



Sabbath Service
Saturday, January 27, 2007
“Introduction to the
Annual Observances and Festivals”



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(If you are meeting in a small group, select a leader for the day. The leader reads the text printed in regular face. The rest of the group reads the text printed in bold face and wherever it states "In Unison." If you are worshipping as a single individual, read all the parts.)

CALL TO WORSHIP

God, whose steadfast love fills the universe,
rejoices in our presence here.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

God breaks through the silences of our lives
and calls us by a new name.

With you, O God, is the fountain of life;

in your light do we see light.

God blesses us with varieties of spiritual gifts
and inspires us to use them well.

**Your righteousness is like the mountains, O God,
and your faithfulness extends to the heavens. Amen.**

INVITATION *(In Unison)*

Faithful and loving God, we come to the abundance of your house to drink again from the river of your delights. You inspire our gathering and equip us for living. You pour out your Spirit upon us for the common good. Meet us now, that we may hear what you want us to hear and know what you want us to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

OPENING HYMN #18

"We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer"

Julis Bulkley Cady, 1882-

Netherlands Folk Song From The Collection

by Andrianus Valerius, 1625

We praise Thee, O God, our Redeemer, Creator,
In grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before Thee, we kneel and adore Thee,
We bless Thy Holy Name, glad praises we sing.

We worship Thee, God of our fathers, we bless Thee;
Through life's storm and tempest our Guide hast Thou been.

When perils o'er-take us, escape Thou wilt make us,
And with Thy help, O lord, our battles we win.

With voices united our praises we offer,
To Thee, great Eternal, glad anthems we raise.
Thy strong arm will guide us, our God is beside us
To Thee, our Great Redeemer, forever be praise.

OPENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION *(In Unison)*

O God, how do you have time for us when we have given so little time to you? We have tried to live by our own designs rather than to seek your purposes. We have become mired in our mistakes and then imagined that you do not care. We have suffered the agonies of loss and have blamed you rather than sought the comfort and help you alone can give. We have turned away from the judgment we deserve in order to justify ourselves. Where can we find the integrity for which we yearn and the healing we so desperately need? Help us, Father, to face our own need and to accept your guidance. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS *(Read by leader)*

God vindicates and liberates. The Ruler of the universe offers salvation as a burning torch that brightens and transforms all within reach. God recognizes and evokes the beauty within you. God calls you by name and rejoices in you. The glory of God shines through you. Praise God!

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

PERSONAL PRAYER *(In Silence)*

HYMN #35 *"I Sing the Mighty Power of God"*

*Isaac Watts, 1709
From Gesangbuch der Herzogl,
Wirtembergischen Katholischen Hofkapelle, 1784*

I sing the mighty pow'r of God that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.
I sing the Wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord that filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with His word and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed where'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread or gaze upon the sky!

There's not a plant or flow'r below but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise and tempests blow by order from Thy throne.
While all that borrows life from Thee is ever in Thy care,
And ev'rywhere that man can be, Thou, God, art present there.

PRESENTATIONS BEFORE GOD *(Not a monetary offering)*

Time for any in attendance to offer a musical or instrumental piece, a reading, comments, or anything they would like to present before God.

If no one is prepared or if you want more, the link below will open a choral anthem from a full choir for your listening enjoyment.

“Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Time for groups to make any necessary announcements relating to their own group.

We are only eight weeks away from Passover. Because there have been so many questions asked about Passover, our need to observe it, and the other Holy Days, over the next eight weeks we will be inserting several in-depth studies of God’s Laws and his Holy Days, with particular attention to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Hopefully, this will help all of us to get more out of these days when they arrive. We begin this week with a general study of all the Holy Days and why it is important that we observe them as God commanded from the beginning.

COLLECT *(Preparing for the lesson, In Unison)*

Make your ways known to us, O God; teach us your paths. We await your instruction and inspiration. Penetrate the clouds that dim our sight and loosen the shackles that paralyze our actions. We are ready to hear and respond. Amen.

THE LESSON

(Use the lesson provided here, or conduct a study of your own selection.)

Introduction to the Annual Observances and Festivals

*Based on an original article written by B.L. Cocherell,
Edited and updated, 2007*

New International Version (NIV) of the Bible used unless otherwise noted.

The annual observances and festivals are not just days that God arbitrarily chose as holidays for the nation of Israel. God had a purpose and plan for humanity before their creation, and this purpose and plan is revealed through the literal, prophetic, and symbolic meaning that God has placed within each of his very special observances.

It is through the observance and study of these annual observances and festivals that one can gain many awesome insights into the mind of God and into his plan for the future of humanity.

