

IS THERE MORE TO KEEPING GOD'S DAYS THAN MEETS THE EYE?

In this article I'd like to discuss some thoughts and ideas on some miscellaneous subjects relating to God's days that are rarely discussed amongst God's people.

The six subjects that I'd like to cover in this paper are the following :-

- To work or not to work on the day part of Passover (Nisan 14)?
- Should we abstain from eating leaven on Passover (Nisan 14)?
- The wavesheaf offering
- Should we have services or Bible studies on each night of Unleavened Bread?
- Are the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost pilgrimage feasts?
- New moons

Before I offer some thoughts and musings on each of these topics I'd like to lay a little groundwork by covering some principles we need to keep in mind as we go through these topics.

Over and Above

In **Luke 17:7-10** Jesus gave a parable in which He said:

“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

Generally we look on this parable of the unprofitable servant as teaching us the principle of having a good work ethic in our jobs but we should look at it in a broader way in relation to our obedience to God.

There are those things which are commanded of us to do – what Jesus refers to in the parable as our duty. Jesus tells us that we should have a heart that wants to do more than what is simply required of us. We are not merely to keep the Ten Commandments but go over and above in doing good to others and bear more of the fruits of the Spirit.

In **1 John 3:22** we read: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

God's preferences when it comes to those things that He steers us to do personally (eg. guiding us to a certain profession or to a particular person to marry) are not specifically recorded in the scriptures. There are paths that are open to us that would please God if we were to choose them.

There are many things in His will for us that are pleasing to Him that are not specifically recorded in scripture. These things are not a matter of right and wrong we see but they are still things that are also God's will and that God would be pleased with if we were to choose them. Choosing to do those things is one way that we can go over and above in our obedience to Him.

Remember God is our Father. As parents there are things that we require of our children to do. They don't have to do more but don't we desire, if we are parents, for them to go over and above and do things that please us that aren't required of them to do? When they do good things for us and go over and above it shows a depth of love that they have for us. How much that they do above what is required is often a good gauge as to how much they love us and an indicator of their enthusiasm to please us.

This is very much the case when it comes to how God looks on us. He's very interested in what's in our hearts and our attitude towards to doing things in general that are over and above what is required of us show what's in our hearts.

One example of this is are offerings. What is required of us is our tenth to God and to give offerings on the Holy Days (**Malachi 3:8-10**). We are required to give a tenth to God of our increase (**Leviticus 27:30**) and to give an offering on the Holy Days though the amount we are to give on the Holy Days is completely up to us (**Deuteronomy 16:16-17**). God is pleased with and desires us to give more offerings over and above that but He leaves that up to us (**2 Corinthians 9:6**).

Rabbi Miller, a Messianic Jew, encourages messianics and christians when it comes to the Torah, the laws of the first five books of the Bible, to focus on what you can do and not on what you can't do in the Torah. When people say, "Do you have to do that?" in a negative way about some of the more odd statutes and judgments he says to them in an enthusiastic tone, "No, I GET to do them!"

We should keep this in mind when it comes to these topics relating to God's days. There may not be a requirement to do these things but should we not WANT to do them as we are able to do them even if circumstances prevent us from doing so? Sometimes we're not always able to or they are a lot more inconvenient at some times than other times.

In the church we should foster a positive atmosphere that encourages the brethren to go and above in the keeping of His laws and His days in a balanced way. For those of us who are eager to do some of these things above what is required of us we also need to be careful not to look down on the actions of others who may not want to do more than what is clearly required.

When Is A Holy Day Not A Holy Day?

That sounds like an odd question doesn't it? When is a holy day not a holy day? Have you ever thought it a bit odd that what is regarded as the holiest and most sober festival of all is not on a sabbath day? The Passover service is not held on a High Day or annual sabbath.

Jews consider Yom Kippor (the Day of Atonement) as the Highest of the high days. They view Atonement the way that we in the church of God view Passover since they don't see the personal atonement in the meaning of Passover but celebrate it as Israel's liberation from the death angel and captivity in Egypt.

In **Leviticus 23:4-8** we read: "These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day *shall be* a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work *on it*."

