Passover which we celebrate every time we commune together around the elements of bread and wine. Yet it's especially what we celebrate in the ultimate way when our Lord Jesus returns. Because that day is coming – the great and coming day. Then the Lord won't come through one angel to pass over but in his Son, he, with all his angels, will completely take over!

9. Explain simply the similarities and the differences between the Passover and the Lord's Supper:

10. How has this study helped your appreciation of God's progressive salvation history?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for his deliverance in Jesus Christ. He is our Saviour God!

Confession: Acknowledge the times we have not lived as a saved people. Also confess the times we have taken the Lord's Supper lightly.

Thanksgiving: Thank God for his providing the Lord's Supper – the New Testament sacrament remembering our deliverance and which comforts and strengthens us in what Christ did and is still doing.

Supplication: Ask God to help you truly live by his Word so that those around you will see you have been saved.

Study 5

You Are His – His Care Confirms It!

Number 28: 26-31

1. Read the whole of chapter 28. What particularly strikes you about the flow so far through these verses? What does that say about how we should be?

By now we are realising how carefully the Lord regulates the worship and service of his people in the Old Testament. He lays down exactly what his people need to be – the light to him among the nations. There is no part of their lives that should be untouched by him.

What we have seen thus far in Numbers 28 is clear about this. The verses 1 till 8 began with the daily offerings. Twice each day, dawn and dusk, there were public offerings. Then the verses 9 and 10 prescribed a Sabbath offering. Once a week, on the seventh day, there was a public midday offering. But it does not end there. The verses 11 till 15 lay down monthly offerings. This meant every four weeks there was an extra special offering. And you knew it was extra-special because you offered up a lot more.

Then there are the annual feasts. The first of these was the Passover Festival. That especially remembered when they were delivered up from Egypt and so freed to be the Lord's own.

The effect of the Lord on their lives becomes even clearer, however, with the second most important festival in the Hebrew calendar year. For some seven weeks after the Sabbath following the Passover there is the Feast of Weeks. That's why one of the names for this festival is 'Feast of Weeks', because it comes exactly seven weeks later. Seven times seven days afterwards.

2. Read Revelation 13:11-18. How does especially verse 18 help us understand what the number seven represents?

Seven is the one uniquely symbolic number in Scripture. Seven is the number which expresses "completeness" or "perfection".

And it's on the day after this that there is this one-day festival. The day that commemorates fifty days since the sickle was first put to the barley harvest. The Jubilee Day!

This is why this day is also known as Pentecost, for Pentecost is the Greek word for 'fifty' which was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This day is also called 'The Feast of Harvest' and 'The Day of First-fruits.'

It was a day which was to be treated as a Sabbath Day – a sacred assembly. This was because the loaves made from the new grain were offered on the altar. Leviticus 23 verse 17 instructed the people, “From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of first-fruits to the LORD.”

So, though it was a one day festival, it was especially set aside. Every year it was to be faithfully remembered by Israel. Right throughout the Old Testament and in the New we find references to it.

This was to be an abiding ordinance. While their various crops and fruit might ripen at different times, the Lord set down that at the time of the wheat harvest, seven weeks after the Passover’s Sabbath, his people were to specially thank him.

It is quite a different reason for solemnly worshipping the Lord their God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread had celebrated his great saving act of the destroying angel passing over his people. Those were the people who had sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their door posts.

That was special revelation. That was an act where God moved in an extraordinary way. And what could be more special than Jesus Christ himself coming to live among us? That is the height of all special revelation. His death and resurrection is the ultimate supernatural act. In fact, all special revelation either directly points towards him, speaks about when he was here, or looks back to him.

But now they are commemorating general revelation. For this is the care God gives them every day and in every way. It is a care that the pagans also experience. Though, unlike the pagans, the Israelites know who cares for them. So while, as Matthew 5:45 says, the sun rises on the evil and the good and the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, because they are of the righteous they know who sends that rain.

3. What is the fundamental mistake that the proponents of climate change make regarding the cause of this world’s weather? How does this passage and the rest of God’s Word correct this?

4. How can you use this knowledge of God’s care for us in creation as a witness to your unbelieving neighbour?

5. By living biblically what do you show to the community you live in?

God's People Thank Him For Food

We need to imagine the testimony this was in the world then. We have seen that already in the way God's people were to celebrate the New Moon. That was quite different than those around them. The whole style of worship is a total contrast to the other religions, because the Lord's way had them looking a completely different way.

And so each day, morning and evening; and each Sabbath, at mid-day; and once a month; they would have solemn times of worship. There were priests set apart to lead it. And the people reverently looked on. How different could you get from the world!

And the Feast of Weeks does it again. Because harvest time for the pagans was party time! If you thought their New Moon festivities were wild, you'd be definitely blown away by what they did on this day – or in this week!

So the last thing on pagan minds at this time was what they had done wrong. They were too busy having a good time. There was gluttony and much immorality. In fact, it was more than likely they wouldn't have remembered much of this time anyway because of their drunkenness!

But the Israelites were remembering alright! They were thanking the Lord for another year of his care for them.

6. Read Leviticus 23:9-22. How do the Israelites especially show their thankfulness to the Lord in these offerings?

In Leviticus 23 it is clear that the offering of new grain referred to in verse 26 of the text is the Lord receiving the first of the new harvest before anyone else. Leviticus 23 verse 14 declares, "You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live."

Imagine that! Right when they harvested the first-fruits, which was around the time of Passover, and which would have been barley because it ripened several weeks before wheat, they had to bring the amount equivalent to an omer of fine flour as an offering to the Lord.

The harvest began with the Lord, and then, with the Feast of Weeks, it ended with the Lord. For after seven weeks of harvesting, they have come to the end of the crop. Seven weeks, forty-nine days – over a month and a half.

After all that work, they had to lay it again before the Lord. Your meal shouldn't only begin with grace – that blessing we ask on the food. It has to also end with thanksgiving!

And so it is that the people are gathered before the Lord on Pentecost. The people are giving thanks to whom thanks is due. There is a certain spirit in all this. Israel has to have a good attitude here. It cannot be like Israel was in the time of Jeremiah the prophet. In Jeremiah 5:24 he says of disobedient Israel that they don't "fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains," and "who assures them of the regular weeks of harvest." True thanksgiving isn't just words. It is a response. And it is the same deed-response regardless of what God has given you.

A good example of this is the first Thanksgiving Day held by the Puritan pilgrims in North America. You might know the story. It had been a hard time for those settlers. But in amongst all their difficulties – the loss of loved ones, the lack of food supplies – they still believed they were blessed. And so, on Harvest Day, they chose to celebrate God's goodness by sharing a meal with the Native Americans who had helped them to survive.

That attitude made one Christian writer say that so much of the spirit of the original celebration had been lost today. People are complaining that their Thanksgiving Day has been "spoiled" by bad weather, disappointing food, or a bad cold. But it is we who are spoiled, she said, spoiled by the very blessings that should make every day a day of thanksgiving, whatever our circumstances.

This is why this Feast of Weeks was to be an annual event, regardless of how well the harvest did – or didn't do! The Lord's people need to see that all things are sent by God. It is all for our good – even if we don't think it's so good! Are you going to judge God? Would you tell him what to do?

In Deuteronomy 16 verse 10 the Lord said that the freewill offering ought to be in proportion to how much the harvest produced. So it was never to be unfair. God never asks for what we cannot give.

But always the standard requirements for the public worship were to be kept. This was to be the time the Old Testament Church showed its gratitude for the Lord's care physically.