Each commanded observance is unique in its meaning and purpose; however, all the observances are interrelated in their contribution to God’s plan for the

salvation of humanity. Moreover, each observance has a literal, symbolic, and prophetic meaning concerning the people, places, times, and events in God's plan.

The annual observances that God commended Israel to observe were times of great rejoicing. These were times when all Israelite males were to present themselves before God to formally worship him and bring him the required tribute and freewill offerings. These observances were to be times of national thanksgiving and rejoicing, which showed appreciation for the great blessings that the Creator God had bestowed upon national Israel.

Later, it will be shown that these days also hold a great importance to those who are called to salvation during the ages prior to and after the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings.

There are three festival seasons:

Exodus 23:14-17 — “Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. (15) “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. “No one is to appear before me empty-handed. (16) “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. “Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. (17) “Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD.

In these verses, the English word “feast” is a translation from the Hebrew word *hag*, which is used to denote “keeping a feast” or “celebrating a holiday,” and it is usually used to describe the three pilgrimage feasts of God (i.e., the Passover season [Days of Unleavened Bread], the Feast of Pentecost [Weeks/Harvest], and the Feast of Shelters/Ingathering [Tabernacles]). The noun *hag* means pilgrimage-feast or holiday (i.e., a day or season of religious joy).

Although the nation as a whole was supposed to worship God in the place where he placed his name, learn his ways, and rejoice before him, a specific command was given to every male Israelite to appear before him during these three festival seasons.

Exodus 34:23-24 — Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel. (24) I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God.

Because observing these festivals meant that many of the Israelites would leave their property unprotected, God promised that their property would remain safe while they attended the annual observances and festivals.

One of the reasons the males of Israel were to appear before God during the three festival seasons was that they represented the leadership of Israel and bore within their flesh the outward sign (i.e., circumcision) that the nation of Israel was under the terms and conditions of the Abrahamic Covenant (**Gen. 17:10-14**).

Deuteronomy 16:16 — Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed:

The three festival seasons fell within the three main agricultural seasons of Palestine: The spring harvest of barley; the early summer harvest of wheat; and the fall harvest of fruit.

The three festival seasons contained the following commanded observances and festivals:

Spring

- The Passover—a commanded observance
- The Days of Unleavened Bread—a seven day festival
- The First Day of Unleavened Bread—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Lift Offering—an offering of the first grain of the barley harvest
- The Last Day of Unleavened Bread—a festival and commanded assembly

Early Summer

- The Feast of Weeks/Day of Pentecost—a festival and commanded assembly

Fall

- The Feast of Trumpets—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Day of Atonement—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Feast of Shelters/Ingathering (Tabernacles)—a seven day festival
- The First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Festival of the Eighth Day—a festival and commanded assembly

THE WORSHIP OF GOD

From the first chapter of the book of Genesis to the last chapter of the book of Revelation, God reveals and gives instructions on how to worship him in order to receive the blessings that he wants to give.

One of the very first things the Israelites were told to do when they entered the promised land was to completely destroy and erase all traces of the pagan worship system that existed there.

Deuteronomy 12:1-4 — These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has

given you to possess — as long as you live in the land. (2) Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. (3) Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. (4) You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. [*This last was not a suggestion. It was a commandment.*]

A very important thing to keep in mind as one studies the Bible is that God wants to be worshiped in a certain way and he will not accept any other method of worship. Any method of worship that God has not sanctioned is considered a sin: a pollution and perversion of his law of worship. Any deviation from God's lawful worship system always leads people away from him and his purpose and plan for humanity. Therefore, he told the Israelites to eliminate these objectionable practices and objects of worship from the land they were to inherit. God alone would choose the place, the methods, and the times in which Israel should come before him in formal worship.

SEEK GOD

Deuteronomy 12:5 — But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go;

In this verse, the English word “seek” is translated from the Hebrew word *darash*, which can mean “pursuit, seek, ask, or worship.”

The Israelites were to go to the place where God placed his name and presence. There, they were to commune with God, pay homage to him, reverence him, and do his will. There, they were to seek him through obedience and worship.

Where God placed his name and presence was the only place on earth where these things could be accomplished in a formal way because this was where the presence of God resided.

REJOICE BEFORE GOD

Deuteronomy 16:11, 13-15 — And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name — you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.

Anyone who was considered a part of national Israel, regardless of their personal status (e.g., child, servant, slave, or proselyte), was to observe the festivals of God by worshipping and rejoicing before him:

(13) Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. (14) Be

joyful at your Feast — you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. (15) For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.

