

HOW to Observe God's Festivals

Here is a clear, simple explanation showing how YOU can keep God's festivals even if you cannot observe them with converted brethren or if you live with unconverted relatives.

by Herman L. Hoeh

HOW SHOULD you observe the annual festivals if you are at home with unconverted members of the family? How can you *keep* from offending them? *What should you do if you are unable to assemble* at any of our local congregations?

And even if you do attend the Festivals with brethren, here is what *everyone of us* needs to know about observing God's festivals!

Purpose for the Festivals

God wants us to be happy. He is not the stern God He has so often been pictured to be. One primary way God has provided for our happiness — as well as our growth and development in the true Christian life — is through fellowship with brethren at the annual festivals.

But not all are able to have this kind of fellowship. Many of you brethren are all alone in this world — except for the spiritual fellowship you can have with God. Yet you, too, can have real happiness at every festival *if you know what to do and how to be an example to unconverted members of your family*. There may be many difficulties, it may take time, but there is a way you can achieve peace and harmony in your home even if all the members of your family are unconverted.

What Is a Festival?

A "festival," or "feast" is a part of *time* ordained by God for our physical, as well as spiritual, *rejuvenation*. There is one chapter in the Bible which mentions all the festivals God has ordained — Leviticus 23.

Notice that the first festival men-

tioned occurs weekly. It is the Sabbath, which occurs every seventh day of the week (Lev. 23:2-3). It is a period of rest from our usual business, labors and pleasures. Our article "Rejoice in God's Sabbath!" explains how to keep the Sabbath. Write for it today. But notice, now, what God reveals about keeping the *annual* festivals.

The first *annual* festival is the Passover (Lev. 23:4-5). The Passover is the only festival that is *not* a Sabbath (unless it happens to fall on the seventh day of the week). But the Passover, as well as every other annual festival, is a **COMMANDED ASSEMBLY** — a time of convocation.

We are, of course, to worship the Father in Spirit and truth no matter where we may be (John 4:21-24). But whenever it is possible to assemble we are commanded to do so.

The whole family is *commanded* to attend whenever possible (Deut. 16:11, 14, 16). Jesus and his brothers and sisters came with Joseph and Mary at the Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread (Luke 2:41, 42).

How to Observe The Passover

The Passover comes the day before the great Spring Festival of Unleavened Bread (Numbers 28:16, 17). Since the Passover is *not* a Sabbath day, work may be done on it. That's why the Passover is called a day of preparation (Matt. 27:62). The Passover is a very serious time of the year. Jesus set us an example on the day of His death so that we today might know how to keep the Passover.

Although the Passover is the day

before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it was customary among the Jews to use only unleavened bread on the Passover day. That is why the Passover is called a *day* of unleavened bread (Luke 22:7).

No leavened product is ever to be used with the Passover service — which is improperly termed "Lord's Supper" (I Corinthians 11:20). The morning after the Passover service, which is still the Passover day (all days start at sunset the previous evening, *not* at midnight), is probably the most convenient time to remove any leavening agents or leavened bread.

Be sure that all leaven is removed from your premises. Don't store it in some other room. Removing leavened products which cost a few cents is just one way God has of testing you to see how much you prize obedience above money and the pleasures of this age. By following His will, God has promised to give you more in this life in return for what you give up in loving obedience to Him (John 10:10).

It is wise to arrange your purchases so that when the Passover comes, there will be little leaven to discard. Remember, *there is nothing wrong with leaven*. It is merely used in the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a *symbol* of vanity and sin.

Perhaps some of you are wondering what leaven is. A leavening agent is any substance that is used to puff up or produce fermentation, causing dough to rise. Yeast, soda and baking powder are such products. Bread, crackers, some prepared cereals and cakes, and some bought pies contain leaven and should be avoided at home and at restaurants

during the festival. Homemade unleavened pies, cereals and unleavened bread are to be used instead, *together with all the regular meats, milk, fruits and vegetables you normally eat*, for the Festival of Unleavened Bread following the Passover. Cakes with *beaten* egg white PURPOSELY substituted for leaven should not be used. But beaten egg white on pies, etc., is not a leavening agent.

