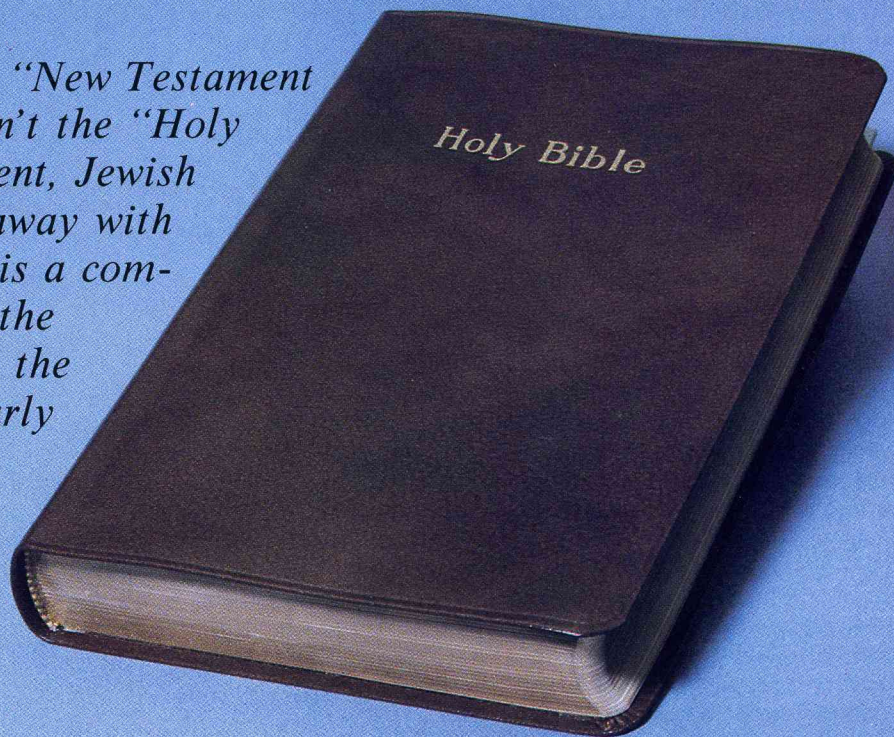


God's Holy Days in the New Testament

What do you mean, "New Testament Holy Days"? Weren't the "Holy Days" Old Testament, Jewish observances, done away with at the cross? Here is a comprehensive look at the practices of Christ, the apostles and the early Church.

By Leroy Neff



I well remember the first time I heard Herbert W. Armstrong speak.

It was August, 1951. My wife and I were attending our first services of the Church of God in a small house used for local church services in Portland, Ore.

In his sermon, Mr. Armstrong referred a number of times to various feast days such as the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Except for one of these, the names all sounded strange to

me. I had read the Bible ever since I started reading, and yet these terms were "Greek" to me.

I had heard about Pentecost and knew it was important. However, I did not know whether Pentecost was a day or an event. I didn't know if it happened only once or many times.

In my thinking, not only were these names strange sounding, but they belonged to ancient history. I believed that these days were unchristian. I had been taught that they were "nailed to the cross" and that we would be under a curse — under a "yoke of bondage" — if we observed them. They were Jewish feasts and not for Christians.

Since that day I have learned a lot from the Bible — things I did not dream it contained.

After finding out that Mr. Armstrong and the Church of God observed these "Old Testament" days, I began looking them up in my own Bible. What a surprise, especially in the New Testament I thought I knew so well!

In my research I also found that most Jews don't keep these feasts, and that those who do don't keep them in the same manner, and in some cases not even on the same day, that the New Testament Church of God did.

As I began my research, I found that I could not find the word *Christmas* in the Bible,

either in Old or New Testament. Neither could I find New Year's (Jan. 1), Valentine's Day, May Day, Halloween or April Fool's Day.

I did find *Easter* (Acts 12:4 in the King James Version), but in the other versions it was called *Passover* instead. In checking further I learned that the King James translators in 1611 used the wrong word entirely, as the Greek manuscripts from which they translated read *Pascha*, which, literally translated, is *Passover*.

Since these holidays were not mentioned, what days were? I found that the New Testament, in many places, mentioned the days to which Mr. Armstrong had referred in his sermon.

I want now to take you through the same scriptures that I "discovered" in my study more than 30 years ago. You, too, will probably be as surprised as I was with at least some, if not all, of these texts and what they say.