7. If God's people are sincerely focused on worshipping the Lord God the way he has directed them to – thus they are looking up to him – what does that mean for where else they look?

God's People Dedicate All To Him

Unless we also draw out that it's not only about a response to God but a direction with him as well, we will miss the vital part this feast was in Israel's life. This is where the word "first-fruits" particularly comes in. Because the first thought is to be for the Lord. And if the first thought is always for the Lord it certainly gives us his direction for our lives. After all, who was it who thought of them – of his people?

No wonder that in Deuteronomy 16 verse 12 this feast is connected to their deliverance from Egypt, because it is their being saved by the Lord that puts them in this special place. And certainly the burnt offerings and the sin offering on this day pointed again to how he had called them apart.

Now, if their focus is on the Lord, it will also be on their neighbour. This is clear from the two tables of the law. The first table, consisting of the first four commandments, is vertical – this is how we show who God is to us. And the second table, the last six commandments, is horizontal - it shows how who God is to us reflects in the way we treat others.

The Lord Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments in Matthew 22 this way. In the verses 37 till 39 he said it was this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

So the Old Testament Israelites, while loving the Lord their God, also care for their neighbour. This is why Leviticus 23 after describing the regulations for 'The Feast of Weeks' concludes with verse 22 commanding them to leave the very edges of the field and the gleanings for the poor. This way the crumbs of the meal could feed those in need.

When the Israelites met in this special public worship, they weren't only giving a portion of what they had to the Lord, they were dedicating all they had to him! Isn't this what we do each Sunday? You don't honestly think that what you put in the offering bag is the total sum of your commitment, do you? Of course not! It is the portion – the tithe – you set aside especially for God's Kingdom work through the Church of Christ. But it also represents a whole life set apart for him!

The apostle Paul spoke about this in Galatians chapter 6. Using the harvest analogy he says there in verse 8, "the one who sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life." And so he goes on in verse 10, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

8. Why is it that in considering those around us it must be our fellow Christians we look to helping first of all? How does the phrase 'Charity begins at home' fit in with Galatians 6:10?

The early New Testament Church was well known for this love it had for one another. To be part of the church meant you were part of the most loving family on earth. And is it any surprise since God himself is our Father? God is creating a new society. In amongst the darkness of this world his light shines – through all our little lights! It is because we join those lights together in the Church that we become the Light, the Body of Christ himself!

Someone once wrote a poem expressing this sentiment. She said, "O Heavenly Father: We thank Thee for food and remember the hungry. We thank Thee for health and remember the sick. We thank Thee for friends and remember the friendless. We thank Thee for freedom and remember the enslaved. May these remembrances stir us to service, that Thy gifts to us may be used for others."

As we dedicate our all to the Lord our worship is acceptable to him. Hold any part back and we're no different to Ananias and Sapphira. So we must not hold anything back. We know from Romans 1, verse 21, that nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. Instead, let's be completely taken up in thanking God for all he's done. That will restore contentment. That will bring out the joy of our salvation.

And then we will have the same Spirit the ancient Israelites had when they faithfully celebrated this feast. For then it was the most joyful time for them. The bounty of the harvest had been taken in.

9. Read 1st Corinthians 15:1-34. How does the resurrection of Christ shine a light on Numbers 28:26-31?

Let us also rejoice. The greatest harvest of all time is coming in. The first-fruits have already been seen. 1st Corinthians 15 gladly declares that. For verse 20 there says that “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

As the apostle Paul goes on there to explain, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the first-fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (vv21-23).”

This is the true message of Easter. Because this is what we remember every Sunday, for Sunday is the first day of the week. As those who belong to Christ you dedicate your all to him. You show you are his fruit. When you do that you are offering up your sacrifice every day, because it is a spiritual sacrifice. And then you are the aroma pleasing to the Lord!

10. How does your preparation for Sunday make a difference to the rest of your week?

11. What changes can you make to what you do on Sunday that will help reinforce this?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for his wonderful creation through which we are provided for each through food, clothing and shelter.

Confession: Acknowledge to the Lord we have often taken his care for granted. We have often not shone his light in our lives.

Thanksgiving: Thank God for the gifts and talents he gives us so that we can be blessed by what he graciously provides for us. Especially help us to show gratitude for the firstfruits that Christ Jesus is.

Supplication: Ask God to help you give to him in all you think and say and do. Plead with him so that we may please the Spirit.

Study 6

You Are His – Celebrate It!

Number 29: 1-6

1. Read Numbers 29:1-6. Do we get any idea from these verses of the origin for this festival? Is there anything in particular that stands out in this passage?

We have come, in our considering of the festivals of the Old Testament Church, to the third feast in the year. The first two festivals – the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) had fallen within the first two months. The festival of our passage, however, doesn't occur until some six months later.

So, we are now in the seventh month. All the harvests have been gathered, but perhaps one.

But here we come to a bit of a mystery. Because the origin for this festival is unknown. Unlike the other feasts we cannot connect it directly with something else in Scripture. That has left the commentators wondering. And that's not always a good thing!

So let's open up what this feast means in a quite different way. Rather than trying to work out what it was originally like let's see how it is celebrated today. By what it has now become in Judaism there will be a connection to what it originally meant.

Now, there have been other things added to this festival over the years. Jewish rabbinic tradition was good at doing this. But there will be something tying it to what it originally meant. When we find that, we will see the Scripture to which it is joined to.

Indeed, the way this particular festival has developed through history is very interesting. Also the relation it has with the following two festivals is a help to us as we see where this festival fits in.

2. Why do you think New Year's Eve holds such a prominent position in our society?

To the Jews today, and for the Jews for thousands of years already, this is the beginning of their year. The 'Feast of Trumpets' is the Jewish New Year. It is when they start their civil year. And it is the beginning of the Jewish calendar year.

Now their term for this festival today, 'Rosh Hasbanah', is a rabbinic one. It means "beginning of the year."

And also rabbinic is the focus of this festival. For it emphasises repentance, preparation for the day of divine judgment, and prayer for a fruitful year.

Traditionally the last month of the old year is a time of preparation known as the 'High Holidays.' This has been a time of penitence for known sins toward the family of God.

This two-day festival for them falls usually in September or early October in our calendar. It starts at sundown of the preceding evening, as do all Jewish observances. During this festival there's the sounding of a ram's horn in the middle of a long synagogue service that focuses on the festival themes. And there are quite involved meals at home to bring in the new year. There will also be an added focus on prayers confessing sins.

We see certain parallels with our end-of-year celebrations. Spiritually it has been used as a time for reflection and re-dedication.

Having seen what it's become we find three distinct lines tying back to the text and to the Scriptures around the text.

The first of these is that this is:

The End Of The Harvests

The Feast of Trumpets marks a break in the cycle of ploughing and reaping. For about a month there was no work on the land. And, as their economy was completely agrarian, that meant it was a time of rest. So it was that this whole month became the major religious focus of the year.

3. Read Exodus 23:14-19. Which principles for our worship can we glean from this passage? How does it help to give background to Numbers 29:1-6?

We read in Exodus 23 that it was the third feast marked out as being compulsory for all men to attend. Though there it was actually called the 'Feast of Ingathering,' it became called later 'the Feast of Trumpets' in Leviticus and Numbers. In Exodus 34 it is again proscribed in a similar way to Exodus 23. In Exodus 34, verse 22, however, it is said that it is celebrated at the turn of the year.

There is a recognition here of a definite period of time coming to an end. And while the calendar then was primarily lunar, as we've seen, it was also seasonal.