The Passover is described as a feast and but there is no set requirement to keep it as a sabbath and not work on it. It's a feast but it's not a sabbath. The same is true of days two to six of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and days two to seven of the Feast of Tabernacles. They are ALL God's days but none of them are sabbaths. This is a point to keep in mind when we get to the subject of new moons.

The fact that Passover (Nisan 14) is not a sabbath and there is no command to abstain from leaven on that day has been a factor in why historically the Jews centuries after the original Passover in Hezekiah's time misunderstood the scriptures and moved the time to kill the Passover lamb from the beginning of Nisan 14 to the end of Nisan 14 and began eating the lamb at the beginning of Nisan 15 instead of Nisan 14.

Should we work on the day part of Passover day between the Passover service of the night before and the First Day of Unleavened Bread? Since the Passover is such an important night of the year and since what Christ did for us is so deeply meaningful I would say God would be pleased with us if we didn't work on that day and reflected and studied more into it. It may not be a requirement but I'm sure that God would be pleased, if in the spirit of the festival of being cleansed from sin, we gave that extra focus to it if we were able to.

A similar thing could be said of de-leavening before the Passover service and eating unleavened bread and not eating leavened bread on Nisan 14. It is clearly not a requirement to abstain until the night of Nisan 15 but since we are keeping the Passover service with unleavened bread would not God be pleased with us if, in keeping with the spirit of the festival season of being cleansed from and coming out of sin, we decided to abstain that extra day (Nisan 14) from this symbol of sin?

The Wavesheaf Offering

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites commemorated the wave sheaf offering on the first day of the week that fell during the Feast. In **Leviticus 23:10-11** we read: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'"

The wave sheaf was the very first sheaf of wheat that was harvested in Israel during the early harvest which concluded at the feast of Pentecost seven weeks later. The first harvest was the smaller of the two annual harvests. Pentecost is also known as the Feast of Firstfruits. The wave sheaf was the first of the firstfruit harvest.

Those of us in the church are the firstfruits of salvation before the latter great harvest of souls in the millennium. Christ is called the firstborn from the dead in **Colossians 1:18**. In **1 Corinthians 15:20-23** we see that Christ is the first of the firstfruits and the wave sheaf that was waved at the very beginning of the early harvest represented Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath before the wave sheaf offering is the memorial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ who rose near the end of the Sabbath. He rose to heaven and was accepted as the true wave sheaf offering - the first of the firstfruits - on the day after.

Jesus said to Mary Magdalene after she recognized Him: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (**John 20:17**).

The scene of being accepted by the Father is dramatically described in vision in **Revelation 4 and 5** by the apostle John. Later on the first day of the week, after He beamed up to

heaven and back and was accepted by God, He allowed the disciples to touch him (**John 20:19-29**).

As far as determining when the Feast of Pentecost is there are actually two different counts. One count is seven weeks only (49 days) and the other is 50 days.

Pentecost is seven weeks (49 days) **FROM** the day after the Sabbath when the wave sheaf was offered (**Leviticus 23:15, Deuteronomy 16:9-10**) **AND** fifty days **TO** the day after seventh Sabbath – a Sunday (**Leviticus 23:16**). Remember that Christ was resurrected near the end of the Sabbath **AND** He ascended to heaven to be accepted by God the Father on the first day of the week. That is my opinion of why there are two separate counts to Pentecost.

Despite its dramatic importance in the whole plan of God we do nothing as a church to commemorate the resurrection and ascension to heaven of Jesus Christ. When we look at the feast instructions of **Leviticus 23** we see through the wavesheaf offering that God made provision for remembrance of these vitally important events.

Not only do we not have a wavesheaf offering in the church today we don't even so much have a tradition of a message given on the sabbath in the midst of the Feast of Unleavened Bread to reflect on the vitally important events of the resurrection and ascension to heaven of Jesus Christ.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the command is to give the sheaf to the priest to wave it and since there is no priesthood the church does not presume something that is reserved for the priesthood. This is true in the sense that there is no command for a minister of the church to do what is told a priest should do in the scriptures.

If the church wanted to wave the first sheaf or grain to God at the beginning of the wheat harvest on this day as a tradition would God be pleased with this tradition or would He think we are presuming to do something that is only reserved for the priesthood?

