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Less Judging, More Thinking

Dear Brethren,

Since the COVID-19 vaccines were approved, Church members have lined up on both sides of the issue. Some claimed you lacked faith if you took the jab. Others claimed it was your moral or civic duty to do so. Both views miss the mark.

Those who submitted to vaccination did so for a variety of reasons. Travel is not as free in many places around the world as it is here in the United States. A few ministers could not carry out essential duties—could not do the Work—without a vaccine passport. We also have members who could not visit a dying parent without proof of vaccination. One minister was abroad when a sudden change of regulations left him unable to return home unless he took the jab. None of these men or women *sought* vaccination; they were forced into a difficult corner by circumstances. They weighed the risks against the benefits and submitted in faith to take the jab. There are other reasons people submitted to vaccination, and they need not explain those reasons to anyone—it is a matter between them and God.

Just as those against vaccination should not judge those who choose it, neither should those who choose vaccination judge those who do not. Some have condemned anyone who refuses vaccination as not fulfilling their civic duty. However, this reasoning could be applied to many things that we in the Church avoid for good reasons, including voting, serving on a jury, or serving in the military.

The Church's stand on the subject has been consistent: *Vaccination is a personal matter.* That is not being neutral; it is taking a specific stand. Some on both sides of the issue disagree and desire that the Church come down on their side. Instead, we encourage members to use wisdom and base their decisions on facts as best they can. The problem is that coming

to a conclusion based on facts is not an easy matter in today's polarized world. As Dr. Jeffrey Fall, a former dentist with years of medical training, said during our Council of Elders meetings (I'll paraphrase), "There are highly credentialed and sincere authorities who do not agree on the facts." So, where does that leave us?

Mixtures of Truth and Error

It all depends on where you go for your opinions. Many people distrust mainstream medicine—and there are sometimes good reasons for skepticism. Like so much that mankind has achieved, modern medicine represents a mixture of right and wrong that goes back to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, while some people criticize mainstream doctors as "only in it for the money," many alternative and "natural" practitioners are selling their services and products at rather hefty prices. And "natural medicine" can sometimes be just as problematic as its mainstream counterpart. A wise friend once told me that all disciplines of medicine probably have *a piece* of the big picture. There is likely a place for surgeons, general practitioners, and chiropractors. The problem comes when any one of them thinks he or she has the *whole* picture. Most doctors are neither all good nor all bad.

There are some facts that are self-evident. For one, we know that the authorities have not always been honest with us. Here in the United States, we were first told by Dr. Anthony Fauci that masks were of no value, but after the supply chain ramped up he confessed to being less than honest and explained that he had wanted to save the limited supply of masks for healthcare professionals—and that was not the last contradiction coming from him and others.

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Some things are easily proven false. The impression from the beginning was that if everyone is vaccinated, we can take off our masks and get back to normal. That was why we all “needed” the jab. We were told it was “a pandemic of the unvaccinated”—but then there were those pesky “breakthrough cases” that kept coming up. No matter where you stand on the issue, it should be obvious by now that vaccination does not stop you from contracting COVID-19, nor from spreading it. The Mayo Clinic states, “People with vaccine breakthrough infections may spread COVID-19 to others” (“Fully vaccinated? Get the facts,” *MayoClinic.org*, May 19, 2022).

Many individuals talk about how they were fully vaccinated and boosted yet still got sick, and it wasn’t always mild. President Biden’s former fully-vaccinated-and-boosted press secretary has admitted to coming down with it twice. And then there is the man himself: “Anthony Fauci MD, has been on the rebound, but not in a good way. During a remote interview with the Foreign Policy Global Health Forum on Tuesday, Fauci indicated that he’s been having a ‘Paxlovid rebound.’ That’s a relapse of Covid-19 positivity and symptoms soon after completing a course of Paxlovid for Covid-19 and testing negative. And apparently the rebound has been worse than the first time around” (“Dr. Fauci Takes 2nd Course Of Paxlovid After Suffering Covid-19 Rebound,” *Forbes.com*, June 30, 2022).

Canadian Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos was quoted as saying, “It is also important for individuals to remain up to date with the recommended vaccinations to ensure they are adequately *protected against infection, transmission, and severe complications*.... As we have said all along, Canada’s border measures will remain flexible and adaptable, *guided by science and prudence*” (“Canada extends COVID-19 border measures for incoming travellers,” *MSN.com*, June 29, 2022, emphasis mine).

Duclos’ statement suggests that with COVID vaccination you are “protected against infection” and “transmission,” but this is not completely true, as abundant evidence from medical sources, such as the Mayo Clinic, shows anyone with open eyes! However, that vaccination may minimize symptoms in many cases is backed even by some doctors who are against universal vaccination—so I, for one, am willing to consider this a possibility. This is why some individuals with co-morbidities (un-

derlying health issues like diabetes, breathing conditions, etc.) have taken the jab—they see risks both ways and accept what they see as the lower risk for their personal circumstances.

Between You and God

When it comes to vaccinating children, parents need to ask themselves a few questions. What is the real risk of COVID-19 for children? Does your child have underlying conditions that make you think the risk of the vaccine is less than the risk of the virus? And what are the long-term risks from the vaccine? The answer to the last question is not yet known, nor can it be known at this time.

Interestingly, only recently has it come to the public’s attention that there is an association between one of the most popular painkillers and conditions that have been on the rise in recent decades. “In a 2018 study, researchers did a meta-analysis of seven studies involving 132,738 pairs of mothers and children.... The analysis revealed a 20% higher risk of autism and a 30% higher risk of ADHD for children who had prolonged exposure to acetaminophen in the womb” (“Pregnancy: Does Acetaminophen Heighten Risk for Autism or ADHD?,” *Health.ClevelandClinic.org*, February 17, 2022).

Tylenol—the most popular acetaminophen medication in the U.S.—was first introduced in 1955. Is this pain reliever responsible for a dramatic rise in autism and ADHD? Apparently it is part of the problem, but it took six decades before that was discovered. How many casualties are walking around today because of what was unknown by doctors and pharmacists for years? It would seem wise for any parent to question what the risks of this new class of vaccines might be, compared against the risks to your child of the virus—both short-term and long-term.

There are risks in life, and it serves us well to use the minds God has given us. *Prayerfully* think through your options—then, with God’s help, come to a decision. And once you do, *don’t judge one another*. “Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves” (Romans 14:22).



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Walk with God and Follow His Lead

All of God's Festivals are times for self-examination, even as they foreshadow events in God's master plan. It is evident that God wants us to remember lessons from the past as well as look forward to the future. The Festivals of the seventh month remind us of what to expect in the future: Christ's return at the end of seven earth-shattering trumpet blasts, the great deceiver Satan removed from influencing mankind for a thousand years, the glorious reign of Jesus Christ on earth during those thousand years, and the second resurrection—when God will open the minds of all to have a genuine opportunity to be in God's Kingdom as His sons and daughters.

Sermons will be given on these Festival days, reviewing and deeply examining their meanings. Members will discuss these future events as they fellowship over shared meals and gatherings. "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16). While we eagerly look forward to the fulfillment of these Feasts, we are also instructed to learn important lessons by looking back.

The Passover is a reminder of God sparing Israel's firstborn as they, so to speak, "locked down" in their homes on what must have been a night full of mixed emotions, anticipating the sunrise on a new day bringing freedom at last. We are to meditate on what that must have been like, as well as consider our own emancipation made possible by the death of our Savior (Exodus 12:26–27; Matthew 26:28). We are also to consider what it means to repent and come out of the bondage of sin—our response to Jesus Christ's sacrifice (Exodus 13:3; 1 Corinthians 5:8). God wants us to learn lessons, whether we look back or look forward. There are important lessons in both directions.

When we look back over the last two-and-a-half years, it is hardly news to say that our world changed dramatically as we faced many challenges individually and collectively. It was not as though we were never warned about disease epidemics to come—and we know that much worse is on the horizon—but I think we must admit that the speed with which it happened and the extent of its ramifications took us somewhat by surprise. During our Council of Elders discussions this past June, we explored lessons we may apply going forward into the

uncertain times prophesied for the end of this age, as God wants us to learn from past times of stress. Much has yet to happen before the trumpets sound, and we must look to Him in obedient faith (1 Corinthians 10:1–13). I'd like to share with you some of the lessons we discussed.

Change Came Suddenly

One important lesson is in how quickly our world turned upside down. When warnings came out of China about a new disease, it was human nature to minimize such a threat. Another contemporary example of self-deception is that, despite all the warning signs of a Russian invasion, many Ukrainians were caught off-guard and took no action until it was too late. We know difficult times are on the horizon, but will we be ready? Have we learned anything?

Some events leading up to Christ's return will almost certainly happen more quickly than we expect. We cannot control the future, but we can prepare ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually—the last being the most important. The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 serves as a warning for those upon whom the ends of the ages will come. All ten are invited to the wedding, but only five prepare for the bridegroom's delay. The other five do not plan and are caught off guard. Another related warning is found in Matthew 24. The return of Christ may seem to be delayed, but He will come sooner than some expect.

But if that evil servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:48–51).

It is easy to procrastinate in making necessary changes in one's life; to fall asleep spiritually, thinking there will be time to react when the day finally comes. But the pandemic, like many other circumstances in life, shouts loud and clear, *Act now while there is time!* Expect the unexpected. And, more than anything else, develop a close relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, for They provide our only hope for deliverance.

As a Church, when COVID arrived, we congregated on-line for several weeks, months, or more, depending on where we lived. And when governments and venues allowed, we often met with something called “social distancing.” Most of us found that this brought some advantages, especially during the Feasts, as we did not have to squeeze by people to find a seat. It was as though everyone had an aisle seat. There were many more changes thrust upon us, but the point is that there are lessons in this for all who are willing to learn.

Selling Fear

People are easily influenced by emotions, and it was remarkable how the media and governments fueled fear. It is not wrong to have fear—an emotion that God gave us. It is good to have a sudden shot of adrenaline when you see a poisonous snake in your path. It is also good for a woman to have a healthy fear of walking down a dark and lonely city street at night.