The Israelites had a great deal to rejoice about throughout the year as they lived their lives under the guidance and protection of the Creator God. As they came to these very special days, they were to remember that they were the only nation and people on the earth that God claimed as his personal treasure and children. They were the only people on earth that God had personally chosen to represent him on earth. They were the only people on earth whom God had personally promised to bless and care for. The Israelites truly had a great deal about which to rejoice.

A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE

Deuteronomy 16:12 — Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees.

Each annual observance reminded the Israelites of their national captivity and slavery in Egypt and that God had brought them out of this slavery and made them his children.

A TIME TO SACRIFICE AND BRING TRIBUTE

Deuteronomy 12:6 — there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

Deuteronomy 14:22 — Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

Deuteronomy 16:10 — Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.

Exodus 23:15 — ... "No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

See also **Leviticus 23:37-38**.

TITHES AND FREEWILL OFFERINGS

The annual festivals were a time when the Israelites were to bring the tithe of the land and freewill offerings to present to God.

All who worked the land and received an increase from it were to set apart a certain amount of this increase to be used as God directed. The amount set aside

was to be 20 percent of the increase, divided into two tenths (tithes), which were each intended for a specific purpose.

The First Tenth

Numbers 18:21 — “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.

God required the first tenth to be given for the support of the priesthood and the Levites who performed the many services that God required as a part of his system of worship.

The Festival Tenth

The second tenth was to only be used by each person or family for the purpose of celebrating and enjoying the annual observances and festivals:

Deuteronomy 12:17 — You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and oil, or the firstborn of your herds and flocks, or whatever you have vowed to give, or your freewill offerings or special gifts.

Deuteronomy 14:23 — Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

The annual days of worship were such an important part of God’s worship system that he required a full tenth of the increase from the land of Israel to be used by the Israelites to attend and enjoy these festivals. He went into detail on how the people were to use their tithe in order to attend and enjoy the feasts.

Deuteronomy 14:24-27 — But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), (25) then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. (26) Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. (27) And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.

The Tenth for the Poor

Is there a third tithe? Those of us who came out of the Worldwide Church of God know that they always collected that third tithe from us. What does the Bible say?

Every third year, a tenth of the increase was to be brought and given for the support of widows, orphans, and strangers in need:

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 — At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, (29) so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

This does not indicate a third tithe as much as it points to something special being done every third year. As the first tithe is already going to the Levites, this could not be an additional tithe. It is saying that every third year, all of the tithes should be shared with the aliens, the orphans and the widows, as well as the Levites. It is talking about the tithes that God has already commanded, not adding a third tithe, which in today's tax-heavy world would amount to 30 percent of one's income, before taxes, going out for tithes. This may explain why so many people in the Worldwide Church of God were so poor, while the powers running the show were so rich. Because God demands obedience to his laws, it also could explain why that church is no more.

The Freewill Offerings

Deuteronomy 16:16-17 — Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: (17) Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

In addition to the tenth of their increase and the festival tenth, God required all Israelite males to come before him to present him with a freewill offering to show their appreciation for his blessings. These were freewill offerings and intended to show gratefulness for all that God had done for them each year. If a man had a really good year, his offering might be larger, but in a really bad year, it might be small. We see many examples in the Bible of people giving back to God in reflection of their status in life. The greater blessings seemed to be lavished on those who had the least when they demonstrated their faith by giving even as little as the "widow's mite."

This scripture is also one of those that the Worldwide Church of God abused repeatedly.

Blessings for Obedience

If the Israelites were faithful in their observance of the annual festivals and in bringing the required tithes and offerings to God at the place where he placed his name and presence, he promised to give them unimaginable physical blessings:

Malachi 3:10-11 — Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. (11) I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty.

With this promise from God, it is a wonder that the people continued to follow the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God. There were very few of the working poor who were giving their full tithe to the church, saving their festival tithe and attending the feasts, and making generous freewill offerings who ever saw this blessing poured out on them. That should have alerted at least some that there was something wrong with this organization. God was not blessing it — at least not the people. The only “blessed” ones were the leaders — and that on the backs of the people. They laid their claim to these blessings by pointing out how blessed headquarters and its people were and they were able to convince all the poor suffering ones that God was blessing their giving by lavishing all this wealth on the leadership. Certainly, God will inquire about all this one day soon.

Learn to Worship the Lord

Deuteronomy 14:23 — Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

In order to be at peace with God and to perform his will in their lives, the Israelites had to learn to love, revere, and respect God. A major part of this learning process concerned contact with God through the formal worship system at the place he chose to place his name and presence. There, the people would fulfill their obligations for tithes, tribute, offerings, and freewill gifts to God. And they were to remember, speak of, and meditate on the great things that God had done and was doing for them individually and as a nation.