An interesting case example of this situation is the example of the abovementioned Rabbi Miller. Where he is from in Texas, they regularly have droughts one year in every three. He sought permission from the local grain co-op to wave the first grain before God on wavesheaf Sunday and in the seven years that he has been doing it they have not had one drought in that time. God appears to have put His blessing on Rabbi Miller's efforts with this tradition.

In **Leviticus 23:14** God says: "You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering [waved the wavesheaf offering] to your God; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." In principle this is similar to giving thanks and acknowledgment to God before we sit down to eat dinner following Christ's example to ask a blessing before our meals (**Matthew 26:26-27**).

The second reason the church does nothing to commemorate the resurrection and ascension to heaven of Jesus Christ is probably an over reaction to the way in which the world's churches celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Since God has made provision for remembrance of these vitally important events with the wavesheaf offering, I feel, at the very least, we should have a message on the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread to remember the resurrection of Christ which occurred on that day and all that it means for mankind.

It would be good to reflect on the events of the resurrection and ascension to heaven of Jesus Christ and also reflect on the symbolism of not only the wavesheaf offering but also the symbolism of the other offerings that were made along with the wavesheaf offering.

Should we have services or Bible studies on each night of Unleavened Bread?

During the Feast of Tabernacles we have services every day, even though there is no such command to do so in **Leviticus 23** or elsewhere. The church sees the principle (**Deuteronomy 14:22-23**) that the Feast of Tabernacles is a time to intensively learn from God's word and so has services every day. [As an aside, most church members generally are quite unfamiliar with the fact that this feast is also called the Feast of Ingathering in scripture (**Exodus 23:16, 34:22**)].

Since there is no command to have services every day of the Feast of Tabernacles and yet we have services every day what about doing something similar as a tradition for the Feast of Unleavened Bread? When you realize the symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to come out of this world and to be cleansed of and overcome sin there is even stronger reason by principle to have such a tradition as compared to Tabernacles.

The church does not go away as a group to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread as we do Tabernacles. Most church members are usually working during the non-sabbath days of Unleavened Bread but evenings are free for most members. My suggestion is that there, at least, be bible studies each night of Unleavened Bread so members can intensively learn from God's word to help them grow and overcome.

We have to eat unleavened bread every day - seven days shall you eat it (**Exodus 12:15**). This teaches us our need to come to God seeking His help and power every day and be renewed day by day (**2 Corinthians 4:16**). Seven is the number of completeness, teaching us that we need to put sin out of our lives completely.

If we have to take in Christ symbolically for every day of unleavened bread then we should be intensely studying and learning from His word EVERY day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The church, I feel, should support this by offering Bible studies every night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread just as we have the tradition of services each day of Tabernacles.

Are the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost Pilgrimage Feasts?

The meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to come out of the world and come out of and completely overcome sin. The first night of this feast we keep as a celebration called the "Night to Be Much Remembered". In **Exodus 12:42** God says: "It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations." This event was exactly 430 years to the day (**Exodus 12:40-41**) that Abraham came out of Ur (symbolizing the world) and made his way towards Canaan.

For Israel the celebration this night commemorated the coming out of Egypt in Moses' day. For the christian it celebrates coming out of this world and sin. Far too many Night to Be's I've been to in years past it became just another dinner party without any real discussion of the Bible or the meaning of the night. Recently things have improved in that department. One thing that I think would be a great tradition for the Night to Be Much Remembered is to share our stories of how God called us out of the world and converted us. The stories of how we

came into the church and into the Truth are some of the most fascinating and encouraging stories we can share with one another.

Since the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures us coming out of the world the question could be asked why don't we "come out of the world" in the same way we do at the Feast of Tabernacles as a pilgrimage (travel away) feast?

From the years 1955 to 1965 the Worldwide (then Radio) Church of God did, in fact, keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the same way that we keep the Feast of Tabernacles today as a pilgrimage or travel-away feast.

There is a clear command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in temporary dwellings in **Leviticus 23:39-42**. There is no such command regarding Unleavened Bread or Passover. This was the reason given to discontinue the practice of keeping those festivals as pilgrimage feasts.