At the very beginning of the pandemic, many of us were careful about “sanitizing” our groceries before bringing them into our homes. We were careful about gathering in crowded places. But as we learned more about the nature of the threat, we realized some fears were unnecessary or even irrational. We have seen plenty of irrational fear over the past months as governments and media whipped it up to force vaccination upon everyone, including small children. We could dispute whether governments used fear in good conscience to protect citizens or whether there was more to it—but, clearly, credibility was an early casualty of the pandemic.

While fear is normal and even helpful at times, love and courage must overcome fear and we must never be paralyzed by it. “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Irrational Rabbit Holes

Speaking of the irrational, Mr. Wallace Smith pointed out that “we are seeing extremes. People are more and more taking sides,” depending on where they get their news. Sadly, many look to sources that can hardly be called reliable. Instead of searching for the truth, many search for sources that validate what they already think—and there is no lack of sources to help one plunge down the proverbial rabbit hole. The result is “Internet wars” as emotions soar and people accuse each other of being duped or failing to do their civic duty.

Once again, remember what the Apostle Paul tells us about the Spirit of God: It is a spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind.” The idea that the vaccines injected into our arms are “nanobots” that come together to form a transmitter that is picked up on the 5G network does not come from a sound mind any more than the flat-earth theory or QAnon. And are Bill Gates and other globalists really trying to eliminate 90 percent of the earth’s population?

Does this square with a 200-million-man army at the end of the age?

Conspiracies and squabbles have abounded over the last few years, with some members judging others’ intelligence or faith. Yet the Bible admonishes humility and minding our own business. “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another... Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves... for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:19, 22–23).

Government and Counsel

Government is easy to follow when people agree—not so easy when they do not. One point I like to express about the Council of Elders is that there would be no need for a council if we all thought exactly the same way. When God tells us through His word in the Proverbs—multiple times—that seeking wise counsel is important, we ought to take this seriously. And seeking a multitude of counsel does not mean shopping around for those who agree with you. It is often more important to find those who may *disagree* with you! Consider these proverbs and internalize them:

Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise (Proverbs 12:15).

Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established (Proverbs 15:22).

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days (Proverbs 19:20).

How easy it is to think we understand this—until we don’t like the counsel given. The last couple of years have revealed that some did not accept counsel or government. Understanding right government, how the word of God reveals the mind of God, and the importance of wise counsel will become even more important in the years ahead. The days leading to Christ’s return are going to be traumatic. We will face situations we cannot at this time imagine. Some decisions, such as whether to be vaccinated, are personal. Other decisions, such as how to conduct Sabbath services, involve more than you individually, and of necessity are left for the Church to decide (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Mr. Jonathan McNair explained how “we went through an exercise in government and how important it is in a time of crisis. We must communicate and work together.” The pandemic (some would dispute that it is a pandemic, but we will leave

that for others to debate) is something the Church has not previously faced in modern times. We have made decisions based on the available knowledge and on the reality in which we find ourselves. Part of that reality is that we are a worldwide Work with hundreds of congregations. Thankfully, the Bible is not silent on how the Church is to deal with matters that are not clear to everyone. Deuteronomy 17:8–13 has taken on greater significance in the past two years for those willing to let the Bible speak.

Mr. Dan Hall rightly brought out that the issue that caused some to separate from the Church was never about masks or singing, but rather that *No one is going to tell me what to do*. That assessment fits well with Proverbs 18:1–2: “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” Mr. Rod McNair reminded us that “God allows the tree to be shaken from time to time.”

One field-based Council member mentioned how he and many of you members appreciated the balance the Church has had throughout these difficult times. Those of us at Headquarters thank you in return for your loyal support and

Understanding right government, how the word of God reveals the mind of God, and the importance of wise counsel will become even more important in the years ahead.

faithfulness. This is especially true for those who may have held a different opinion at times, but nevertheless feared God enough to support the decisions of the Church.

The Big Picture

Dr. Douglas Winnail often emphasizes the need to keep the big picture in mind—and an important part of that big picture is doing the Work. We can lose sight of this by getting caught up in the politics of our day. That was evident even before, but politics was put “on steroids” during the pandemic. Some lost sight of the need to do the Work and lost their way over minutiae in comparison. As Mr. Rick Stafford pointed out, “People who left do not understand the need to do the Work.”

Satan has not been removed. That will not happen until the Day of Atonement is fulfilled. He is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, and the one directing the course of this present evil age. How many have forgotten that, if only temporarily?

As mentioned earlier, some scriptures have taken on greater significance in these troubling times. One that jumped out at me was John 14:30, where Jesus said, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and

he has nothing in Me.” A great lesson in retrospect is how easy it is for the current ruler of this world to *have something in us*, to catch us up in the course of his world! If you look back and see that this happened to you, ask for God’s forgiveness, which He is eager to give, and learn from the experience to avoid Satan’s devices in the future.

More Lessons

Council members put forward many other lessons. Dr. Jeffrey Fall pointed out that distinguished doctors hold strong opinions but disagree among themselves on matters regarding COVID. He also reminded us that many people view mainstream medicine with the same faith as others might a religion. I would add that there are also those who view *non-mainstream* medicine with a religious fervor. Medicine—mainstream or otherwise—has its place, but we must never forget that God is our Healer and the One to whom our faith must be directed. This will be even more important as we come closer to the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets.

Mr. Rand Millich made an encouraging point when he mentioned how members displayed leadership in local areas in coming forward to get things done, such as setting up livestreaming and helping one another. Mr. Paul Shumway, who during lockdown was in the Caribbean where meetings were prohibited or greatly limited, pointed out that livestreamed services are no substitute for meeting in person. Historically, outside forces have made it a challenge for members of God’s Church to meet. Throughout past centuries, some met in homes, some hid in caves, and others were scattered and had to keep the Sabbath by themselves. During COVID lockdowns, brethren in many areas of the world had to meet online for a time, but that should never be the standard for most members.

Mr. Dexter Wakefield reminded us that, through it all, “Christ is in charge of the Work,” and that is made clear by the way He has blessed us. One of Mr. Richard Ames’ favorite scriptures is Ephesians 3:20, which certainly applies here: God is “able to do *exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*, according to the power that works in us.”

God’s Festivals and Holy Days give us lessons from past events and look forward to the future. Consider—is that not also the record of the Bible in general? Genesis gives us ancient history, but also a glimpse into our time with its prophecies of Israel’s sons in the latter days. Much of what we know about the Millennium and Last Great Day is found in the writings of the prophets. We also learn from how the Israelites reacted to challenging times. May we look back and be wiser for what we have been through. And may we remember these poetic words from Mr. Mario Hernandez: “You sail with serenity when you walk with God and follow His lead.” ^{LN}

Seven Lessons for the Day of Atonement

By **Richard F. Ames**

Do you remember where you were on the Day of Atonement last year, or any particular year? I will always remember where I was on the Day of Atonement in 1973. I was in England with my wife and mother-in-law, visiting the Ambassador College campus in Bricket Wood. We were visiting my wife's brother—Dr. Roderick C. Meredith—and I was scheduled to give the morning sermon in London on the Day of Atonement. Yes, we had both morning and afternoon services on the Day of Atonement back then!

Coming home from services, on the hour-and-a-half drive back to Bricket Wood, we heard on the radio that Arab armies had on that very day attacked the tiny Middle Eastern nation of Israel on two fronts. Israel counterattacked, and after just 18 days the war ended with Israel capturing significant enemy territory.

Since then, there has been much continuing conflict in the Middle East. Four years after that war, which came to be known as the Yom Kippur War, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat traveled to Israel and spoke to Israel's Knesset, announcing his desire for peace. Sadly, Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981, the day before the Day of Atonement, while reviewing a military parade.

But the day is approaching, faster than many expect, when instead of war and assassination the Day of Atonement will mark the announcement of worldwide peace and liberty, when Jesus Christ returns to planet Earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. The adversary, Satan the devil, will be dethroned after 6,000 years of his reign over human beings as the "god of this world." Finally, the human family will be "at one" with God.

We learn lessons with each new Day of Atonement, year after year. In this article, we will briefly review seven such lessons, covering aspects of what the day means and what it pictures.

Lesson One: Satan Will Be Put Away for a Thousand Years

Regarding the High Priest's duty on the Day of Atonement, we read the following:

And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering. Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:5–10).

One goat was sacrificed as a sin offering, its blood shed for the Israelites. Just once a year, the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to make this offering.

In modern English, we now use the term "scapegoat" to indicate someone given undeserved blame. In Leviticus, however, the "escape goat" did indeed have Israel's deserved blame put upon it. This is the goat, symbolizing Satan, that was cast away from the congregation of Israel. As Christians, this should bring to our minds Revelation 20, which describes the soon-coming time when Satan will be cast into the "bottomless pit" where he can no longer influence the world until he is "released for a little while" at the end of the Millennium, before the Great White Throne Judgment (v. 3). This is the thousand-year restraint of Satan, before he is released for a brief time and then thrown into the lake of fire.

Lesson Two: The World Will Be Set Free

The world has been held captive by Satan (Revelation 12:9), but the Day of Atonement pictures the future day on which God will free the world from Satan's enslavement and give everyone access to the sacrifice of Christ—the sacrifice also pictured by and on this day! Jesus Christ told us that no one can come to Him unless God the Father draws him (John 6:44). Most of this present world is blinded, with only a relative few called to understand His plan of salvation and do their part in

supporting His Work in this age. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong put it this way in his booklet *A World Held Captive*:

You live in a world of awesome progress, but paradoxically, of appalling evils. WHY? It's a world held captive, deceived into loving its captivity. Deliverance from kidnap in deception, human discontent, suffering and death hastens nearer. World peace, happiness and joy are just around the corner (p. i).

We know that Satan is “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is called “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). He and his demons stir up an attitude of disobedience toward God—so much so that there will be millions fighting against Jesus Christ when He returns.

How deceptive is the god of this age? There are even false prophecies spread among some professing Christian groups saying that when the Antichrist rules he will enforce the seventh-day Sabbath and the Ten Commandments! But there are also false prophecies being spread among God's people—and I urge you not to be deceived by those whom Satan is using to create discouragement by “setting dates” for Christ's return. When that time nears, God's Church will know it without doubt or ambiguity.