That is a helpful pointer to the place this feast has in the Old Testament Church Calendar. The people could have this period of rest after having harvested and stored what they would need for the coming year. It was the time to celebrate. And while celebrating to the world around us may consist of getting drunk, or stoned, and being quite immoral, the word 'celebrate' actually means marking an important occasion in quite a respectful way.

4. Read Hebrews 4:1-11. How does this connect with the situation behind this festival? In what way does it encourage us now?

So, the happiness here was deep and thankful. The Lord God had blessed them with what they needed for another year of service for him. This is why it was a day to sound the trumpets. For that was the call to worship – a distinctive sound that was blasted out as they looked to the Lord. For where else were these trumpets blown?

Numbers 10, verse 10, says that they were to be blown whenever there was a time of rejoicing. Therefore it was done at all the appointed feasts and New Moon festivals. They were to be sounded then over the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. That way they were a memorial before their God.

It was also blown after the 49th year when there was the Year of Jubilee – the year when there was no work on the land for a whole year. That is a long period of rest.

But what kind of trumpets were they? We naturally think of brass wind instruments with that sharp sound. But, as we have heard, today the Jews use ram's horns. They are called 'shofar's.'

So when they remember this day today they blow the ram's horns. It's a deep, hollow sound. Quite unlike the trumpet we know. And that's indeed what the Bible describes in Joshua 6 being blown by seven priests as the people marched around Jericho those seven days.

And yet, despite this historical tradition, it is actually something like the trumpet we know that they used originally on this day. Numbers 10, verse 1, tells us of the Lord instructing Moses to make two trumpets of hammered silver. These trumpets would call the people of God to order. They would be blown when they set out and when they came together.

So this trumpet was an ancient call to worship. It distinctively reminded the people about the Lord and their privilege to worship and serve him alone. It served a uniquely sacred purpose.

In this way we have come to the second distinct line:

The Call To Worship

We are reminded of something very much this in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. Chapters 8 and 9 of that book tell of the seven angels given seven trumpets to declare God's judgment throughout the earth. That definitely was not a call to worship anymore, because it is too late. But it does tie us to the same instrument and its uniquely sacred use.

So what does a call to worship do? Well, we have one at the beginning of each worship service. With a passage from Scripture the preacher focuses God's people on why they are here. And that is to worship God himself, no less! This, then, is an exhortation to preparation. We focus on meeting with God.

The Israelites then were beginning a special month. They were joining to thank God together. Those trumpets called them prayerfully to prepare. In the same way that Hebrews 4:11 told us to make every effort to enter God's rest, this is what the sounding of the trumpets was to do for God's people under the old covenant.

We know that Hebrews 4:11 is to be fulfilled by each of us individually. God's Spirit is now upon our hearts in the fullest way. But then it was through the leadership and with God's people altogether that they were being obedient. That's how they heard the call to worship.

5. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. How do these verses help to bring out the difference we have in coming into worship than what was in Old Testament Israel?

And, indeed, the first ten days of the seventh month, leading up to the next feast, 'The Day of Atonement,' have always been a time of prayerful preparation. The first of those ten days is the 'Feast of Trumpets.'

You can imagine the situation. Three times Israel was required to assemble before the Lord at the place where the tabernacle or temple was. This was the third time.

And yet, as the third time, at a time when they were at rest, and with two other festivals coming up in the next few weeks, those faithful were not likely to go off home in-between. The men there as representatives of each household would stay all the time, using that time particularly to focus on the Lord and his will for them. They would not come this time only to the 'Feast of Tabernacles' as many would do because it was the biggest feast of them all. Rather, they would respect the intent of what Moses said in Exodus.

One tradition that has come down is the reading of the Law on the Feast of Trumpets. That would tie in exactly with this penitential season. They knew they had to be right with the Lord in order to be used by him in this new year ahead.

6. To read out the whole law would take some time. That gives us an idea of why this was the best time to do this. But what does this tell us of how much we are to read from God's Word in the public worship service?

The number of sacrifices given for this day illustrates this the necessity of being right with the Lord in preparation for the year ahead. For as well as the normal daily offerings, and the new moon offerings, there was this added offering of the young bull, ram, and seven male lambs, all without defect, and the other offerings that went along with them. And that included the male goat as a sin offering.

So, what was offered up on the new moon is offered up twice. This really highlighted that aspect of public worship. It was certainly the call to worship!

And then there is the third strand which leads us back to what this day would have meant:

The Beginning For Rest

Leviticus 23 verse 24 tells us something crucial about this feast. It says that this is to be 'a day of rest.' In other words, this day is to be to them like a Sabbath Day! Despite whatever day it fell on, it was to be regarded as a Sabbath Day – the seventh day. No work this day!

7. How can we make the Christian Sabbath Day a true rest day? What would treating Sunday this way do for the rest of our week?

The designation of this day being the first day of the seventh month is a key here. The seventh month in the year; the month which was the first month of the year. It doesn't seem to make much sense, does it? And yet, scripturally speaking, it made the most sense of all! After all, this is all about God's timing.

Here the rabbinic tradition of this New Year as being the anniversary of creation helps us. Then this strand of the beginning for rest fits in well. For this is, in such a small way, a foretaste of glory itself. Doing this faithfully would be for God's people then their version of Answer 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

That Catechism begins with the question, "What is the chief purpose of man?" In other words: "What are we here especially to do?"

The answer is biblically clear. "The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

This is something which Old Testament Israel never got anywhere near to doing. Neither will the New Testament Church. But it is certainly what we will be doing in the new heavens and the new earth!

All their outward worship – all those burnt and sin and fellowship offerings - pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that was to come in the Messiah. In the same way, this feast, and the next three weeks, pointed to what they would enjoy in all eternity with him.

We might wonder how much would that have come home to them then. Well, we don't exactly know. We do know, though, that where this was faithfully done the Lord gave them peace and prosperity physically.

8. What did it mean for Israel as a nation to have physical peace and prosperity?

9. When were the only times Israel/Judah had this physical peace and prosperity?

Now, we read in Hebrews 4 that they could not enter forever into that rest because of their disobedience. This is a different situation for us today because Jesus Christ has come and was the perfect once-for-all sacrifice. It is through him that the first day of the week has become the rest day – the Christian Sabbath.

For now no more does a sacrifice need to be made every day for us, and not on every Sabbath Day, or New Moon, or Feast Day. He has taken all that away.

But we must enter into that rest. The sacred trumpets will sound again. And this time not to proclaim salvation but to pronounce condemnation!

Are you making every effort to enter that rest? Is your life a living sacrifice glorifying God? Do you enjoy him?

You see, if Isaiah 58 verse 13 tells God's people of old to call the Sabbath a delight, how are you beaming forth the joy of your salvation? Are you happy to belong to Christ? Do you live in this world glad to be the Lords'? Is your home the place of true peace? Because there is nothing else quite like the believer living out what he is in the Lord. He is bringing heaven to earth.

Another tradition the Jews have is concerning the time Lucifer was cast out of heaven. When he was asked in hell what he missed most out of his former life, the devil replied, "I miss most the sound of trumpets in the morning."

Does anyone here miss the sound of the trumpet? Is your spirit weakening? Has the strong purpose dropped off in your life?

Then bravely put the trumpet to your lips. Answer all your doubts and all your wavering and all your fears with rejoicing in him. Sing to him! You are his. Let's celebrate it!

10. A music teacher once said, 'You cannot sing if you are sad.' How does Psalm 150 help to illustrate this?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for the eternal rest he has waiting for us – his people on the new heavens and the new earth.

Confession: Acknowledge to the Lord we have often failed to rejoice in being his. Seek his forgiveness for not showing this world we are glad to be his.