One would also suspect economic factors may have played an important part in the decision. Where I live in Australia we have four weeks annual leave. In America the standard annual leave is two weeks and this makes asking time off for an extra week at Unleavened Bread time more difficult.

In **Exodus 23:14** God says: "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year." The Hebrew word that is used for "times" here is "regel". Strong's gives the meaning of "regel" as the following: "From H7270; **a foot (as used in walking); by implication a step**; by euphemism the *pu'denda*: - X be able to endure, X according as, X after, **X coming, X follow**, ([broken-]) foot ([ed, -stool]), X great toe, X haunt, **X journey**, leg, + possession, time."

The same phrase "three times in the year" is also found in **Exodus 23:17, 34:23 and Deuteronomy 16:16**. In those verses the word "times" is translated from the Hebrew "pa'am". Strong's says this about that word: "From H6470; **a stroke**, literally or figuratively (in various applications): - anvil, corner, **foot (-step), going**, [hundred-] fold, X now, (this) + once, order, rank, step, + thrice, [often-], second, this, two) time (-s), twice, wheel."

We are told to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the place where God chooses to place His name in **Deuteronomy 16:13-15**. We generally look at that phrase "the place God chooses to place His name" as implying a place we are required to travel to. This same phrase is used of Pentecost a few verses earlier.

In **Deuteronomy 16:10-11** we read: "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God...You shall rejoice before the LORD your God...at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide." The same is said of the Passover and Unleavened Bread season in **Deuteronomy 16:6-7**.

The commands to keep a feast at three times a year at Unleavened Bread (inclusive of Passover), Pentecost and Tabernacles (inclusive of Last Great Day) are given in **Exodus 23 and 34 and Deuteronomy 16**. Trumpets and Atonement are not mentioned at all in these feast command chapters. The only place we have a complete record of the feast days is in **Leviticus 23**. Trumpets and Atonement were not harvest festivals and no travel away was associated with them.

Jesus Christ, our example, journeyed to Jerusalem each year to keep the Passover (**Luke 2:40, John 2:13**). The Feast of Passover / Unleavened Bread was just as big a festival as Tabernacles that was kept in Jerusalem by people all over Israel in ancient Israel. We read of great Passover / Unleavened Bread festivals kept in Hezekiah's day in **2 Chronicles 29 and**

30 and in Josiah's day in **2 Chronicles 34 and 35**. They weren't minor celebrations compared to Tabernacles.

The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Jesus knew the hour would come when worship of God at His feast times would be at places other than Jerusalem (**John 4:21-24**). The place is not as important as worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth. The New Testament Church kept the feasts in localized areas (**Acts 20:5-6**).

Whether we should keep the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost as pilgrimage feasts is certainly not crystal clear in the scriptures though, in my humble opinion the balance of evidence appears to weigh in favour of it. Regardless of whether they should be or not, I do suspect in the World Tomorrow that they will be kept in such a way when all people will be worshipping God and there won't be the economic pressures to hinder such observance.

In the meantime I'm sure God would be pleased with our efforts individually, if it isn't too inconvenient to do so, if we personally get away from our regular occupations that week and focus more on what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is all about. It certainly isn't a clear command to do so but if we are able to go over and above in this way then God would be honoured with our efforts and bless us accordingly.

New Moons

In **Colossians 2:16-17** the apostle Paul to the primarily Gentile church at Colosse tells them to not let anyone hassle them about the way that they observed the sabbath, new moons and festivals and then he goes on to say that these "are a shadow of things to come."

The sabbath and the annual feasts (particularly the latter feast days) picture future events in the plan of God when God will intervene in world events and bring His kingdom to the earth. There is great symbolism to the sabbath, the new moons and the festivals of God.

We are told in **Genesis 1:14** that God set the sun and moon in the heavens to divide time marking out when we keep the new moon and festivals.

What is the symbolism behind the new moons? Also, why start the month at the new moon and not the full moon which might, at first, seem more logical given it is easier to see?

In the church we have often taught the analogy that the Sun can be compared to God (**Malachi 4:2**) while the moon, which has no light of its own but can radiate a lot of the Sun's light, can be compared to the church.