Through the repetition of the annual observances and festivals and practicing God’s law and way of life, the Israelites were constantly reminded of God’s greatness and his love and concern for them.

UNDER THE NEW AGREEMENT

With the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the new agreement (covenant) between God and his people, many of the literal, symbolic, and prophetic meanings of the annual festivals were fulfilled. However, there are still many that have not yet been fulfilled, and there is still much to be learned and understood about the plan of God as pictured by these annual observances and festivals. Under the new agreement, these festivals must be observed in light

of their present meaning and purpose as we wait for the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings at the end of this age.

The Place of Worship

While the temple in Jerusalem existed and was attended by the priesthood, anyone who wanted to perform certain acts of worship could do so at Jerusalem. However, after the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., there was no place for the priesthood to officiate or perform sacrifices.

Today, the Father's name rests upon his children, and his presence dwells within their flesh through the power of his holy spirit. Anyone who has the name and presence of the Father dwelling within them is a temple of God on earth. See **1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22.**

Within this temple of flesh, the law of God is written in the hearts of his children (**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-11**). As long as they live within this temple of flesh, they have the authority to communicate, serve, and worship the Father wherever they are and receive daily spiritual nourishment to sustain them as they journey through life.

Within the children of God is the most holy place on earth; it is where the spirit of God resides and where God the Father and Jesus Christ meet with those who are called to salvation.

A worshiper of God no longer has to go to a physical temple to offer sacrifices or to keep the annual observances: all annual observances can now be observed anywhere a child of God is or wherever one desires to fellowship with other children of God and worship God the Father.

Assemble Together

Although assembling together is not a requirement for salvation, it should be a highly desirable and profitable part of one's spiritual growth process. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts those who are called to salvation and are serious about their calling and spiritual growth to meet together.

Hebrews 10:23-25 — Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

SUMMARY

There is no doubt that the commanded observances and festivals must be observed by the elect of God, and that an understanding and proper observance of these special days is an important part of one's spiritual growth process and

walk with God. The following is a list of the major things that can be learned through the observance and study of these special days:

- Each reveals many great and wonderful insights into the mind of God the Father and Jesus Christ and into their plan for the future of humanity.
- Each observance and festival has its own literal, symbolic, and prophetic meaning for the elect of God and humanity as a whole.
- Each pictures the past, present, and future of specific events and situations in God's plan for the salvation of humanity.
- Each teaches the great concern, compassion, and love that God the Father and Jesus Christ have for humanity.
- Each shows the tremendous care with which the Father made his plan for the salvation of humanity.
- Each reveals the way to eternal and immortal life in the Family of God.

The Father wants his children to be happy. He is not the stern harsh God that he has so often been pictured to be. One of the ways that he has provided for our happiness and our spiritual growth and development of righteous character is through his special observances. These observances and festivals are specifically set apart for our physical and spiritual rejuvenation as we live our lives in anticipation of the rewards that he has promised for faithful obedience to his law and way of life.

We will be exploring the origin, past, present and future of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread during the next eight weeks. When it comes time to observe the Passover, we all should be better prepared to get the most out of the experience this year and for years to come.

For additional reading this week, see:

Does it Really Matter What Days We Keep?

An article by William Dankenbring that talks more about the Holy Days and why it is important that we observe them and are obedient to God. (Found on the HOME page at www.soundatrumpet.com.)

CLOSING HYMN #226

“With Happy Voices Singing”

William G. Tarrant, 1888
Berthold Tours, 1872

With happy voices ringing, Thy children, Lord, appear;
Their joyous praises bringing in anthems sweet and clear.
For skies of golden splendor, for azure rolling sea,
For blossoms sweet and tender, O Lord, we worship Thee.

What though no eye beholds Thee, no hand Thy hand may feel,
Thy universe unfolds Thee, Thy starry heav'ns reveal;
The earth and all its glory, our homes and all we love,
Tell forth the wondrous story of One Who reigns above.

And shall we not adore Thee, with more than joyous song,
And live in truth before Thee, all beautiful and strong?
Lord, bless our souls' endeavor Thy servants true to be,
And through all life, forever, to live our praise to Thee.

CLOSING WORDS

Scatter to your accustomed places with a new outlook;
God is ruling in our midst.

**Nothing we do escapes God's notice,
and no act of ours can separate us from God's love.**

Take the promises of God to a needy world;
share good news with friends and co-workers.

**God turns us from all that destroys
and builds us up to face and overcome evil.**

God will direct your paths during the week ahead
and provide all that you need to face its choices.

**We will be watchful and prayerful,
lest we miss the work of God all around us. Amen.**