Thanksgiving: Thank God for the coming of the Messiah who was the ultimate sacrifice and so has fulfilled all righteousness.

Supplication: Ask God for his Spirit's help to truly appreciate what being called to worship him means.

Study 7

You Are His – Deny Yourself!

Numbers 29:7-11

1. Read Numbers 29:7-11. With all the religious festivals that Israel had why do you think Israel could yet have another religious feast for?

We have seen how extensive the Old Testament public worship laid down by the Lord is. Every day there were two offerings – morning and night. Every Sabbath day there was a mid-day offering, which was double the offering that either of the morning and evening offerings were. Then there was the monthly offering which was a lot more again than the Sabbath day offering. And added to that there are the annual feasts, each again offering up more offerings on top of all these.

All in all you couldn't get away from those many offerings to the Lord God. There were burnt offerings, sin offerings, and fellowship offerings for public worship.

Then there were the types of offerings prescribed for personal sins. Every possible type of sin had an offering to be made to the Lord for it.

So what do you think Israel could yet have another religious feast for? Which possible situation would they yet need more offerings for? Well, how about a feast which specifically remembered the imperfection of all those other sacrifices?

This is what the Day of Atonement was. While you may have thought that all those offerings already being offered up was more than enough, they are nothing like enough! No wonder that this feast which highlighted that was the feast of sin and confession. This was the feast that really made you take a long hard look at yourself.

This theme has come down to the present day. In the Jewish calendar this is 'Yom Kippur' – the most important holiday.

If you are visiting Israel on this day forget doing anything on the day. The country comes to a complete halt for twenty-five hours on this day. Places of entertainment are closed. There is no television and radio. Public transport is ceased. Even the roads are completely closed.

You might remember that it was on this day that Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel in 1973. They thought this would have to be the best day for it. Not that it caught the Jews napping though – in the end they severely defeated those armies and gained much territory!

2. Read Leviticus 16:1-34. How does this help us understand what this particular religious feast is for?

This Feast was Very Serious

The Day of Atonement sets aside a major holiday to acknowledge the sins of mankind to God. So it was a very serious feast.

We can see this with the exhortation in verse 7 that the people were to “deny” themselves upon the occasion of this sacred assembly. This is a command not mentioned in connection with any of the other religious feasts. It is a word also translated as “humble your souls,” or, “afflict your souls.”

This denying oneself had earlier appeared in Leviticus 16 and 23. There it is seen as an essential part of properly coming before the Lord on this day. So, what was this added aspect to worship? Ah, but you’ve read the footnote! You have seen that it could also be translated as “fast”. So it is obviously to do with not eating food on this day.

That is certainly how it is seen today by the Jews. And by the time of Isaiah that is how it was practiced. But let’s see how the prophet refers to it. Isaiah 58 verse 5 challenges the Israelites. It asks about their public worship this day, “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?” This is why we must see that this feast is very serious. It wasn’t to be an outward conformity. This was no following the traditions because it had always been done that way. Instead, this demanded the deepest possible personal evaluation. They had to take a really good hard look at themselves. That’s why they were to fast – so that there would be no distractions to this self-evaluation.

Because that’s what drinking and eating do to us. They put us in a particular pattern. Our lives are fixed around these physical things. That’s why this day breaks the mould as it unsettles their routine and puts them completely in a spiritual dimension.

Jesus showed how fasting can continue to serve a valuable spiritual purpose for us too, in the New Testament Church. In Matthew 5 he points to its inward spiritual worth as he tells those doing it not to make a show of it. Rather, no one should know that they were fasting because, like prayer, it wasn't proving you were better than anyone else. In fact, if anything, it shows how inadequate you are before the Lord. That's exactly the meaning of verse 7 in Numbers 29.

3. Read Isaiah 58:1-14. While fasting was an outward physical acts what makes it a true spiritual act?

4. Read Matthew 6:16-18. How does Jesus illustrate here the wrong kind of fasting found Isaiah 58 pictures?

5. In which ways can a biblical fast help your walk with the Lord?

The seriousness of this day is further confirmed by this day being treated as a Sabbath day. The text alludes to this with the command to hold a sacred assembly. But verse 7 is even stronger about this as it says that there was to be no work done on this day. This is the same as what we read in Leviticus 16 verse 31 about how this was to be a Sabbath of rest.

All of the practical details had been taken care of before this day. In fact, there was even more spiritual preparation for this day because there would be none of that preparation for their meals this day. This feast day would be different than all the other feast days because of that!

Especially it was different because it recognised that we simply could never ever satisfy God's justice. Think about it - we don't even know all the wrong we do! There are all those sins of omission!

You might be wondering what these sins of omission are. Well, the sins of commission are the sins you know you have done. When God's Word and Spirit convicts us we repent those sins to the Lord. But the sins of omission are those commands we avoid obeying, whether through ignorance, weakness, or error. Sins we are just as guilty of.

Our hearts and lives are so infected by sin that we do wrong without realizing it. We can have sinful habits that we don't consciously know about. Now, the more we come under God's Word the more these are dealt with. Then we notice we're changing – or at least those around us do! But you are never completely free of these sins this side of heaven.

6. How could you respond to someone who said it is possible to be free of all sin on this earth?

7. Turn back to Leviticus 16. What is different about this particular feast with what takes place and how it takes place?

This Feast was Quite Different

It is very interesting to note that these sins which we didn't know we were doing are brought right out into public view. In this way this feast was quite different.

Reading through Leviticus 16 made that crystal clear. The High Priest went into the Holy of Holies on his own. But it was on behalf of them all. The similarity to the other special occasions of worship ended there, though. Because just as everyone was acting differently by denying themselves the High Priest on behalf of them all would be doing something quite different than what he ordinarily did.

It was on this one day in the year that he entered by himself into the Holy of Holies. Only on this one day did the High Priest go into the closest place with the Lord to make amends for transgression and impurities that had not been covered by the normal sacrificial rituals. This kept them all honest, because this reminded them of just how rotten they were – through and through!

Even the clothes he was wearing in this ceremony were completely different than what He wore as the High Priest otherwise. We will come back to these special clothes a little later. But what we must note here is that it was a simple white outfit. Coming before the Lord on this occasion he was wearing nothing fancy. He wore just white basic clothing made of white linen. And when he took off those clothes he had to bathe himself with water in a holy place before putting on his regular garments. Then he continued on with the offerings enumerated in our text.

This was all known to the people. This is the setting for our passage. Also what the High Priest did with those two goats.

It was that sin offering for atonement which is referred to in verse 11 of the text. We notice that it says, “Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the sin offering for atonement...”

With all the other feasts it is simply mentioned about the one male goat as a sin offering. Here it makes specific reference to what we read in Leviticus 16 as to what the High Priest was to uniquely do.

It was there we read of the two goats. Two goats on which he was to lay his hands and confess over them the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites.

What he did with the first was no surprise. Slaughtering that goat for a sin offering and sprinkling its blood over the holy of holies was not new. But sending that other goat out into the desert was something else!

And that goat was as much sacrificed for them as the other one! That goat would in the end die for them. But his form of death is to be sent out into the world.

One commentator points out that the Hebrew here speaks about the first goat being sacrificed for the Lord God while the second goat is sacrificed for another person. In the Hebrew the name ‘Azazel’ is given for that other person.

He says that because that goat was sent out into the world of the evil spirits their sin was removed. Their fellowship with God was restored.

So it tells the father of this world that his evil influence has no effect on those forgiven by the Lord. And it also tells the congregation that those burdened with sin could not remain in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, they would be banished to the place of evil spirits unless they were redeemed from it.