What feasts did Christ observe?

It is logical to begin at the beginning, so I first carefully checked to see what days Christ observed. There was no record that He ever observed any of the well-known holidays I just mentioned.

What did He observe, then? I found that when Jesus was 12 years old His parents took Him to Jerusalem to observe the Passover: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast" (Luke 2:41-42).

Notice here that His parents traveled to this Feast annually; therefore, Jesus had been to this Feast several times before. He continued this practice with His parents as He was subject to His parents (verse 51).

And not only did they stay for the Passover day alone, but "fulfilled the days" (verse 43) — the seven Days of Unleavened Bread

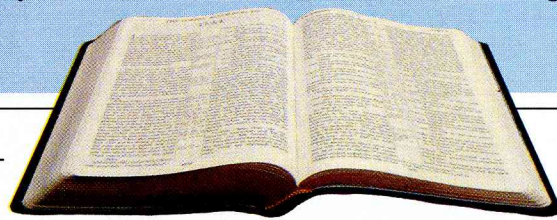
associated with the Passover (see Leviticus 23:4-6).

Why did His parents do this? Because they were devout Jews who "performed all things according to the law of the Lord [God's law]" (Luke 2:39). Most Jews of that time were really not devout in their religious worship,

returned home (John 4:45). They had seen what He did at the Feast, which probably includes all the events from chapter 2:13 to 3:21.

John 5:1 mentions another Feast. It probably was one of the fall festivals, and Jesus again went up to Jerusalem. Based on

We have seen that Jesus kept the Passover,
the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of
Tabernacles and the Last Great Day
They were all included in the . . . Holy
Days. . . . Was there to be a change?



but the parents God the Father chose to rear His own Son were.

About 18 years later, when Jesus was about 30 years old, we find that He was still continuing His parents' practice as prescribed in the law of the Lord.

Notice John 2:13: "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." Some people wonder why this is called the "Jews' passover" when it is one of the feasts of God (Lev. 23:2). Two possible reasons exist: 1) Only Jews observed these days (gentiles did not), and 2) the Jews had made some changes regarding Feast observance since it was given to Israel in the time of Moses.

Here we see that Christ, now in His adult life and during His 3½-year ministry, was going to Jerusalem to observe the Feast. In addition to the Passover day, He also continued on during the "feast day" (Feast of Unleavened Bread, verse 23).

Some people from Galilee who also traveled to Jerusalem for this Feast received Jesus after He

the record of John, it would seem

apparent this was not the spring or Passover Feast. Events in the next chapter, which occurred later, mention that the Passover was near (John 6:4).

Quite some time later (possibly two or three years), Jesus again prepared to go up to the Feast. This time there were threats against His life so He stayed in Galilee as long as possible. This Feast was the great Feast of Tabernacles: "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand" (John 7:1-2).

Even though there were threats of violence against His life, Jesus still went to the Feast. He taught in the Temple during the Feast (verse 14) and at the end of the Feast, the last or eighth day (verse 37).

At this Feast He explained the spiritual significance and meaning of these days, and in particular the Last Great Day (verses 37-38).

Later, as the time of His cru-

cifixion drew near, He again prepared to go to Jerusalem. Many of the people speculated as to whether He would come (John 11:55-56), as they apparently knew of the threats against Him.

Jesus knew in detail what would happen to Him this time at Jerusalem, and plainly told His disciples on the way (Matt. 20:17-19). Knowing all this, He still went to observe the commanded Passover!

Christ's last Passover

All the gospels record this last Passover in great detail, and it would be unnecessary and repetitious to quote all four accounts. But we should see certain points regarding this climax to Christ's ministry and to His physical life.

In John 12 we find that Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover. Since Lazarus had been brought back to life (verse 1), the chief priests wanted to kill Lazarus too (verses 10-11). If they could kill Lazarus, they could discredit Jesus Christ and

The gospels and even some of Paul's writings, as we will see later, give the events of that evening in great detail. For our study, the important point to note is that He still observed this day according to the "law of the Lord." It is interesting to note that He also observed it 24 hours before the Jews did.

On the daylight part of that day He was crucified and died for our sins. Now notice: Everything that was "nailed to the cross" was nailed right then and there. Whatever the cross ended, was ended.

Holy Days "nailed to the cross"?