God's Church has learned its lesson about setting too-eager dates anticipating Christ's return. We know it will be sooner, not later, and we know that God will make it clear when His Church must tell the brethren that it is time to flee. Do not be deceived by men who seek attention by misusing God's word. And know that the time is soon coming when liberty will be proclaimed through all the land:

Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and *proclaim liberty* throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family (Leviticus 25:9–10).

This is a Day of Atonement prophecy, corresponding to the scriptural Year of Jubilee, when debts were forgiven. Brethren in the United States may be aware of the Liberty Bell, a powerful symbol of a new nation's commitment to liberty—and with its crack also a symbol of that liberty being merely a goal rather than an achieved reality. When Christ returns, the world will finally be set at liberty. Instead of remaining captive to false religions and materialism, all nations

will go up to Jerusalem to worship Christ and keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). And unlike the ceremonial cleansing accomplished through the blood of bulls and goats, true forgiveness of sins and *spiritual* cleansing through the shed blood of Jesus Christ will be available to *all* human beings as an atoning sacrifice.

Lesson Three: The World's Nations Will Be Reconciled

How can enemy nations ever hope to be reconciled when even individuals cannot reconcile with one another? We think of Russia and Ukraine, Israel and the Arab nations, Germany against the Allies in World War I and World War II—and even within nations we see horrors like the “killing fields” of Kampuchea and the massacre of Tutsi people in Rwanda. Why do hostilities like these continue?

Some people think of themselves as righteous, but the Apostle Paul reminds us that all human beings, other than our Savior, have sinned. Jesus' mother, Mary, was a righteous and virtuous woman, but she was not born without sin in an “immaculate conception.” Every one of us needs Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. And Paul gives us the principle by which we can be reconciled: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8–10).

And the time is coming when repentance will occur on a national scale, under Jesus Christ's loving rule in the Kingdom of God. Some nations will briefly experiment with rebellion, but will be corrected in love. “And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them” (Isaiah 19:22).

Notice that former enemy nations will be reconciled and given special favor by God: “In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’” (Isaiah 19:24–25).

When the whole world has Jesus Christ in common as Savior and King, all peoples will come together. Christ will bring all the nations together in peace, including the scattered Israelites (Isaiah 11:12).

Lesson Four: The World's “Second Exodus” Will Begin

We just saw that when Christ returns, He will bring scattered nations back together as wars cease. There will be a “second Exodus.”

“Therefore, behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ And they shall dwell in their own land” (Jeremiah 23:7–8).

Notice that a trumpet blast announces the liberation of the Israelites from captivity: “So it shall be in that day: the great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 27:13). Let us read what Mr. John Ogwyn wrote on page 41 of his booklet *Revelation: The Mystery Unveiled!* about this announcement of the Jubilee and the symbolism of that trumpet blast:

Satan being put away will represent the liberation of mankind. This is the fulfillment of the symbolism of the ancient year of Jubilee, when freedom was proclaimed (Leviticus 25:9–10). Note that the Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, the day that symbolized Satan’s banishment. At this point, the remnants of all twelve tribes of Israel will begin to be regathered from their captivity to the land of Israel (Isaiah 27:1, 13).

Yes, the scattered Israelites will be brought to their own land after a time of captivity. Notice that this is a future prophecy—an exodus not from Egypt, but from other nations. We also read:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them (Ezekiel 36:24–27).

People in that day will have experienced terrible things at the end of the previous age, the last 6,000 years of Satan’s rule. They will have a repentant attitude and will have God’s Holy Spirit, which they will use as they repent of their lives of filthiness and idolatry.

Lesson Five: Satan’s Deceptions Must Be Avoided

We know that Satan can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Yet he is also described as a roaring lion, seeking anyone he might devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Paul warned the Ephesians not to give Satan a place in their hearts (Ephesians 4:27). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), and we must be careful always to be honest with one another—and with ourselves. We may even be so bold as to think we can get away with lying to the Holy Spirit, but the example of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 shows us that this is a very dangerous mistake. It was not sinful for them to keep some or all of the money from selling their land; the sin was in conspiring to lie as if they had given the whole proceeds.

Regrettably, many of us find it far easier to lie to ourselves. We rationalize a “small lie” or a “little disobedience” or a “just this once” breaking of a commandment. And each time we do so, we make the next sin that much easier.

Sometimes we may think we see some sin or some injustice go unpunished, and we feel stirred to accuse the sinner in a public and shaming way. But we should always remember that it is Satan who is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). If you see a sin that you think should be publicized, ask yourself what your motives are. Do you want to help the sinner? Or do you want people to think of you as more righteous—maybe even to distract them from your own sins? In Matthew 18, your Bible gives clear instructions about privately confronting a sinning brother or sister in Christ, then with the help of others, and eventually the Church (specifically, the ministry) if necessary.

But how should you react if some situation is not resolved the way you hoped it would be? One of Satan’s most insidious deceptions is the attitude of self-righteous bitterness. We may feel that we are justified to hold on to anger about what we think is an injustice. But Scripture commands us not to let the sun go down on our wrath (Ephesians 4:26). God is in charge. Vengeance is His, not ours (Romans 12:19). We are not judges, though we can and should be “fruit inspectors.” We should flee from any temptation to become involved in a sinful situation (2 Timothy 2:22).

What should you do if you find that you are developing an attitude of bitterness? Jesus gave us the answer: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). We must always be aware of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11) and always maintain an attitude of repentance and willingness to confess our sins (1 John 1:8–9).

Lesson Six: We Must Walk Humbly with God

God tells us that on the Day of Atonement we must “afflict our souls” (Leviticus 16:31). Those who do not do so will be “cut

off” from God’s people (Leviticus 23:29). We fast, but we also examine ourselves, much as we do when preparing for the Passover. Fasting is a physical parallel of the internal humbling we should experience when we each ask ourselves, *Am I still carnally minded? Am I radiating Christ’s nature to others as I should? What do I need to change in my character and my behavior?*

How did King David of Israel humble himself? We read, “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart” (Psalm 35:13). The word “humbled” in this verse is from the Hebrew *anah*, which means “to afflict.” David examined his own heart when he fasted. When we fast, we are to judge ourselves, not others.

We don’t need to wear sackcloth as David did. We don’t want to be like those whom Jesus condemned for drawing attention to themselves while fasting (Matthew 6:16). Rather, we should focus on our inward selves, not on making a showy display of our affliction. The prophet Isaiah gave us a good description of a fasting attitude:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, “Here I am.” If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday (Isaiah 58:6–10).

Can we maintain that perspective, and that hope, as we fast?

Lesson Seven: God’s Kingdom Will Reign

After Satan has been cast into the pit, God’s faithful resurrected saints will sit on thrones assisting Jesus Christ with His Millennial rule. The Apostle John saw this in a vision:

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to

Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4–6).

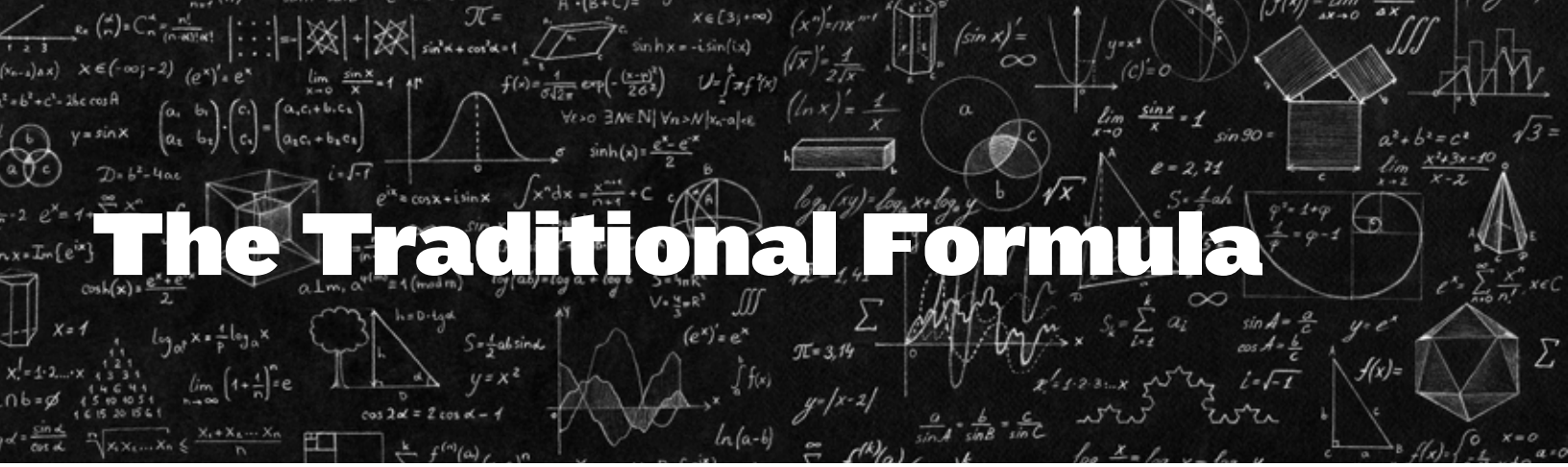
When the world’s kingdoms have become Christ’s Kingdom, today’s faithful Christians—as resurrected firstfruits—will literally rule over cities, states, and nations.

Living in today’s world, we see firsthand how difficult it is to rule justly without Christ. We should be praying today for our rulers, that they may rule justly and that we may submit to their rule humbly as long as they do not try to force us to disobey our Savior. And we should be humbled, knowing that in time it will become our responsibility to rule according to the duties Christ gives to each of us. We can pray even today that our rulers will “let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24). And the day is soon coming when each of us will have our own part in that responsibility!

The firstfruits born as Spirit into the Kingdom of God at the last trumpet will reeducate planet Earth to the way of true peace. The Hebrew word for “atonement”—*kaphar*—literally means “to cover over.” It is the same word we find translated as “cover” in the instructions for Noah to build the ark at the time of the Flood: “Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch” (Genesis 6:14). The Day of Atonement reminds us that God has covered over and will cover over the sins of repentant Christians. It reminds us of what God has done in the past for us, and what He will in the future do *with* us.

When Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God here on the earth, Satan and his demons will be locked up and put away. Christ’s sacrifice—in this age applied to only the relative few who respond to God’s calling—will be made available for the whole world. We read that in that time all Israel shall be saved, though today they are blind as they are not now being saved: “I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25–26).