8. With all you have understood of this feast how would you say it applies to us today?

This Feast was Extremely Prophetic

This feast was quite different alright. But we must also note that this feast is extremely prophetic. If we consider the New Testament references to this feast, this is beyond doubt. There is the link Hebrews 9 verse 7 draws with the worship in the earthly tabernacle and the occasion when the High Priest would once a year enter the inner room.

The very next verse – Hebrews 9:8 – makes the application that “the Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was standing.” It further added in verse 9 that “this was an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.”

This was all temporary. That is why Hebrews 9 verse 12 says that Christ, because of who he was, could enter the Most Holy Place once and for all time by his own blood.

The apostle Paul is quite clear about this also in Romans 8. In the verses 3 till 4 there, he says, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

This is seen in two aspects of what we read in Leviticus 16. The first is the special clothing worn by the High Priest on the day of Atonement. We have noted that it was white linen, white linen that was the purest white, and white linen that was as white as it could be then. Because that was the colour linen was.

9. Read Ezekiel 9:1-10:8 and Daniel 10:5 and 12:5-7. How do these passages help us understand what the High Priest wore?

There is something said by the Lord when people are dressed in this way. Would not black be a better colour to wear confessing your sins? Yet consider how the angels of the Lord are described this way by Ezekiel and Daniel. And it is related to the glory of the Lord in Daniel 10 (v6), Ezekiel 1, and in Revelation 1 (verses 13-15).

So, the white material which Aaron wore is pointing to Christ. He perfectly fulfilled God’s will and remained pure throughout.

And then there is the goat being sent out into the desert. Who could forget Hebrews 13 when it said in verse 12, “And so Jesus suffered also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood”? For then the application is drawn, “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.”

This feast was extremely prophetic. There could be no doubt about that! It was pointing to the ultimate and perfect sacrifice Christ would make for his people.

Dear believer, are you denying yourself? Does your heart look for the Lord? If you do then you will find yourself at odds with this world. Living for Jesus doesn't give you much of a life out there!

But you will also find that Jesus meets your every need. His sacrifice not only paid the price for all your sin, it also means his Spirit now wins the battle within.

In Romans 10 the apostle Paul describes it well. In verse 4 there he says, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

The Jews today believe that in strictly following the law they can keep the Day of Atonement. That's why they miss the very meaning of this day, because it cries out to them that there's no way they can do that!

That's why until the Gospel opens their eyes they won't see. Only faith in Jesus Christ makes them right before the Lord.

We must pray that their hearts – and many more – will be opened. And let's show that with lives that are truly free – because we're worshipping and serving the Lord his way!

10. What have you personally been challenged about through considering this old covenant festival?

11. How much has this drawn you closer to what it was that the Lord Jesus did for his own?

Prayer Points:

Adoration: Praise God for his honesty with us. He who is the truth in person has spoken clearly to us.

Confession: Acknowledge to the Lord we have fallen far short of his glory. This festival and its fulfilment in Christ show how much we need him.

Thanksgiving: Thank God that while there was and is no way we can satisfy his justice someone has done that for us – his own Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Supplication: Ask God for the Spirit's help in having a good hard look at ourselves – and so honestly coming clean with God of all that has held us back from truly serving him.

Study 8

You Are His – See Where You Are!

Numbers 29:12-40

How come you are where you are? Or in other words: What has brought you to this time and place in your life? Take a moment to reflect on this. Now you might try to be clever and reply, “Well, it’s because we got in a car and came here.” And for some of you that’s quite a drive.

But that’s not the answer, is it? Because you know the answer isn’t really about what you have done at all. In fact, to be part of this Study now for the right reason means knowing that God has done it all!

What you acknowledge at this time is how he’s been working all the time to put you right where you are. He is the One who either brought you up in a Christian family or who has converted you. He is the One who has kept working on you through his Word and Spirit so that you’re part of his people.

In fact, thinking about how you got to this point in your life makes you see how blessed you’ve been by the Lord. To think that he chose you – of all people! And it should’ve been completely different! What amazing grace! So being in church, worshipping together with God’s people, the Body of Jesus Christ, brings it all back. You are reminded through what you do now that you belong to the Church of all ages and places. For what we do now is what they did when they came to worship the triune God.

This is what Old Testament Israel did every time they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. The name ‘tabernacles,’ or ‘booths’ as this festival is also called, was because the Israelites were living in small tents for the seven days of this feast. These were seven days which began five days after the Day of Atonement. In this way they symbolically experienced the pilgrimage of the wilderness.

These days in Israel you will find this continues as *Sukkot*, which means booths. All over that country you will find people putting up these *sukkot*. They will line parking lots, balconies, rooftops, lawns, and public spaces. Every army base has one.

This feast also tied in with the end of the harvests. So while the wheat harvest was celebrated at the Feast of Weeks, which is Pentecost, now they celebrated the Ingathering of the rest of the harvests. These were the fruits of the orchard and vineyard.

This festival was all about the joy of their salvation. For who had looked after them through the forty years and with the harvests just gathered? It was none other than the God of the covenant!

This was the feast more than the other feasts which celebrated the Lord being with them. For he was still with them. And he hadn't yet finished with them!

1. Read Numbers 29:12-40. What is the overall impression you have from these verses?

2. What would it have been like to have been there?

The Last But Not the Least of the Feasts

What their church year ended with was actually quite a high point. How can we know that? Well, look how many verses this passage consists of! Twenty-eight verses! And that's simply because this feast involves much more than any of the other feasts.

There were eight days straight of numerous offerings. Those priests would have been run off their feet!

And is it any surprise? For this is where it all comes together. With this celebration they would finish the year on a high! They had lots of offerings because they had so many blessings!

Is it any wonder that it was during this time of the church year that Solomon dedicated the temple? 1st King chapter 8 describes that incredible scene. And verse 5 says it all there. For they were "sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted."

Didn't reading through the verses 12 till 39 of the text seem like that? For the seven days of the festival there were 70 young bulls sacrifices, 14 rams, 98 male lambs, and 7 male goats. A total of 199 animals altogether over the seven days. And that doesn't count the daily morning and evening burnt offerings, and the Sabbath day burnt offerings. Nor does it count the eighth day when there was another bull, one ram, seven male lambs, and the one male goat.

This feast offered up double what was offered in rams and lambs at the Passover and Pentecost. And as for the number of bulls – the most valuable animal of them all – this was five times the amount offered up at those other two feasts!

This festival was the religious crescendo to the church year. Solomon couldn't have chosen any other time to dedicate the temple to the Lord!

3. Read Deuteronomy 16:13-17. What stands out there about this festival?

4. How do all the different classes of people mentioned affirm this?

How much isn't this a joyful feast? "Be joyful at your Feast" Deuteronomy 16:14 declares. The people of Go were called together to praise God for the blessings of God.

And how much wasn't this to be a joy shared by all! Notice how the most disadvantaged were to be among the most blessed. They may have ordinarily been the last amongst humanity but they were by no means the least in the Lord's eyes. For this was the very time when they would be lifted above their time!

After this festival it would be six months until the next religious feast. That would be the beginning of the church year, with the Passover. The Passover – which commemorated their deliverance.

But from now until then they were left with the memory of how he kept them through the wilderness. For being saved is only the first day. There are many more days and weeks and months and years after that. And on each of those days the Lord saves them in different ways over and over again! His Spirit is ever busy working to keep his promise to them because he has saved them.

Dear believer, isn't that the testimony of your life? You have certainly been kept by the Lord. And he keeps on keeping you! There is no way he is letting you go.