What now? Were the laws changed or done away with, as so many believe? Were people "saved" before this time by obedience to the law and now, because of what was nailed to the cross, would people be saved by disobeying that same law? We will see.

So far we have seen that Jesus kept the Passover, the Days of

Holy Days: 1) Devout Jews who worshiped the Creator God did, and He was a devout Jew. 2) The law commanded that the Holy Days be observed. Sin is the transgression of the law (I John 3:4), and Christ did not sin (I Pet. 2:22). 3) He was the One who gave the Holy Days to Israel (Lev. 23). He was the YHWH, or God of Israel (I Cor. 10:4), made flesh. He was the Word who was God, who became flesh (John 1:1-4, 14). He was only doing what He Himself told Israel to do centuries earlier.

What now? Was there to be a change? Were Christ's followers to have a new religion and observe different days than He did?

Let's pick up this fascinating story in Matthew 28. After Christ's crucifixion and burial He was resurrected exactly three days and three nights later, as He said He would be.

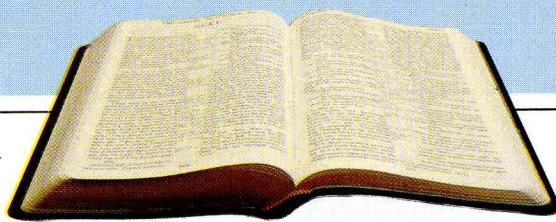
During the next 40 days He was seen by the disciples under varying circumstances. At the end of that time He gave His final instructions to the disciples at the Mount of Olives and then ascended to heaven in a cloud.

Here are those instructions: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (verses 18-20).

Verse 19 is well-known and frequently quoted, but I would like to emphasize verse 20. He said that they should teach "all nations" (Jews and gentiles alike) to observe the things He had commanded them.

There is no direct command by Jesus in the New Testament to observe these days; however, He did command them personally to all Israel. And, by example,

In other words, we ought to live the way Christ lived. He set us the perfect example. From these . . . scriptures, it ought to be plain that since He observed the Holy Days, the New Testament Church ought to also.



His "miracles" in order that the people would no longer follow Christ.

Luke tells us how much Jesus wanted to observe this final Passover with His disciples: "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).

Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Even though the Feast of Pentecost, Trumpets and Atonement are not mentioned by name, it is obvious that He observed them, too. They were all included in the seven annual Holy Days.

Here are three reasons why Jesus observed all seven annual

which He had now set, it should have been clear. But there is even more, as we will see shortly.

Notice again that word *observe*. Some people think that all we have to do is have "love" (as they interpret the word *love*). When we really understand what love is, as the Bible explains it, that may well be so. But that kind of love includes obedience to God's commandments (I John 5:3, 2:3-6).

It should be apparent that the word *observe* in this context means a lot more than just having "love in your heart"! How do you *observe* love? *Observe* certainly includes what Christ *observed*. The Greek word from which this is translated literally means "to watch" or "to keep." It is translated 57 times as "keep" (including John 9:16). Certainly *observe* includes observing the days He observed.

Let's go one step further. I John 2:6 says we should walk as He walked. Or, in modern English, this means to live like He lived as far as religious matters are concerned. Peter tells us the same thing in different words:

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Pet. 2:21).

In other words, we ought to live the way Christ lived. He set us the perfect example. From these two scriptures, it ought to be plain that since He observed the Holy Days, the New Testament Church ought to also.

Paul also made a similar statement: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).

If Paul did not follow Christ, we should not follow him. If the New Testament Church did not follow Christ, we should not follow it. If the gentile Christians did not follow Christ, we should not follow them. This should be plain from these scriptures.

We now need to see whether

the Church really did follow Christ in observing these days. The facts are comforting and consistent for those who really want to learn God's ways and observe them.

Did the Church follow Christ?

The opening statements in Acts make it clear. The Church did follow Christ's example.

In chapter 2, verse 1, we find the Church observing a Holy Day — Pentecost! It was still a Holy Day. If such days had been nailed to the cross, it would not have been Pentecost any longer, but just another weekday of work.

If the Church of God had not been together on this high Holy Day, they would not have received the gift of God's Holy Spirit. They would not have been together and of one accord.