Let us all look forward to the future Day of Atonement, when Christ the King will make that glorious announcement: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants!” (L)



The Traditional Formula

By John Robinson

Every fall and winter, we go through the same cycle of the holiday season, starting with Halloween and culminating with New Year’s Eve. And every year, we see professing Christians of the world participating every step of the way. How did mainstream Christianity become so mixed up?

We can find one answer in an article from *Christianity Today* that tries to defend Halloween observance.

Christians should embrace the devilish holiday with gusto—and laughter.... If we follow the traditional formula of having a good time at his expense, Satan flees... I have always considered Halloween a day to celebrate the imagination, to become for a short time something wonderful and strange, smelling of grease paint, to taste sweets that are permissible only once a year. How wonderful to be with other children dressed up as what they might grow up to be, what they wished they could be, or even what they secretly feared. All of us, dreams and nightmares, were brought together on equal footing, going from door to door to be given treats and admired for our creativity. How delightful to go to parties with doughnuts, apples, brown cider, and pumpkin cakes—and to hear spine-tingling ghost stories and feel our hearts skip a beat when the teller grabbed for us (“Hallowing Halloween,” October 2, 2000).

This article reveals the age-old justification for blending Christianity with pagan holidays. Indeed, mixing truth with error according to “the traditional formula” is the way of professing Christianity today. Some of what this author mentions could be harmless—celebrating the imagination, children dressed up as what they might grow up to be, and tasty festival food. But the author also advocates becoming something *strange* for a short time, children dressed as what they secretly *fear*, dreams and nightmares being treated as equal, and “ghost stories”—lest we forget, God imposed the death penalty on ancient Israelites who consulted witches and mediums.

Where did this “traditional formula” originate? To find out, let’s examine the origins of the Samaritans in the Old Testament, tracking them through the New Testament and even to our day. Through their history, we’ll see that God clearly defines how He wants to be worshipped—and that He hates it when worship of Him is combined with man-made or satanically inspired ideas.

Confusion by Mixing

Around 721 BC, God used the kingdom of Assyria to punish the ancient Israelites for their spiritual adultery. “Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria” (2 Kings 17:5–6).

Just what had the Israelites done to deserve this? Israel “left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone” (2 Kings 17:16–18).

The Assyrians, however, did not just remove the Israelites. They *replaced* them with a group from a different area—Babylon, the very name of which evokes *confusion by mixing*. “Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities” (2 Kings 17:24). Deporting the prior residents, the Assyrians replaced the Israelites of that area—which they called *Samerina*—with Babylonians and Arameans.

But the worst problem came not with the mixing of cultures, but with the further mixing of religions. “And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, ‘The nations whom you have removed and placed in

the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:25–26).

At first glance, it might seem as though these new residents of Samaria wanted to understand how to sincerely worship the true God—but that was *not* the case. Rather, because they were a superstitious people well accustomed to performing various rituals for many different gods of hills and valleys, they were simply wanting to know how to ritually please this “new regional god.” In an attempt to appease the people, “the king of Assyria commanded, saying, ‘Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.’ Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD” (2 Kings 17:27–28).

So, who were these priests? Would they teach the people the true worship of God? To find out the legitimacy of these priests—or the lack thereof—we need to look roughly 200 years earlier.

The Original Halloween?

Shortly after the death of King Solomon and the split between Israel and Judah, Jeroboam, ruling over the northern kingdom, instituted a thorough change in Israel’s religious system.

Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.” Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went *to worship* before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fif-

teenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense (1 Kings 12:25–33).

Jeroboam forced everyone to take a side—anyone who didn’t want to go along with the new religious system had no choice but to leave. Let’s notice some further detail in 2 Chronicles 11: “And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him [Rehoboam, king of Judah]. For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD.” Having kicked out the priests whom *God* had appointed, Jeroboam solidified his “new version” of Israelite worship by bringing in his own lackeys. “Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the *demons*, and the *calf idols* which he had made. And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers” (vv. 13–16).

So, Jeroboam chased out the true priests of God and replaced them with priests who were not sons of Levi, but were from *every* class of people. That was already a violation of what God had established, but these priests also included idolatrous calves as an important component of their worship, and they *made up* their own feast in the eighth month. Interestingly, *octo* is Latin for *eight*—remember that in ancient times the new year started with March, making October the eighth month, though it has become the tenth month on our current calendar. What do we have in the month of *October*? None other than Halloween.

Halloween originally came from the Celts in Northwestern Europe—descendants of the house of Israel who were observing an echo of the false feast that Jeroboam had established in the eighth month. With its focus on things popping up from graves and various undead spirits, Halloween is essentially a satanic counterfeit of the Last Great Day, when God will resurrect the uncalled throughout history and give them an opportunity to live His way of life.

Samaritan Religion

In 2 Kings 17:6, we saw the capital of Israel fall to the Assyrians and the Israelites deported from the land. A few verses later, God goes into more detail as to why this finally happened: “He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the

prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day” (2 Kings 17:21–23).

With all this background in mind, let’s notice what happened to religious observance in Samaria.

However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt.... So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away (2 Kings 17:29–33).

The new people brought into Samaria, who were Babylonians and Arameans by birth, had a superstitious fear that was very different from the sincere reverence God expects from His people. They saw Him as just one more god to appease ritualistically, no different from the many others they feared. Mixing some ritual worship of a new god in with their worship of their familiar idols was a simple matter for them. “To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel.... So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day” (2 Kings 17:34, 40–41).

Here we see the people of Samaria concocting “the traditional formula,” one of religious mixing and confusion. They took the name of God, and Jeroboam’s corrupt worship of Him, and combined these with the rituals that pertained to their carved images. This way of worshiping God was in name only—no form or substance, only a veneer of piety.

Two hundred years later, Judah returned from captivity and began to rebuild Jerusalem and God’s temple. But the land to which the Jews returned was not empty; there were other people still inhabiting it. When these inhabitants heard that the newly returned Jews were building God’s temple, they came to the Jewish leaders and said, “Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.” But the leaders of Judah didn’t fall for it. They responded, “You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.” In response to this rejection, the people of the land tried to

discourage the Jews from building, and even hired people to slow their progress (Ezra 4:1–5).

Who were these “helpful” people? The *Samaritans*—the descendants of the colonists brought in by the Assyrian king. Two hundred years after Assyria took Israel captive, the group now known as the Samaritans was not only still in the area, but more influential than ever.

Jesus Christ, the New Testament Church, and the Samaritans

Fast-forward to the first century AD, and we find that tensions between the Jews and Samaritans were still high—largely because the Samaritans represented a mingling of Judaism and Babylonian paganism. Jesus told a Samaritan, “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). The Samaritans practiced *syncretism*—combining different religions, cultures, and philosophies—and therefore didn’t truly understand who or what they were trying to worship.

Not long after Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, God’s Church reached out to the Samaritans with His truth, sending Philip to preach in Samaria. “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time” (Acts 8:5–11).

Simon was a popular Samaritan magician—but the Samaritans who followed him weren’t *only* in Samaria. Alexander the Great had actually scattered the Samaritans, and by this time significant Samaritan communities also existed in Egypt and Italy, specifically Alexandria and Rome. Many Samaritans in all three of these areas followed and revered Simon.

Simon claimed that he was the bearer of divine revelation, and Justin Martyr, who was himself a Samaritan, wrote that almost all the Samaritans believed that Simon was a god. This Simon, who would come to be known as Simon Magus, was an early writer and influencer of false Christianity—and the Bible describes him as a sorcerer. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Simon Magus is known as “the founder of post-Christian Gnosticism, a dualist religious sect advocating salvation through secret knowledge, and as the archetypal heretic of the Christian Church” (15th edition, vol. 10, p. 820). Regarding the Gnostics, historian Edward Gibbon wrote in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that they “blended with the faith of Christ many sublime but obscure tenets, which they derived from oriental philosophy.”

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name

of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.... Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:12–19).

Simon was essentially trying to buy an apostleship. Peter responded, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (vv. 20–23).

Who Are Today's Samaritans?

To recap, the original Samaritans were Babylonians and Arameans who were imported into the area of Samaria. They were then taught how to "worship" God by false, corrupted priests. They didn't die out, and neither did their syncretistic form of worship—they were still in Samaria when Jesus began His ministry, and they were still there at the beginning of the New Testament Church.

Some of these Samaritans came under the spell of the Gnostic magician Simon Magus, and a new religion developed in which Simon was even considered to be God. Others continued—and continue to this day—with a pseudo-Judaic religion influenced by Babylon.

But can we identify another religion, popular in our world today, that has done what the Samaritans and the followers of Simon Magus did—take a previous religion and put a new "spin" on it by mixing it with new religious ideas? Today we find the Roman Catholic church in that role—a paganized religion with a Christian veneer.

Having betrayed Christ's pure teachings by mixing them with pagan philosophies and doctrines, this church—and those that sprang from it—are doing today what the Samaritans and Simon Magus did centuries ago. They follow "the traditional formula" of combining various religious practices—now with a few Christian elements mixed in.

Sadly, most people are not concerned that "the traditional formula," using the right name for the wrong thing,

has shaped what most today call "Christianity." The Bible, however, *does* see something wrong with this, and in fact calls out such a mix as an abominable Babylonian mystery religion: "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:4–5).

The concept of a great "mystery" is a central tenet of Gnosticism—and those who followed the approach of Simon Magus are still at it today. As we in God's Church have quoted many times, "Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it.... Christianity was the last great creation of the ancient pagan world.... [The Eucharist] was a conception long sanctified by time; the pagan mind needed no schooling to receive it; by embodying the 'mystery of the Mass,' Christianity became the last and greatest of the mystery religions" (Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*).

Don't Fall For It

All through the ages, Satan has been actively trying to deceive the nations, and one of the deadliest tools in his arsenal is the mixing of satanically inspired ideas with the name of God—in other words, calling the wrong thing by the right name. Despite what *Christianity Today* claims, Satan does *not* flee from us when we "have a good time at his expense" with the very practices he has inspired—rather, he flees from us when we *resist* him (James 4:7).