If we follow that analogy further then the new moon would symbolize the time when those of us in the church were in darkness without God. Just as over the course of the month the moon takes on more and more of the brightness of the Sun, we too, in our christian walk must take on more and more of the light of God's word and character.

The lesson of this analogy helps to explain why God starts the month at the darkest period (new moon) and also why God's day starts at sunset (**Genesis 1:5, 8, Leviticus 23:32**) with the darkest part (night) before the daylight half.

On the new moon two silver trumpets were blown in ancient Israel (**Numbers 10:10**). The trumpets are a symbol of alarm and war (**Numbers 10:9**). The new moons are never listed as sabbaths in the Bible and there is no clear directive stating the new moons are a holy convocation. The closest thing to it is that Israel, when they were on the move in the wilderness, would assemble at the tent of meeting when they heard the trumpets being blown (**Numbers 10:3**). It's a line ball call as to whether this commanded assembly of the

days of Israel in the wilderness still applies today though the church has officially declared it does not.

The combined expression “sabbaths, new moons and feasts” is used a number of times in the scriptures such as in **1 Chronicles 23:31, 2 Chronicles 2:4, 8:13, 2 Chronicles 31:3 and Nehemiah 10:33**. This was mostly in connection to the offerings which included offerings given on the New Moon.

Even though the **primarily Gentile** Colossian church wouldn't have kept the new moon as a sabbath, it appears as if they were still carrying on the Jewish tradition of assembling together on the night of the new moon (**Colossians 2:16-17**), though officially they are never referred to as holy convocations.

Having a bible study or service on the night of the new moon is a tradition that is kept right throughout almost all of Judaism and the Messianic Jewish community (those Jews who embrace Christ as Saviour and believe in the New Testament as also part of the Bible).

This tradition will gain a resurgence in the millennium (**Isaiah 66:23**) when the millennial Temple is built.

We read of this resurgence of the worshipping on the new moons at the millennial Temple in **Ezekiel 46:1-3**:

“Thus says the Lord GOD: **‘The gateway of the inner court that faces toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the New Moon it shall be opened.** The prince shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway from the outside, and stand by the gatepost. The priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings. He shall worship at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not be shut until evening. **Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the entrance to this gateway before the LORD on the Sabbaths and the New Moons.**”

Note that the new moons are separated from the Sabbaths – both weekly and plural. The new moon is technically not a sabbath where one is commanded to rest from one's occupational work.

The new moon is a regular reminder to us and a good time to reflect on the time when we were in darkness without God and when we answered the call (symbolized by the trumpet) that alarmed us of our sins and our need for God's light in our lives.

It reminds us of the need to rededicate ourselves to taking on more and more of the light of God's word and character in our christian walk just as moon gets brighter as it takes on more of the Sun's light over the course of the month.

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible says of the New Moon that “the sins committed and not expiated during the previous month were covered by the offerings of the New Moon.” This fits with the symbolism that I have just described. At baptism when we came into the church and came out of the world's darkness we were given a fresh start by God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Our current manner in which we have addressed the subject of the new moons when people have brought it up has led to the situation where we not only do nothing on the new moon but most members don't even know the new moon has even happened when it does.

I believe that we should be aware of when the new moon occurs and given the symbolism that I have just pointed out I think it would be a great idea if we could have bible studies on the night of the new moon as a tradition much in the same way we have other traditions such as services on each day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

I see our attitude toward the new moon as similar to that of offerings. The sabbath and festivals are like tithes which are commanded. The new moons are similar to offerings. Though not commanded as a sabbath, coming together to learn more from His word on them is something that I'm sure God would be pleased with.

As I said before, I believe the church needs to foster a positive atmosphere than encourages the brethren to go and above in the keeping of His laws and His days. For those of us who are eager to do some of these things above what is required of us we also need to be balanced and careful not to look down on the actions of others who may not want to do more than what is clearly required.

These things I've outlined in this paper are not a matter of right and wrong pe see but they are things that God may well be pleased with if we were to choose to do them from time to time. Let's do our best to love God and go over and above where we can in our obedience to Him in not just the keeping of His days but all things.