This is the truth of the 'P' in T.U.L.I.P.. For in those five hallmarks of biblical Christianity, the 'P' in "perseverance of the saints" tells us of how the Lord is always faithful to his own. That's in spite of whatever his own will do!

The Complimentary Aspect of this Feast

So how true our first aspect is. This is the last but not the least of the feasts. And so we move on to see further, the complimentary aspect of this feast. Thus far we have seen the character of this feast. It is vitally important because it celebrates the great fact of the Lord's keeping them. But it is also special because of the way it balances the other festivals, especially the one just before it.

Do you remember that festival held the week before this? That was the 'Day of Atonement' – *Yom Kippur*. Then the emphasis was on sin and atonement. That was the day that said what they were doing through the whole sacrificial system could never make themselves perfectly right with God. Only if he himself provided the sacrifice could there be the right satisfaction.

So it quite clearly spoke prophetically about the coming of Christ for making us right with God. That was about the accomplishment of redemption. And now we have the feast that celebrates how it is God in us and with us that brings us to heaven. This is about the application of redemption.

5. Read John 7:25-44. What does Jesus say here that ties in with this application of redemption?

6. How does this relate to the way we go to heaven?

In John 7:25-44 it tells us of what our Lord taught during the celebration of this Feast. It was on the last and greatest day of the Feast that Jesus stood and spoke in a loud voice. As we read in the verses 37 and 38, he said, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Now, this statement might seem a bit strange. What's water got to with this feast? And how is all this connected to where water comes from?

Well, it seems that on this day in Jesus' time, a priest would take a pitcher of water from the pool of Siloam. He would then pour that water on the ground, saying, using the words of Isaiah 12 verse 3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

Jesus was talking about the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who applies redemption into the lives of believers from their conversion until they come to heaven. So, at the same time that it was the height of the church year and so wrapped up the year it also prepared them for rest of the year.

And this is further confirmed with looking even further at the complimentary aspect of this feast. There is a special clue which tells us this. You have a look through the sacrifices being offered up from the first day of this feast until the last day. It is a lot every day, isn't it?

7. There is something different about each of those days. What is it?

8. What do you think it could mean?

Ah, did you notice? The number of bulls being sacrificed as burnt offerings decreases by one on each subsequent day of the festival. They start off with sacrificing thirteen bulls on the first day and end up sacrificing seven on the seventh day.

Now, thirteen is a very superstitious number for many in our society. When you have a Friday which is also the 13th, it's called 'Black Friday' and they believe it's an unlucky day. But that's only because they make it like that. If you expect bad things to happen they will!

There was a special number, though, that we heard about especially at the beginning of Numbers 28. A number which for the Hebrews means something quite blessed. And that number...? Ah, 'seven,' isn't it?

This is the number we end with as the number of bulls being sacrificed on the last day of this feast. So what they end up with is the holy number seven for the most valuable offering as they conclude their offerings. While it appears to make each of the subsequent sacrifices less it actually ends up making it very much the Lord's!

But it does mean that each day they are getting back to their more normal days. And they will have to go back into their everyday work. After having this last month set aside especially for worshipping the Lord, while the land itself also rested, now they would get into the ploughing needed for the next year.

This Feast assured them that the Lord would be with them. And we find that confirmed in verse 39. For verse 39 may seem to be simply affirming what was to be done. But notice how it speaks of all these burnt and sin and fellowship offerings which they do together as God's people. Because those offerings are not the most important thing. The thing that matters most is what they themselves personally vow and offer to the Lord. These offerings are only additional to that.

So when the Israelites faithfully followed the church year they confirmed their blessedness. For the Word and the Spirit always go together.

God gives us all a break. Every Sunday you have got a day to rest and recreate in him. Then we rejoice in the Lord, as Philippians 4 verse 4 says.

But it's also every day we must give thanks to God for his good gifts. Don't let a day pass without expressing your gratitude for all he's done. In the words of 1st Thessalonians 5 verses 16 till 18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

With such a spirit you truly have the Holy Spirit. And with him in you, you will make it through. Because then it is Christ who is leading you.

9. Do you have to be in a church building or need to hear a certain kind of music to be able to worship?

10. If not, when do you actually worship?

11. How can we be assured in our day that the Lord will be with us?

Prayer Points:

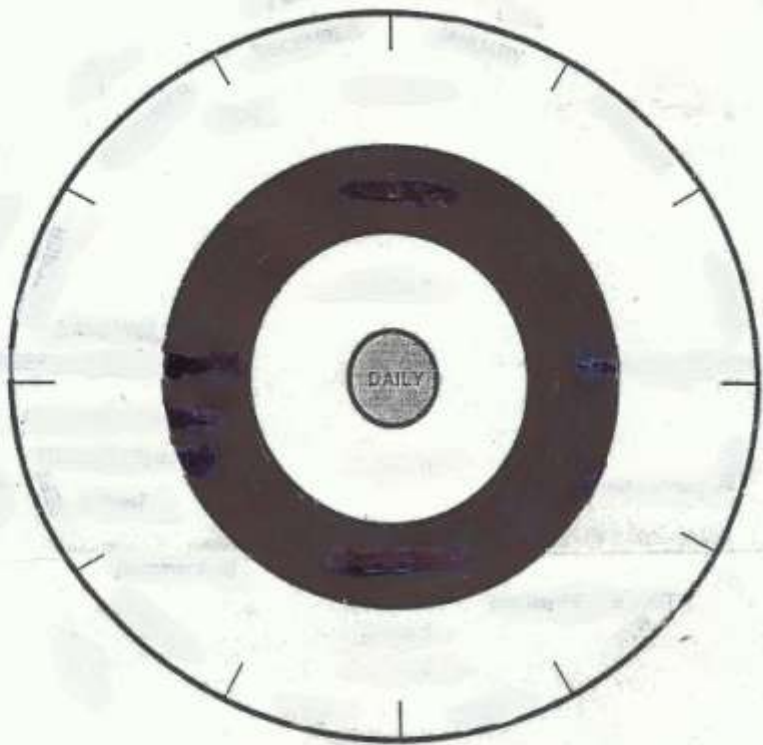
Adoration: Praise God for in Jesus Christ he has given the best gift of all. And so let's pray that our gifts will indeed reflect what he has done in his Son.

Confession: Acknowledge to the Lord we have often not used Sunday to help motivate us for the rest of the week. Let's ask for his help so that we pray that what we are blessed in on the Lord's Day will go with us into the next six days.

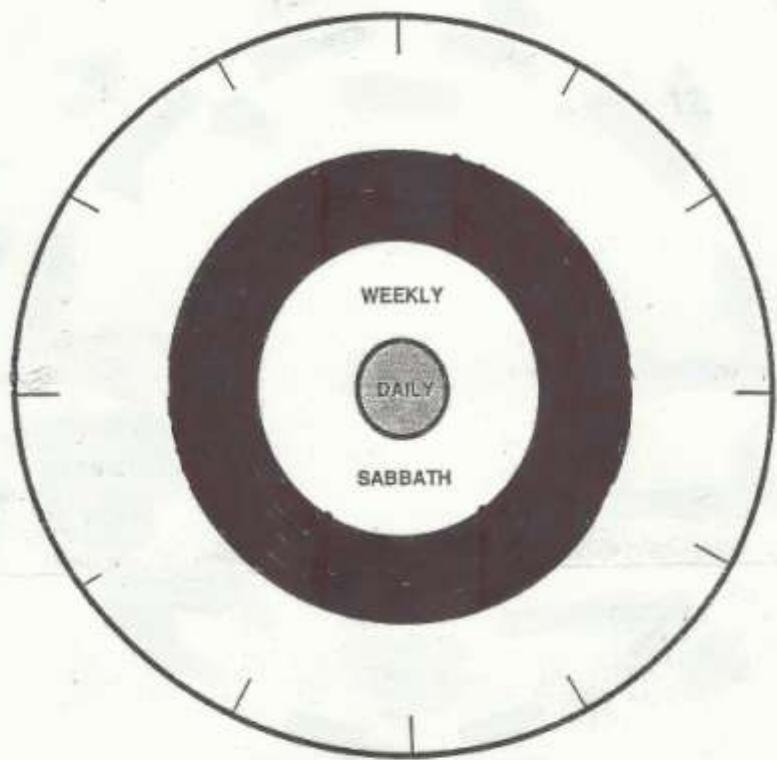
Thanksgiving: Thank God that he is always faithful to his own. He doesn't change and so we can depend on his promises to guide and keep us.