Let's remember that God, through His inspired word, makes it very clear that we should never mix other philosophies, holidays, veneration, or rituals with anything that God Himself has ordained. Let's make sure we do not fall for the traditional formula, and instead heed God's commands in 2 Corinthians:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (6:14–7:1). (LN)



To Liberate a World Held Captive

By **Wyatt Ciesielka**

The Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day are among the spiritual highlights of the year for God's people, not only because they are a time to learn about the coming Kingdom of God—and not only because they are an annual reminder *picturing* the wonderful future reign of Jesus Christ—but also because of another wonderful truth: The Feast of Tabernacles anticipates the first time since the Garden of Eden when *all of humanity* will live in a world liberated from Satan the devil's captivity.

Decades ago, describing how Jesus Christ will return to free all humanity from bondage, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote an inspiring booklet titled *A World Held Captive*. The title expressed an important truth most people ignore or reject—that this world is indeed *captive to Satan*, the great captor. Consequently, humanity suffers under the adversary's evil influence much more than it understands. But thankfully, God will *not* leave the world in captivity. And the Feast of Tabernacles points to that future time when all nations will experience *true liberty* for the first time since before Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator.

But how did the world become captive? And what are some promises and blessings that all humankind can look forward to after Jesus Christ returns and liberates us?

Captive Since the Garden of Eden

Jesus Christ is the Creator—all things were made by Him and through Him (John 1:3). His ways are justice and mercy (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 116:5), and all His works and judgments are righteous and true (Daniel 9:14; Revelation 16:7). But Satan is the captor—his name means “adversary,” and he is full of evil and wickedness (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). And because of sin, “the whole world” lies under his sway (1 John 5:19).

As God's ministers have long warned, Satan's wicked influence over individuals, nations, and humanity is *enormous* and should not be underestimated. Mr. Gerald Weston gives this warning in a recent *Living Church News* article: “The Bible calls Satan ‘the prince of the power of the air’—the one who directs ‘the course of this world’ (Ephesians 2:2). The depth to which he directs the world is often underestimated”

(“Why the Holy Days?,” March–April, 2022). Most people not only underestimate Satan's influence; but have also *chosen* the way of their captor.

Explaining how the world reached this terrible state, Mr. Armstrong wrote, “God placed Adam and Eve after creation in the beautiful garden of Eden. In its midst were two special symbolic trees of tremendous significance.... Adam had to choose between the government of Satan with its self-centered way of life, and the government of GOD with its GOD-centered way of life.... Willingly, Adam was led into captivity by Satan. He had willingly gone along with Satan, the arch kidnapper of all time” (*A World Held Captive*, pp. 9–10). Upon Adam's and Eve's sin, Satan became the ruler of this present world (John 14:30), and the “god of this age.” As Mr. Armstrong wrote, “All humanity came out of Adam and Eve. The present world was **FOUNDED** in them.... Upon Adam's sin, God closed off the tree of life, until the second Adam, Jesus Christ, should pay the ransom price. The **WORLD** has ever since been **HELD CAPTIVE!** The world had thus chosen **THE WAY** of the kidnapper, rather than of the potential Parent!” (p. 11).

Satan is the enemy and the adversary (Matthew 13:39; 1 Peter 5:8). He was created perfect, but he *chose* sin (Ezekiel 28:15–16). “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth” (John 8:44). Causing evil, pain, and rebellion is his purpose, and deception is one of his greatest tools (2 Corinthians 4:4). With Adam's and Eve's sin, the world became captive to the adversary, and he has deceived the whole world ever since (Revelation 12:9).

Through the ages, God has mercifully called a very few out of this world, who have escaped the spiritual captivity of the captor (cf. John 17:15–20). Humanity has lived in deception and bondage. But the Creator will *not* leave His creation in bondage forever.

The Creator Will Liberate

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus went into the Temple and read from the the Scriptures. Meaningfully, He read a passage from Isaiah, written hundreds of years earlier, which proclaimed His purpose! Jesus read: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Luke 4:18–19).

The Creator desires to *liberate* His creation! This great hope is central to the true Gospel that God’s Church has proclaimed through the ages, and it is what the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day portend. True liberty and blessings come from Christ as the result of obeying and living according to His perfect law, which is the law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12). The Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day also remind us that all the world will one day learn to obey and walk according to God’s perfect laws, because “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

If they were universally obeyed, the Ten Commandments would liberate the world from the scourge and pain of sin. And this is another of the reasons why true Christians are so excited to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles each year—in addition to pointing to the wonderful future reality of God’s government on this earth, it is an opportunity to meditate more deeply upon and learn more fully God’s plan and His laws.

As zealous Philadelphian Christians celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day, we not only obey the command to assemble where God has “placed His name” to learn, worship, and rejoice (cf. Deuteronomy 12:20–21; 16:14–15). We also assemble because, like Jesus Christ, we anticipate the soon-coming reality these days represent—when every nation will confess that He is Lord (cf. Philippians 2:9–11). Then, the Creator will bring liberty to a world held captive (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18).

The Creator Will Rule

What are some of the blessings that the world will experience in the coming Kingdom of God? Let’s briefly review just ten blessings that all will benefit from as the creation learns to worship the Creator.

Our *first* blessing is that Jesus Christ is zealous to perform His will. As we have already seen, He is *zealous* to liberate this distraught, rebellious, and increasingly troubled world: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. *The zeal of the LORD hosts will perform this*” (Isaiah 9:7). All true Christians share this zeal with Jesus Christ.

Our *second* blessing follows, which is that upon the earth’s liberation from Satan, God’s righteous government will be established on the earth. We look forward to all nations learning to obey Him (Isaiah 2:3).

Our *third* blessing is that God’s laws will be obeyed throughout *the entire earth* (Micah 4:2). Although some people

will at first be resistant (cf. Zechariah 14:16–19), there will be no place on the planet where God’s laws will not be fully enforced.

And our *fourth* blessing is that in addition to God’s laws covering the entire earth, during the Millennium *the knowledge of the Lord* will also cover the earth (Isaiah 11:9). All people will come to know God, the Creator (Hebrews 8:11).

Having been delivered from captivity, and now under Jesus Christ’s righteous rule, the nations will learn to live in peace (Isaiah 2:4; 19:24–25), which is our *fifth* blessing. As we see violence and war increasing throughout the world today, this promise is becoming even more significant.

And as peace and lawfulness spreads, this will lead to our *sixth* blessing, which is that God will bless the nations with an abundance of food and prosperity (Ezekiel 36:33–37; Micah 4:3–4). As we currently see hunger and famine increasing, this is another promise that is growing in significance.

Our *seventh* blessing is that all the *natural* world will be in peace and harmony (Isaiah 65:25).

Our *eighth* blessing is that, as a result of people learning to obey God’s laws, He will heal sicknesses and diseases (Jeremiah 30:17; Malachi 4:2). How wonderful it will be when the scourge of disease is removed from the earth!

Our *ninth* blessing is that Israel will no longer be subject to the covenant curses because of its disobedience (Leviticus 26:14–46; Deuteronomy 28:15–68). These curses are coming upon us now, and they will culminate in the Great Tribulation yet to come. But in the Millennium, these curses will be removed. No longer will Israel build and someone else inhabit, or plant and someone else will eat, but Israel will instead be blessed in everything it does (Isaiah 65:21–24).

All Who Ever Lived Will Have Their Opportunity

There are many more blessings we could discuss, but our *tenth* blessing is that after the Millennium will come the Great White Throne Judgment, which is pictured by the Last Great Day, “the eighth day” and a Holy Day (Leviticus 23:36; Numbers 29:35). Then, all the rest of the human beings who have ever lived will have their opportunity to know Jesus Christ, to repent, and to accept Him as Lord and King (John 7:37; Revelation 20:11–15).

Each year, we look forward to the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. But we look forward with even more excitement to what these wonderful celebrations picture—when humanity and all the world will no longer be captive, but instead will be *liberated* and enjoy *wonderful blessings*. We are excited that the righteous saints will be resurrected, will live forever, and will rule as “priests of God and of Christ” for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6). And we are thankful that all creation will again be subject to Jesus Christ, the Creator and the Liberator, who Himself “will also be subject to Him [the Father] who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). ^(L)



How Do I Use My Second Tithe?

By **Wallace G. Smith**

Unlike first tithe, which is intended for God's Work, second tithe is intended for us to spend in connection with God's Festivals (Deuteronomy 14:22–23). All of God's tithes are holy (Leviticus 27:30), including second tithe. So, how do we make sure we use it as God intends?

First, let's note that second tithe is not limited to the Feast of Tabernacles. Other commanded Festivals sometimes involve unusual travel and expenses, and it's appropriate to use second tithe for these. However, we should preserve the majority of our second tithe for our observance of the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day, which tend to involve higher expenses. This article will focus on Feast of Tabernacles observance, but the principles will apply to all of God's Festivals.

Embrace the Purpose of Second Tithe

The most important key to properly using second tithe is understanding its purpose, which God explains in Deuteronomy 14:22–27—using second tithe should help us “learn to fear the LORD your God always” (v. 23), as a tool for helping us grow in reverence of God at His Festivals. When we embrace this, we can better judge which of our expenditures or spending opportunities are appropriate for second tithe use.

First and foremost, second tithe should provide food, shelter, and other expenses at the Feast site. We're commanded to observe the Feast “in the place where He chooses to make His name abide” (v. 23), and second tithe should primarily be used to make this possible.

And there, we are to rejoice (v. 26)! The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ and His saints, under whom mankind will experience abundance, joy, and security! Obediently saving our second tithe throughout the year (v. 22) allows us to experience an abundance during the Feast that we normally do not. We may eat at restaurants, enjoy outings, and experience sources of entertainment and education that we normally cannot afford.

In Nehemiah 8:10, Ezra and Nehemiah explain that God's Festivals are a time to “eat the fat” and “drink the sweet”—enjoying foods reflective of special occasions. Mak-

ing time at the Feast a real joy for our family is a fine use of second tithe!

Not About the Self

But, as we enjoy, we must be on guard against the temptations to focus inordinately on ourselves. Some read that second tithe should be spent “for whatever your heart desires” (Deuteronomy 14:26) and proceed to focus completely on themselves, purchasing items they don't even use at the Feast. Using second tithe is not about increasing our possessions. Note that verse 26 mentions food and drink to be enjoyed at the Feast site itself: “You shall *eat there* before the LORD your God.”