About 13 or 14 years later, during the Days of Unleavened Bread, Herod the king killed the apostle James (Acts 12:1-2). Notice: The Days of Unleavened Bread still existed. The reason they are mentioned here is so that

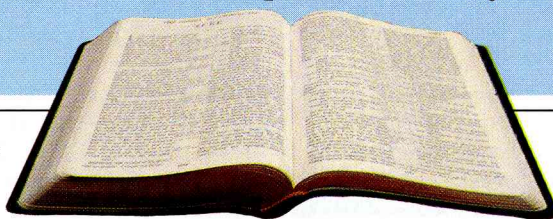
is also considered to have been Greek. The book was for Jew and Greek Christians alike.

If the gentile Christians did not know about the Holy Days it would have been useless for Luke to even mention that this event occurred during this Feast. The truth, as we shall see more clearly as more scriptures are reviewed, is that gentiles and Jews alike were keeping these days.

In this passage in Acts 12, not only are the Days of Unleavened Bread mentioned, but also the Passover. It is mentioned in verse 4, except that the King James Version incorrectly translates the word *Pascha* as "Easter" at this point. The New Testament Christians were familiar with the Passover.

Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, said, "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem" (Acts 18:21). It would appear that this Feast was probably the Feast of Tabernacles. The people he was addressing in this text were probably mostly gentile Christians

Imagine . . . a gentile, writing to another gentile, 30 years after the cross and using a "Jewish" Holy Day to describe the time of year! . . . early Christians, Jew and gentile . . . knew about and kept God's Holy Days.



the reader will know the time of year this murder of one of God's apostles took place.

The author of this book was Luke, who is commonly and probably correctly believed to have been a gentile. He wrote specifically for his "patron," Theophilus (Acts 1:1), and by extension to all Christians. Theophilus

(verse 6). Here is the first of several examples in which we find this apostle keeping the feasts of God.

This same apostle and his associates sailed away from Philippi, in Greece, right after the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6). Obviously they had observed the days before their departure. The

Days of Unleavened Bread still existed, now about a quarter century after everything was nailed to the cross.

Later in this same chapter we learn that Paul hurried so that he might be able to be in Jerusalem a few weeks later for Pentecost (verse 16).

holy to God (Lev. 23:2-3). But there are even more references in Acts.

Two more Holy Days in Acts

Notice Acts 13:14: "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the

A.D. 55, he sent the letter commonly known as I Corinthians. This church was composed of both gentile and Jewish Christians — probably mostly gentile. The church had serious problems, which Paul addressed in this letter.

One problem concerned immorality on the part of one man. The rest of the church knew about and condoned the man's sin.

Chapter 5 addresses the problem. The man was "disfellowshipped" and the church strongly admonished because of their wrong attitude. Three verses specifically tell them what they should do about this spiritual "leaven": "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:6-8).

Leaven is a type of sin. If put into a lump of dough, leaven will, in time, permeate the whole lump. Sin, if left alone, would, in like manner, permeate the whole Church.

The seven Days of Unleavened Bread are a time when all leavened products are to be removed. This physical removal reminds one of the spiritual implications and workings of sin.

Not only does leaven permeate the whole lump, but it puffs up the dough so that the bread will be larger and lighter in texture. This compares to sin puffing up the individual or the affected group of people.

In this last quoted passage, note that the Church is told to purge out this leaven (sin) "as ye are unleavened" (verse 7). He was not saying they were unleavened spiritually, as the whole passage indicates the exact opposite. How, then, were they "un-

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Paul next commands, "Therefore let us keep the feast" . . . This is a command to the Church, Jew and gentile alike. If it had been nailed to the cross 34 years earlier . . . Paul would not have penned these words.



The next place where we read of

a Holy Day is in Acts 27:9: "Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them."

This fast day is understood by nearly all biblical scholars to be the Day of Atonement — you can check this point in almost any Bible commentary. The Day of Atonement occurs in the fall of the year, at which time sailing was hazardous in the Mediterranean Sea.

Again, imagine, if you can, a gentile, writing to another gentile, 30 years after the cross and using a "Jewish" Holy Day to describe the time of year! It wasn't strange to Theophilus, but it would be strange to many people today who think they follow Christ, but who do not follow Him and His example concerning God's Holy Days.

We have seen seven different references to the Holy Days in the book of Acts alone. Of course, there are other references to the weekly Sabbath, which they also observed, and which is also a day

sabbath day, and sat down." The

words "sabbath day" in this passage are different from many other places in the Greek text. A literal translation in English would be "day of sabbaths." The word for Sabbath is plural, not singular. This term is used only three times in the Bible — here, Luke 4:16 and Acts 16:13.