Supplication: Ask God to keep reminding you through his Word and Spirit of what he has done for in the greatest deliverance of all done by Jesus Christ.

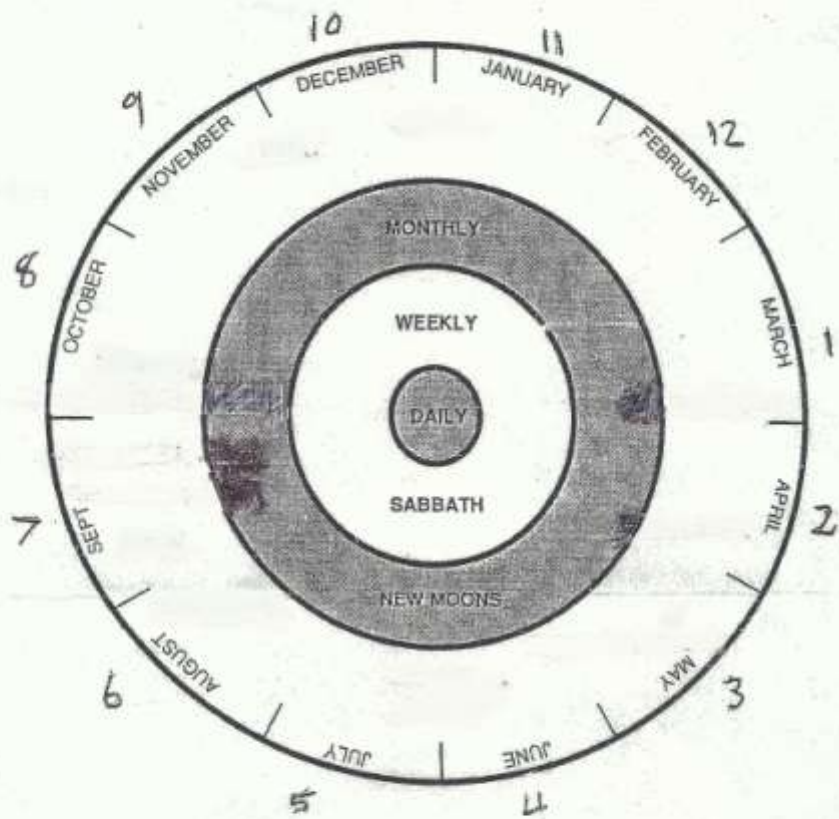
The Appendices:
The Cycles of Israel's Worship



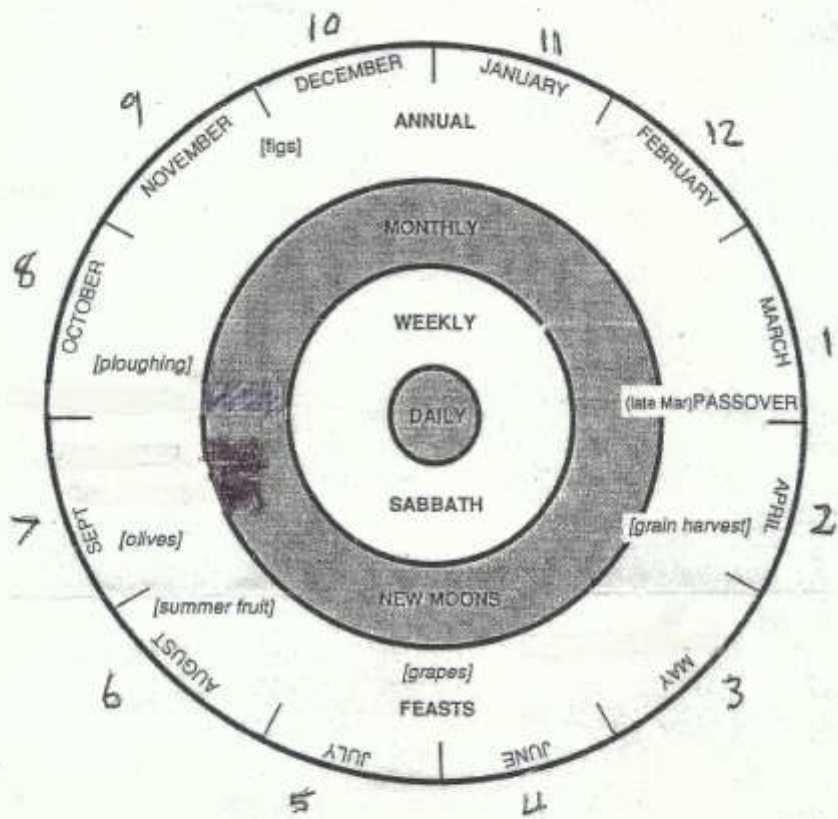
The cycles of Israel's worship (1)



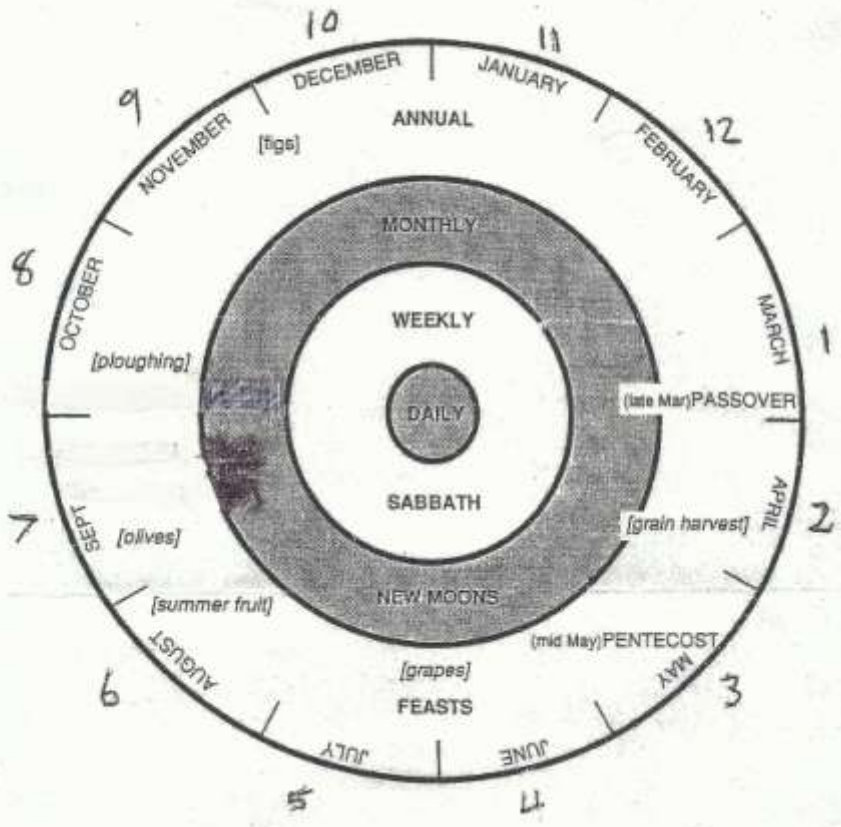
The cycles of Israel's worship (2)