Buying personal items is not forbidden, and gifts for others can be a wonderful way to spend part of our second tithe. But, again, the purpose of second tithe must be in mind. *Is this purchase teaching me to revere God? Is it helping me to properly rejoice during the Festival, or is it simply giving me the “joy” of owning more stuff?*

So, too, we need to take care while eating and drinking. Drunkenness is clearly condemned by God (e.g., Galatians 5:19–21 lists it as a “work of the flesh”), as is gluttony (e.g., Deuteronomy 21:20). God's commands do not cease when the Feast begins! Many have ruined their Feast by overindulging in ways their bodies simply could not handle—just as many have ruined it for their families through the abuse of alcohol, misusing God's blessings for vice.

Even the blessings of God must be managed and enjoyed in a way that pleases Him, so that we do all things in His name (Colossians 3:17). That does not change during the Feast! The Feast of Tabernacles, celebrating when the way of “give” rather than “get” will envelop the entire world (Isaiah 11:9), is no time to picture the way of “get” in our own lives.

Such principles mean that, although making a purchase to enhance our happy memories of the Feast or providing a gift for a child may be an appropriate use of second tithe, we should not primarily use second tithe to satisfy our material cravings, nor for encouraging such an attitude in our children. If our children see the Feast as a “Church-approved Christmas” when they are showered with toys, they—and we—are missing the point.

Giving Others a Good Feast

Looking again at Nehemiah 8:10, we are encouraged not just to enjoy our personal Feast abundance, but also to “send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.” Taking care of others is a wonderful use of our second tithe. This can certainly include sending tokens of thoughtfulness to those who might be unable to attend the Feast due to various conditions. Also, the generosity of others has enabled many to attend the Feast who otherwise could not.

We can also reflect a generous attitude at the Feast itself. Many Church members enjoy secretly paying for the dinner of members they happen to see at a restaurant, or paying for others to attend Feast activities. We can also invite those who have less second tithe to join us for a meal or activity. Such uses of second tithe help us experience our Father’s generous nature and help others to experience the blessings that the world will enjoy in the future.

Deuteronomy 14:27 reminds us to consider the “Levite,” as well. It can be acceptable to use a bit of second tithe to honor our ministry in some way—for whom the Feast is often “work” time.

Expenses and Attractions While Traveling

Traveling to and from one’s Feast site is a natural source of expenses with which second tithe can help. Deuteronomy 14:24–25 demonstrates that travel involved in His Festivals was on God’s mind, and His second tithe provides relief from the concern of those expenses. Suitable travel expenses certainly involve fuel, lodging, and food on the trip.

Some have wondered about pre-Feast car repairs. It is certainly appropriate to ensure that our vehicles are in road-worthy condition for travel to the Feast—however, we should be careful not to use that as an excuse to put off needed repairs throughout the year in order to save personal funds, and we should not spend so much second tithe in preparation that too little is available at the Festival site itself.

For instance, some have covered part of the cost of new tires with second tithe right before the Feast, recognizing the miles they will be driving to and from the Feast site, but paying the greater portion out of personal funds, as most miles on those tires will be driven after the Feast. Such expenditures are personal decisions, but our decisions must ensure that God’s purpose in establishing Festival tithe is served.

The question of side trips on our travels also comes up. Is it appropriate to spend some second tithe on attractions during our travel to and from the Feast? It can be! But, again, we must mind the purpose of second tithe—helping us learn to “fear the LORD” as we keep His Festivals. That purpose should help us not abuse God’s generosity.

Perhaps there is a special attraction in your travels to and from the Feast—such as the California Redwoods or a natural museum—that will stir appreciation for God and make a

special “Feast memory” for your family. Considered carefully, such things could be appropriate second tithe expenditures. Still, such opportunities should not take away from or overshadow the time spent at the Feast site itself.

Excess Second Tithe

Some have thought that excess second tithe is no longer set aside for a specific purpose and may be used back home. That is *not* the case. To do so is to profane what God has set aside as holy!

The Church has traditionally said that a portion of one’s excess second tithe may be used to *supplement*—not replace—one’s Last Great Day offering. However, one should take care to cover expenses regarding the trip home, some of which can be unexpected, such as a flat tire. After returning home, excess second tithe should then be sent in as a “Festival Tithe Donation” so that it will be put in a fund to help take care of next year’s Festival expenses. It should be noted that the Church rarely, if ever, receives enough Festival Tithe donations to cover all Feast-related costs.

Generally, excess second tithe should *not* be saved for the following Feast. However, there may be exceptions to this. When someone is going to retire and does not expect to have sufficient funds for the next year, saving some excess second tithe is permissible. Close family members separated by great distances are permitted to occasionally save for the following Feast so they can be with family when that would otherwise be impossible. In situations where income is erratic, it may be best to spread out a bountiful year’s second tithe over several years. But none of this should be our usual practice—we are to save up from year to year (Deuteronomy 14:22).

While it might seem selfless to minimize second tithe expenses during the Feast in order to send more to the Church at the end of it, doing so can frustrate the very purpose of second tithe! Seek to satisfy that purpose during the Feast, seeing to it that you and your family rejoice abundantly and enjoy picturing what God’s Feast represents—thereby learning to fear the Eternal, who gives such gifts to those who love Him. This purpose should be satisfied first—then any additional contribution in your final offering will truly be “excess.”

A Powerful Tool

It is not without cause that the Feast of Tabernacles represents a highlight of the year for God’s Church! It is an opportunity to draw closer to our Father, our Savior, our family, and each other as we observe the days the Almighty has set apart to picture the glorious Millennial rule of the Kingdom of God and the inspiring conclusion to His 7,000-year plan.

Proper use of God’s second tithe, commanded for our benefit, is a powerful tool to help the Feast be all He desires it to be. May you use it to rejoice and “learn to fear the LORD your God always”! (L^N)



Feast of Tabernacles Preparation: A Look Behind the Scenes

By **Editorial Staff**

The 2022 Feast of Tabernacles is nearly upon us, and members throughout God’s Church are busy preparing to attend their assigned or chosen Festival site. But very few of us know the half of what goes into preparing those sites for us.

To deepen our understanding of the work behind the Feast, we sat down with the Church Administration Department’s Assistant Director Rod McNair, along with Executive Administrative Assistant Tyler Wayne, and asked for their perspectives on the work involved with making the Feast of Tabernacles so enjoyable for the brethren.

Festival Site Criteria

What makes a potential Feast site? The answer, according to Mr. McNair, is a delicate balance. “I was always struck by just how many criteria there are for selecting Festival sites,” he said. “One thing is, we want it to *not* be in the middle of a city. What we’re looking for is somewhere close to nature, where God’s creation helps us to get closer to Him. *But* we want it to be close to an airport, someplace where there is easy access to transportation. And these two criteria don’t usually go together!”

But although the ideal Feast site isn’t *in* the city, it’s not far from the city, either. “We also want it near some restaurants, hotels, and recreational places where families can do things together,” Mr. McNair added. “And it has to be affordable, because many people, especially our seniors and young families, are on a budget.”

Such varied criteria make for interesting discussions with industry representatives. “You tell them it needs to be family

friendly,” Mr. McNair described, “without a lot of seedy parts of town—but near the beach would be fine! It needs to be inexpensive, with lots of housing available—but not in an overly urban area! You start stacking up these different criteria that all look contradictory. How can you possibly find places that check all those boxes? Yet that is what we look for—where God places His name.”

Mr. Tyler Wayne handles many of these discussions. “I gather proposals from different locations and interface with the hotels about price and availability,” he said. But it’s not all about what’s on paper. “After we get a proposal from a venue, we’ll ask a local minister to go to that site and have a look around,” Mr. Wayne added, “because you can only learn so much from pictures. For example, there was one spot where the proposal came back and looked good, but we asked a minister to check it out, and he said that as soon as he got out of his car, all he could hear was the highway. There was another venue that really did *not* look like a good spot, but the minister we asked to look at it said it’s actually really nice. You just don’t know until you’re on site.”

Contracts and Room Blocks

So, where do these proposals come from? “We currently receive proposals from a service where suppliers are on one side and clients are on the other,” said Mr. Wayne. “We’re a supplier, because we’re supplying the business to the venues, so it’s free for us. I build a request for proposals and send it through this program to different hotels, so they get our parameters: We need a certain amount of space, people are coming on certain dates, we have a particular budget that we’re looking at—and they can either decline it or send a proposal back. I collect those until we have some options.”

Gathering proposals isn't as simple as just collecting information from the venues; sometimes they need information about the Church and the Feast. "Sometimes they'll have questions about the event," said Mr. Wayne, "like whether we need the meeting space through the whole Feast, because some places might want to flip the room and use it for somebody else in the evenings—we tell them that we want the room 24 hours a day. Sometimes a hotel will think that everyone at the Feast site will be staying there, and I'll have to tell them, *No, we only need a handful of rooms, because people are going to stay wherever they want.* I answer a lot of questions like that." Mr. Wayne keeps a detailed record of the proposals he receives. "I fill in all their information, like the hall capacity and square footage, how much it's going to cost, if they have any food and beverage requirements, and what the rooms are going to cost. All those venues are categorized and broken down by state, so we can keep things organized."

"The contracts for next year's Feast have to be signed even before this year's Feast is over," he said. **Otherwise, "you're already scrambling to find something, because at that point, you need to be already going through the planning process. In June of this year, we were already working on sites for 2023."**

But a proposal is only the first step—if a venue looks like it has potential, Mr. Wayne will request a contract. "We'll then evaluate the contract, and sometimes the terms don't work for us," he said. "For example, a lot of places have resort fees. So, the hall might be at the top of what we really want to budget for, but then they have a \$30-per-night resort fee—that puts us outside of our budget. So, we may ask them if there's any way they can reduce it, or have it waived."

According to Mr. McNair, the contracts with various vendors represent the most complicated part of Feast preparation. "The contracts for *next* year's Feast have to be signed even before *this* year's Feast is over," he said. Otherwise, "you're already scrambling to find something, because at that point, you need to be already going through the planning process. In June of this year, we were already working on sites for 2023."