This day could possibly be a double high-day Sabbath, when a weekly and annual Sabbath occur together. More likely the phrase refers to Pentecost, since Pentecost comes at the end of seven Sabbaths.

At any rate, Paul and his friends observed the day, as they did some time later (Acts 16:13).

All these texts in Acts should make it clear that the early Christians, Jew and gentile alike, knew about and kept God's Holy Days.

Did Paul instruct gentiles about God's feasts?

Paul raised up the church at Corinth, as we read in Acts 18. Some years later, possibly about

Holy Days

(Continued from page 21)

leavened"? They were unleavened *physically*. These were the Days of Unleavened Bread. They (Jew and gentile Christians) had put leaven out of their homes and had eaten no leaven. Therefore, they were unleavened physically and now needed to also be unleavened spiritually.

Paul next relates that Christ is our Passover. He was the "lamb" that was slain: His death is commemorated each year by the Passover observance.

Not only had these Corinthians unleavened physically during this Feast of Unleavened Bread, but Paul next commands, "Therefore let us keep the feast" (verse 8).

This is a command to the Church, Jew and gentile alike, to keep the Feast. If it had been nailed to the cross 34 years earlier, or if they would have been under a curse to keep it, Paul would not have penned these words.

A few chapters later, Paul again returns to the subject of the festivals of God. In chapter 11, verses 17-34, he explains in detail the history, purpose and manner of the New Testament Passover.

No longer is the Passover a roast lamb meal (verse 34). Instead it is an evening occasion of great symbolic meaning and purpose. It reminds us of our accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Passover lamb, our Savior and the One who has made it possible, through His shed blood, for us, to have our sins forgiven and to be healed of our physical ailments. These 18 verses are devoted entirely to details of this Feast of God.

In I Corinthians 16:8, Paul again refers to the Feast of Pentecost. On this occasion he intended to remain in Ephesus, keep the Feast there instead of at Jerusalem and after that to continue his evangelistic journeys. Pentecost still came every year. It still existed, now about 24 years after Christ's crucifixion.

It's surprising, but one of the

main "proofs" used by some to "knock in the head" the Sabbath and Holy Days is Colossians 2:16. This "proof text," when viewed in context, instead of proving that they were "done away" proves that a gentile church (at Colosse) actually kept the Holy Days!

Notice the key verses: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

Paul does not here say, "Do not keep Holy Days or Sabbaths," though that is what many people read into the text.

To start with, he warns them not to let a man judge them concerning the matters he then mentions. If they were not to let any man judge them in these matters, who was supposed to judge?

The answer is somewhat obscured by an added word in verse 17. This word, in the King James Version, is indicated by the italic type, meaning that there is no equivalent word in the Greek, but that the word was added by the translators in the hope that the passage would be more clear in English. In this case, though, it obscures the point.

Here is the specific phrase: "But the body *is* of Christ." This should read "But the body of Christ."

Here simply, is what Paul is saying in these two verses: "Don't let any man judge you . . . but let the Body of Christ judge you."

Outsiders were judging the Church

In Colossians 1:18 we learn that Christ is the Head of that Body, which is the Church. Christ, as Head of the Church and through His Church, will judge these matters. No one else should, especially someone not even in the Church.

The matters not to be judged by outsiders concern meat and drink and their relationship to 1) a Holy Day, 2) the new moon, 3) the Sabbath. In other words,

what people eat and drink on these days and what is done on these days are not to be judged by outsiders, but by the Church and its Head, Jesus Christ.

These days are a shadow (picture in advance) of certain aspects of God's plan of salvation. Each year as God's people observe these days, they understand more clearly His plan and how it is being carried out.

God anciently commanded the Sabbath and Holy Days, though He nowhere commanded observing the new moons. The new moons have been observed by some people at various times and in various ways, but nowhere in the Scriptures were they made days of rest.

The fact that Paul had to write to gentile Christians on this matter makes it clear that some people were judging what the people in Colosse were eating and drinking, or what they were doing, as a part of their observance of these days.

These people had not observed God's Holy Days before becoming Christians. They observed the pagan days previously. After starting to observe these Holy Days, false religious teachers began to condemn them about how they kept them and what they did on those days. Paul and the other true ministers, following Christ's example, showed them by personal example and by the scriptures how and when they should observe the Holy Days and Sabbath.