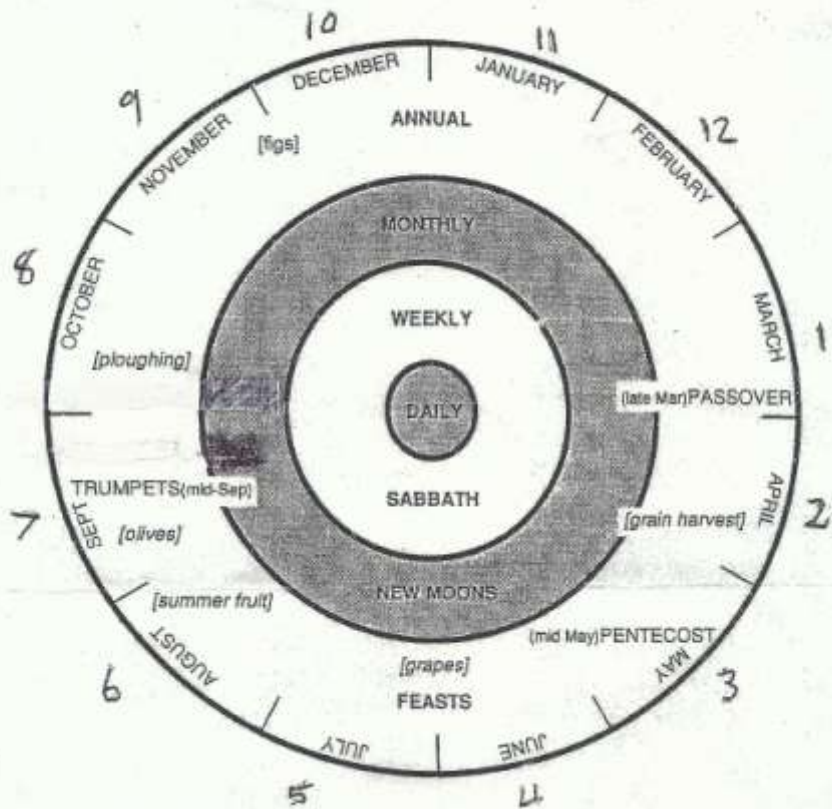
The cycles of Israel's worship (3)



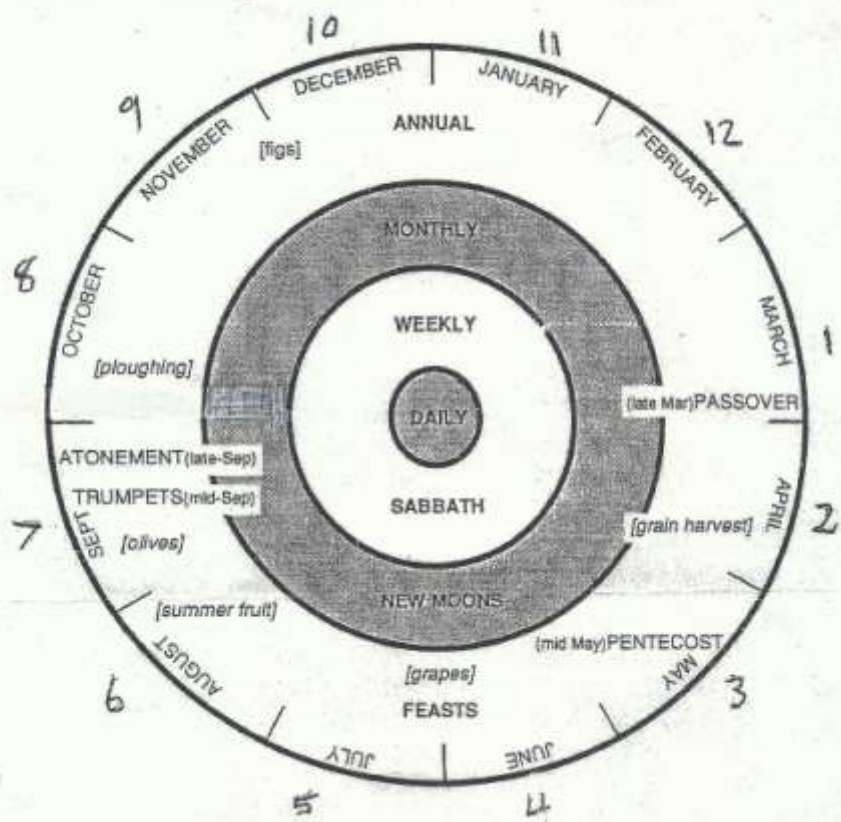
The cycles of Israel's worship (4)



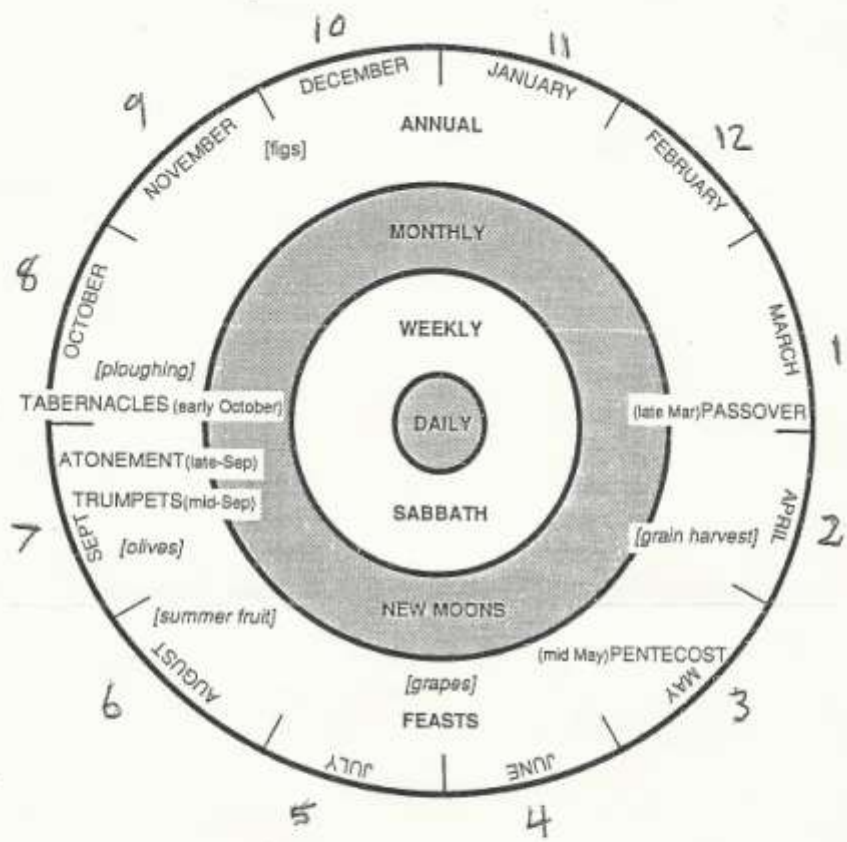
The cycles of Israel's worship (5)



The cycles of Israel's worship (6)



The cycles of Israel's worship (7)



The cycles of Israel's worship