A vital aspect of finalizing many contracts is negotiating how many rooms a hotel venue will reserve, or "block," so that Church members will be able to book them at a reduced rate for the Feast. "A lot of hotels have attrition," explained Mr. Wayne, "so, if they're blocking 60 rooms for us, they might allow for 20 percent attrition. That means they understand that

we can't guarantee that our members will book all 60 rooms, and they'll allow us to reduce that number by 20 percent, so it's okay if we only book 48 rooms. If a contract says we need to book a certain number of rooms and the hotel doesn't have any attrition, we're probably not going to sign."

For vendors who haven't worked with God's Church before, this can be confusing. "We sometimes have to explain to vendors that we have open housing," said Mr. McNair. "If you have a business convention, you can have 1,000 people come in and all stay at three hotels, because they're all making their reservations through you. We don't do that—hopefully we offer the brethren housing that is useful and within their budget, but if it's not, they're free to find something else."

Sometimes, Church members have questions about this, too. "People will wonder why we stay in places where we have to commit to a certain number of rooms," Mr. McNair said.

"When we can find it, the 'gold standard' is always a stand-alone hall, where we don't have to commit to a certain number of rooms." But that's not always possible—in fact, it usually isn't. "It's more and more rare to find just a convention hall or music performance hall that's affordable and suitable," he continued. "So, what's the next best thing? A hall that's attached to a hotel. But then people will stay at that hotel for convenience, so if we pay for the hall alone, they don't get any discounts for staying there. So, if we can't have a stand-alone hall and we have to use a hotel, we try to get a discount for those who stay there. And that is a model that hotels are always familiar with, so it works pretty well. That's the main point—if our brethren are going to stay there anyway, we might as well have them get discounts for it."

Nevertheless, "we try to commit to as few rooms as possible," Mr. McNair said, "because even if we have 400 people coming to a site, we know not all 400 are going to be staying at that hotel, so we'll only commit to filling something like 50 rooms during the Feast. There are times when we are stuck in a commitment to a certain number of rooms—it was the best we could do, so we tell brethren, *If it fits within your budget and it's not a hardship for you, it will help us if you stay at the hotel.*"

However, Mr. McNair emphatically stated that this is *not* a requirement. "If the host hotel does not work for you, we're not expecting you to stay there," he said. "There are some brethren who feel as though they *must* stay at a Feast site's host hotel, but it really does have to fit their situation. We are not pushing at all for people to stay in places they can't afford." While there are brethren who greatly enjoy being so close to the site's meeting hall, others will need more spacious accommodations. "Many families need kitchens, so it doesn't make sense for them to stay in a hotel room."

Working with Coordinators

Festival coordinators work extremely hard to make their sites run smoothly—but who coordinates the coordinators? “After the Feast is over, one of the first things we do is figure out the coordinators for next year’s sites,” Mr. McNair answered. “It has to be discussed with Dr. Winnail and Mr. Weston, because managing a Feast site is a heavy responsibility. There is a lot of detailed organizational work, and some people just gravitate to that—so, we take that into account. Sometimes one man from one area will coordinate a site for several years, and then he’ll get to take a break, and someone else will do it for several years.”

While sites outside the United States are primarily managed by the Church’s regional offices, Mr. Wayne spends considerable time assisting many Festival coordinators with preparations for their specific sites. “A big part of our job is getting the coordinators what they need,” he said. “Near the end of 2021, we scheduled out all the important deadlines for 2022, leading up to Festival registration. We give the coordinators deadlines to submit their information about housing accommodations, what the site is like, maybe what activities they will offer, and we’ll upload that to the Festival microsites. We also handle a lot of the business side of things, like the payments. Ms. Amanda Casey spends a ton of time dealing with the finances for the Feast. Basically, from Feast to Feast, we have processes going on.”

Of course, one essential task is determining who will be giving sermonettes and sermons at the Feast, and when they will be giving them. “Usually, we aim to have the speaking schedules out *before* the Feast starts—that’s our goal, anyway,” Mr. McNair said, chuckling. “I jest—hopefully, by the end of June or by early July, we have them ready to send out, so speakers will know and have a couple of months. We want them to spend time preparing—it’s hard to do that if you don’t know you’re going to be speaking!”

Festival Registration

As one can imagine, managing Festival registration represents a major part of the workload. “We spend a ton of time helping people sign in to their accounts and register,” said Mr. Wayne. “We also spend time making sure that the Festival sites do not get overfilled. The IT department has built a system that shows us how many people have registered for each site, and those who have not yet registered.” Registering for the Feast as quickly as possible, even to simply confirm attendance for an assigned site, makes things *much* easier for Church Administration—and for the rest of our brethren, as well. “At one time,” Mr. Wayne said, “there were around 100 people waiting to get into a site, but we couldn’t let them all in until more people who were *assigned* to that site had registered to let us know where they wanted to go.”

And assigned sites aren’t just a matter of matching brethren to their nearest one. “Sometimes we assign certain sites to more people than we can actually fit there,” said Mr. Wayne, “because we know that many people are going to transfer somewhere else. We’ve rarely had a problem with over-assigning to a site, because we generally have a pretty good idea of what to expect. And sometimes, for example, we’ll assign about 200 people to a beach site even though we have room for 400 people there, because we know we’ll have a lot of transfers to that site—a lot of people want to go to the beach.”

Where God Places His Name

In all of this, Church Administration strives to work in accordance with God’s will, and He makes that will known in various ways. “Sometimes God tells us where He’s placed His name through the fact that there are just no other options,” said Mr. Wayne. “A good example is a few sites we have on the East Coast—they’ve been great sites, but we started looking at other places to see what else is out there and whether we’d get any better prices. We ended up just spinning our wheels—nothing was coming up, or venues weren’t getting back to us. But the places where we were already, they were like, *Come on back!* And they continue to give us good rates. It’s obvious that God is keeping the door open in those spots.”

As we all know, doing God’s will is the very purpose of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, and Mr. McNair emphasized that we need to be diligent in staying focused on it. “In speaking about the different parameters of the Feast,” he said, “it’s important to note that, while the Church tries to find places that ‘check all the boxes,’ the big priority is just that we have a place to worship God in peace and harmony. We can fall into the trap of thinking that the Feast is all about amenities and things to do, especially in the more affluent nations. But the more all of us can focus on the real purpose of the Feast—growing together as a family as we worship our Creator—the more we won’t get sidetracked by distractions and side-issues like housing and recreation.”

Every year, God miraculously enables the Feast of Tabernacles to run smoothly for scores of Festival sites around the world. In doing so, He uses not just a few people, but many. “All of us who are involved with the Feast know that it really takes a lot of people,” Mr. McNair said. “It’s not just the handful of people at Headquarters, it’s not just the coordinators and their assistants—it’s sort of an army of people who make the Feast run. It’s really inspiring and exciting to think that all of us can experience this foretaste of the Millennium.”

May that Millennium come swiftly, and may we all keep God’s Feast this year with even greater appreciation for all He accomplishes through His people! ^(LW)

In Loving Memory

Mr. Johnny Bolences, 65, died on January 31. Mr. Bolences was a longtime elder, serving the brethren in the Polomolok, South Cotabato, congregation in the Philippines. His heart and mind were in God's Work and serving the brethren. He is survived by his wife Imelda, one son, and other relatives. Mr. Bolences was well known, loved, and respected, and will be deeply missed by his family, the brethren, and friends, all of whom he cherished.

Mr. Larry Crooks, 71, a longtime elder in God's Church, died on July 21. Mr. Crooks grew up as a hardworking farm boy in East Texas. He moved to Dallas, Texas, after graduating from high school and worked in a variety of jobs before starting his own business. He worked for Scurry County in West Texas for more than 30 years, more than half of that time as senior tax appraiser. During his 15 years as a member of the Rotary Club, he served in every leadership role. Mr. Crooks had high ethical and moral standards for himself and is well remembered for his kind, caring heart and willingness to help those in need. Baptized in 1974, he loved studying the Bible and being with the brethren. He also enjoyed woodworking and making furniture. After retiring from his job, he moved back to his home in East Texas and enjoyed riding his tractor and his mule. He especially enjoyed time with his family and playing with his grandchildren. He was predeceased by one son and is survived by one daughter and her husband, one son, and two grandchildren, as well as other relatives and many friends.

Mr. Richard Harvey-Haynes, 54, died peacefully in his sleep on April 19 at his home. Baptized in 2005, Mr. Harvey-Haynes was a faithful and dedicated member of the Chaguanas congregation in Trinidad. He loved and cherished his family and lived a simple and quiet life. He was actively involved in serving the local congregation in various capacities. He will be missed by the brethren in Trinidad as well as by those farther afield. Mr. Harvey-Haynes is survived by his wife Donna, two daughters, and one granddaughter, as well as by other relatives.

Mrs. Mavis Holland, 62, from Papua New Guinea, died on March 30 after a long illness. Mrs. Holland, a longtime member of God's Church, had confidence in the promise of the resurrection and had no fear of death.

Mrs. Judith Mackay, 88, died on February 1. Devoted wife of her husband Vic, who predeceased her, and mother of four children, she was a warm and generous woman who was always willing to help others in need. She had a colorful personality and the Melbourne, Australia, brethren enjoyed her infectious smile and intelligent conversations. Mrs. Mackay is survived by three daughters and one son. Area Pastor Adam Jennings conducted her funeral.

Ms. Zaharun Mohammed, 72, died May 6, 2021, at her home. She was a member of the Chaguanas, Trinidad, congregation, baptised in 2011 after being introduced to the truth through the telecast and reading several of the Church's booklets. She was soft spoken and a pleasure to converse with. She had no children and lived alone but remarked that she did not feel alone because God was always with her. She loved to travel for the Feast and enjoyed being among God's people.

Mrs. Susan C. Olson, 78, died on February 18. She was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized with her husband Richard in 1976. Mrs. Olson was born in Minnesota and lived there until after her husband's death in 2001, when she moved to Missouri. She enjoyed reading, puzzles, and spending time with family and friends. Mrs. Olson is survived by two sons and one daughter, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, four siblings, and many other relatives and friends. She is also missed by the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation.

Dr. Hadden (Bill) Pace, 98, died on August 2. He was a chiropractor. Baptized in 1973, he was a longtime member of God's Church. Dr. Pace served for more than 36 years as an elder in the southern California congregations. Positive and encouraging, he lived his life with love toward all people and set an example of determination and dedication in being faithful to the end, despite increasing health trials. Dr. Pace was widely known among the brethren and deeply loved. He is mourned by his wife Sandy and the many who have lost a dear friend.