"Ye observe days, and months"

Another "proof text" supposedly condemning Holy Days is Galatians 4:10: "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."

Let's get our bearings and use some simple logic. First, who were the Galatians? Gentile or Jew? Clearly they were gentile, as Galatians 2:7-8, 3:26 and 4:8 show.

According to chapter 4, verse 9, they had turned back to these "days, and months, and times, and years." What days, months,

times and years had these gentiles observed before coming into the glorious truth of God? Answer: the days that the pagan religions observed.

Just as in Colosse, these gentile Christians learned for the first time about the Holy Days of God through the apostles and the true Church. After embracing these days, which were ordained of God, they had turned back to their old religious days, months, times and years.

God nowhere commanded as holy any months, times or years. He only made holy certain days — the weekly Sabbath and seven annual Holy Days. God, in fact, condemned the observance of times (Deut. 18:10).

This passage has nothing whatsoever to do with Holy Days, but it is mentioned here lest someone think an important “contrary text” was omitted.

It may surprise you that the New Testament has so much to say about God’s Holy Days. Yet these texts have been there all the time, and we have not covered them all even yet. The next to the last book of the Bible also has something to say about Holy Days.

What are love feasts?

“These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12).

What are these “feasts of charity”? Most modern translations call them, more accurately, “love feasts.”

Adam Clarke, in his six-volume commentary, states that they “were in use in the primitive church till the middle of the fourth century, when by the Council of Laodicea they were prohibited to be held in the churches.”

Other commentators and dictionaries connect the love feasts with the Passover, the “Lord’s Supper,” the Eucharist or the term *breaking of bread*. Most of

these comments come from practices extant in the second to fourth centuries, and do not relate to practices at the time of Jude’s writing late in the first century.

When you take the Bible account and compare it with these comments from a later date, it becomes evident that the “faith which was once delivered” (Jude 3) had been watered down.

God is love (I John 4:8). The Holy Days are the “feasts of the Lord” (Lev. 23:2, 4). By extension we can say, then, that the Holy Days are love feasts. They are the only feasts God ever gave. They are an expression of love — God’s love — since He gave them to Israel and to His Church. They are a blessing and delight for God’s people.

The New Testament Church kept all these love feasts. In time, some religious but ungodly men (Jude 4) crept into the Church. They later “went out” (I John 2:19) and apparently took some of the beliefs with them, which in time became perverted.

The “love feasts” that they observed are all that the commentators have found to explain Jude 12. In due time even these perverted “love feasts” were dropped. Probably even these feasts were too “Jewish” for the liking of a church later identified in Revelation 17.

At the time of Jude, the ungodly men who had crept in unawares were spots or blemishes in the celebration, by the Church, of God’s festivals. This same problem is also mentioned in II Peter 2:13, showing again that God’s people in His Church were still keeping these feasts.

Do you keep these days?

We have now seen references to the observance of, or instructions about, God’s Holy Days or feasts in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Also in Acts, I Corinthians, Colossians, II Peter and Jude. Galatians is not included since it mentioned pagan holidays only. Nine New Testament books show clearly what days God’s New

Testament Church kept.

They did not keep Christmas, Easter, May Day or April Fool’s Day. Only the pagans observed such days, known then by different names. In later years the names of these pagan holidays were changed so that they appeared Christian. They were and are anything but truly Christian.

God, who later became Christ, commanded the Holy Days originally. Jesus Christ set the example by keeping these same days. The apostles followed that example and taught others, Jew and gentile, to do the same.

In Zechariah 14:19 we find a prophecy that even the gentiles during the Millennium will either keep the Feast or be punished by God.

The feasts were commanded forever (Lev. 23:41 and elsewhere).

The remaining question is this: Do you, too, keep these New Testament Holy Days? □

PERSONAL

(Continued from page 2)

[the smaller nations] . . . And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord [Eternal], and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he [Christ] will teach us of HIS ways, and we will walk in HIS paths: for THE LAW shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord [Eternal] from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE” (Mic. 4:1-3).

It is when people are undeceived by Satan, when God’s LAW goes forth, when people begin to seek God’s laws and live by His ways and when, through Christ and the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, we are able to develop in our lives the character of God that we shall have PEACE, PROSPERITY, HAPPINESS and JOY! □