Mrs. Margaret Pruitt, 82, died in her residence on May 16. Mrs. Pruitt was a longtime member of God's Church. She and her husband James were both baptized in 1970 and were married for 63 years. A homemaker, she enjoyed garden-

ing and fishing with her husband and visiting with family and friends. Mrs. Pruitt was known as a caring and selfless person who helped people who were in need. Her joy was singing her favorite hymns and reading the Bible. She will be greatly missed by her husband, two sons, one daughter, three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, other relatives, the brethren in the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation, and many friends.

Mrs. Dorothy Scholes, 69, a member of the Melbourne, Australia, congregation for more than 50 years, died peacefully on March 21. She and her husband Harry, who prede-

ceased her, served the brethren in many ways over many decades, and their hospitality was deeply appreciated by all. They shared their home with warmth, love, and laughter. Mrs. Scholes was a Proverbs 31 woman in every aspect of her life. She is survived by two sisters, two daughters, and three grandchildren.

Miss Liatah Tarey, 12, from Vanuatu, died on January 12, after being diagnosed with a serious blood condition many months earlier. Her family appreciates those who were praying for Liatah and those who pray for them as they grieve her loss. Vanuatu elder Jerry Sam conducted her funeral service.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Dan (Charlene) Carlile celebrated **60 years of marriage** on June 22. Mr. Carlile is a deacon in the Des Moines congregation, which held a celebration for them after services on July 2.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen (Linda) Elliott celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on June 18. They have 42 years in the ministry, two sons, two daughters-in-law, and six grandchildren in the Church—life has been full and adventurous. Residing in the Phoenix, Arizona, area currently, they look forward to many more memories.

Mr. and Mrs. Rex (Judy) Grabil reached their **60th anniversary** on May 29. The Des Moines congregation held a celebration for them after services on May 14. Mr. and Mrs. Grabil have two children, six grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred (Joyce) Mullett of the Tampa, Florida, congregation, celebrated their **65th wedding anniversary** on July 8. Both were baptized in 1964 and credit God and His way of life for their successful marriage. They have been blessed with four daughters, eleven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Mullett on 65 years of marriage!

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald (Eleine) Rathgeber of the Yorkton, Saskatchewan, congregation in Canada, celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on July 21. Congratulations to both of them on 60 years of marriage!

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Joshua (Mandy) Arens are proud to announce the arrival of their firstborn child, **Naomi Grace Arens**, born July 21 weighing 8 pounds, 2 ounces. Mother and child are doing well. The Calgary congregation in Canada is looking forward to welcoming her in their midst!

Mr. and Mrs. Mike (Kaylan) Dance are happy to announce the birth of their daughter, **Sienna Lynn Dance**, on May 7. She weighed 7 pounds, 12 ounces, and was 21 inches long. Big brothers Sawyer and Jay are thrilled with their new sister. The Dance fam-

ily attends the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephan (Kelsey) Leuker are proud to announce the arrival of their new baby boy. **Kaleb Mervin Leuker** was born on May 10, weighing 8 pounds, 4 ounces, and measuring 20 inches in length. Scarlett, Jesse, and Annelise were thrilled to welcome their new brother! The Leuker family attends the Calgary, Alberta, congregation in Canada.

Mr. and Mrs. Damion (Kamisha) McKenzie happily welcomed their fourth

child, **Layne Iaan McKenzie**, on June 4. He weighed 8 pounds, 3 ounces, and measured 20 inches in length. Mother and baby are doing well. The Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada rejoices in this new addition, especially grandparents Michael and Kathy Barker!

Mr. and Mrs. Michael (Becky) Thiel are excited to announce the birth of their third child, **Simon Philip Thiel**, born June 7. He weighed 8 pounds, 9 ounces, and measured 21 inches. Mother and baby are doing well, and big sister Katherine and big brother Joshua are happy to have a new baby brother.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Julian Braddock was ordained an elder on July 9 by Regional Pastor Jeffrey Fall, Area Pastor Stephen Elliott, and elders Joe Lozano and Craig Bemis. Mr. Braddock serves in the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation.

Mrs. Ruth Carrasco Rodríguez was ordained a deaconess on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mrs. Carrasco Rodríguez serves in the La Paz congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Marc Casey was ordained a deacon on June 11 by Area Pastor Rajan Moses. Mr. Casey serves in the Goa congregation in India.

Mr. Pascal Devillé was ordained an elder on July 19 by Evangelist Douglas Winnail, Regional Director Peter Nathan, and Area Pastor Rees Ellis. Mr. Deville serves in the Brussels, Belgium, congregation.

Mr. Adalberto Díaz Alvarado was ordained a deacon on June 11 by Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Díaz Alvarado serves in the Monterrey congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Vernon Firestone was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Area Pastor Stephen Elliott. Mr. Firestone serves in the Prescott Valley, Arizona, congregation.

Mr. Miguel Grande was ordained a deacon on June 4 by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Grande serves in the San Luis Potosí congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Georges Jean-Pierre was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Jean-Pierre serves in the Mexico City congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Edward Lever was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Australasian Regional Director Rob Tyler and Area Pastor Graeme Hemphill. Mr. Lever serves in the Sydney, New South Wales, congregation in Australia.

Mr. and Mrs. Denny (Josie) Napoleoni were ordained deacon and deaconess on July 9 by Regional Pastor Jeffrey Fall, Pastor Stephen Elliott, and elders Joe Lozano and Craig Bemis. Mr. and Mrs. Napoleoni serve in the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation.

Mr. Ernesto Neri Barrio was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Neri Barrio serves in the Mexico City congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Wayne Nieto was ordained a deacon on July 16 by Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka. Mr. Nieto serves in the Norfolk, Virginia, congregation.

Mr. Roberto Ontiveros Villarreal was ordained an elder on June 11 by Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Ontiveros Villarreal serves in the Monterrey congregation in Mexico.

Mr. William (Bill) Pogar was ordained a deacon on June 18 by Evangelist Douglas Winnail and Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka. Mr. Pogar serves in the Norfolk, Virginia, congregation.

Mr. Miguel Ríos Jardines was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Ríos Jardines serves in the Mexico City congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Carl Skal and Mr. Steve Smith were ordained deacons on Pentecost by visiting Pastor Jonathan McNair; Area Pastor Alex Celan; Pastor Bill Whitaker; and elders Scott Lyons; Lehman Lyons, Sr.; Frank Frye; and Tad Walls. Messrs. Skal and Smith serve in the Walterboro, South Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Filemón Velasco Canales was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Velasco Canales serves in the Mexico City congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Abelardo Velasco Martínez was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Evangelist Mario Hernández and Area Pastor Cristian Orrego. Mr. Velasco Martínez serves in the Mexico City congregation in Mexico.

Mr. Subashchandra Wangkhem was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Area Pastor Rajan Moses. Mr. Wangkhem serves in the Imphal congregation in India.

Mr. Greg Watt was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Australasian Regional Director Rob Tyler, Area Pastor Graeme Hemphill, and elder Ed Lever. Mr. Watt serves in the Sydney, New South Wales, congregation in Australia.

Electronic Service Requested

Thinking Biblically About Entertainment

We in God's Church strive to think biblically about any given topic—to keep our brains turned on and “tuned in” to what the Bible has to say. But what about entertainment?

Entertainment is usually designed to help us *stop* thinking. When I consider some of the entertainment I enjoy, I know that part of the reason I enjoy it is because it's not mentally taxing. There's a danger in this, as you might expect: When we stop thinking, we are still taking in information. For example, *Star Wars* is my favorite film franchise—but can I just turn my brain off and mindlessly take it in?

There were a few items I realized I needed to filter out of my mindset after being raised on *Star Wars*. First, it sugarcoats war. Most PG or PG-13 movies do this—characters just scream and fall over when they die, and good guys can mow down legions of bad guys, rarely getting hurt themselves. As a result, I grew up thinking that even though war sounded bad, it was probably something I could survive. I was thankfully able to grow out of that mindset as I got a better idea of what war is really like. Needless to say, God never sugarcoats war, and He is looking forward to doing away with it entirely (Matthew 5:9; Isaiah 2:2–4).

Secondly, *Star Wars* usually makes its bad guys faceless; stormtroopers are just evil and deserve to be shot for their crimes against the galaxy. In some ways, it's no different from stories that employ orcs or killer robots—enemies that neither give nor deserve mercy. But when we apply that thinking to human beings, it takes us to places in our history like the Holocaust and other instances of genocide. We have to keep

in mind that *every* human being is created in God's image and that God's master plan includes resurrection for *all* who have died. When God resurrects Nazis (see Matthew 12:41), do we think we'll just gun them back down? Or, are we called to learn how to help them repent of their evil deeds? Some of the Nazis were *literally called stormtroopers*—and, despite all their evil in this age, they were still human beings made in God's image and will have their opportunity to repent.

One more lesson, though there are surely others: In *Star Wars*, the rebels are the good guys. The rebels are *not* the good guys in the Bible—they include Korah, Absalom, Nimrod, and Satan himself. A quick word study will show that the vast majority of biblical references to *rebel*, *rebels*, *rebellion*, and *rebellious* refer to the Israelites' attitudes and actions toward God and His ways! While there are times when we cannot obey men because of our greater responsibility to God (Acts 5:29), it's clear that we should be trying to obey humanly constituted government as much as possible. David is a great example of someone who stuck to this—he had every reason to rebel against King Saul, but he waited for God to handle the situation. It's a big topic, but the main point is that the Bible tells us to try as hard as possible to be obedient, while *Star Wars* celebrates the mindset of rebellion.

And, for all that, I still like *Star Wars*. But I try to remind myself to never turn off a biblical mindset. We have to make sure we use the Bible to filter the world and its entertainment, or the world will quickly start to influence us more than the Bible does. Don't let the world slip in subtle messages through movies and other entertainment—*keep your brain turned on*.

—Mark Sandor

The above is adapted from one of the commentaries available at LivingYouth.org, all of which discuss issues relevant to the young people of God's Church today.