At first it may seem strange to do without leaven in a festival, but once we come to know the mind of God and of Jesus Christ, we see the lesson of obedience it teaches. Happy are you if you do these things, Jesus said (John 13:17).

As there are many products containing leaven, be sure to examine the labels of all products on your shelves. In all probability, there will be some leavened material that somehow escapes! A very good type of the hidden sins that we don't always discover upon conversion. We must always throw away this forgotten leaven — a type of sin — upon discovering it.

Festival of Unleavened Bread

Here is the great Spring Festival, midway in the first month of the sacred calendar, when the people of God are to assemble with one another wherever possible and rejoice over the wonderful new year ahead. The Feast is a seven-day period, beginning the day *after* the Passover.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, although seven days long, has but two *annual* Holy Days or Sabbaths, occurring on the first and last days of the Feast. The intervening days are not *annual* Sabbaths and *ordinary work* (except for any intervening *weekly sabbath*) *may be done on them*.

Annual Sabbaths differ from the *weekly* Sabbath in one particular respect — cooking for the festivals *may be done* on them. But all other forms of ordinary business or work are not to be done. Exodus 12:16 reads: "No manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, *that only may be done of you*."

Although the intervening days are not Sabbaths and work may be done on them, be sure that the usual routine

does not stop you from realizing the purpose of the *entire* Festival. It is to be a time of rejuvenating yourself spiritually and physically. The entire Festival is meant to be a special period of happiness. Spend more time in studying and reading your Bible.

The Use of Unleavened Bread

In this Feast, no leavened bread should be in your homes for seven days and no leavened products should be eaten. Use UNLEAVENED bread instead, *together with your customary meals*. If some of you have never tasted unleavened bread before, you have a surprise coming!

Children should be trained by their parents to eat unleavened bread during these days, and also *taught the meaning for so doing*. This will always be a wonderful experience for them, because most children have never tasted nutritious unleavened bread, which can either be bought, or baked very simply in your own home. Unleavened products are sold in most stores near you. Just ask your grocer.

If some of you would enjoy baking your own unleavened bread, be sure to write us for recipes if you do not already have some.

What About Unconverted Relatives?

If families are divided with only some converted, difficulties may arise. Perhaps you are a husband or a wife whose family does not follow God. Don't let that worry you. *Never force your will on others*. Don't force them to use unleavened bread against their will. This Festival is a matter *between you and God*.

Where the entire family serves God, all leaven must be removed by the beginning of the Festival. If the husband of the family is unconverted, all leaven should be removed *if he does not object*. But if he objects, rather than provoke arguments, it is better to reckon the house as his responsibility, and not remove the leaven. However, a wife who does not need to bake can take all leaven from the kitchen where she works, if no objections would be raised. *Allow an unconverted husband his freedom to eat leavened products if he pur-*

chases them or demands you bake them.

If God has not provided you the monetary means through the second tithe, whether your own or others', then, of course, you will need to observe these days at home. Sometimes it is necessary to explain to your family if they do not understand. You have to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" in explaining the matter, however.

If opposition will likely develop, it would be better, *before saying anything*, to delight unconverted members of your family with unleavened products long before the Feast so that they will not think anything strange when you first mention it. It is surprising how many people know little or nothing about unleavened breads, but who enjoy them from the very first. Perhaps if the unconverted really enjoy it, nothing need be said about the Festival and you can use unleavened bread for the entire week.

When living with the unconverted, many of these troubles can be avoided by attending the Festival with the brethren. Of course, there might be limiting circumstances, especially if there is a newborn child.

The first annual Sabbath or High Day of Unleavened Bread is the *only* other *NIGHT convocation* that is commanded after the Passover (Exodus 12:42). What could be more pleasant than beginning a festival with an enjoyable dinner with members of your family and converted friends in thanks to God?

What About Pentecost?

The next festival when all are to gather is the Day of Firstfruits or Pentecost. It usually occurs a few weeks before summer. *Pentecost always occurs on a Monday*.

Pentecost is an annual Holy Day in which no work is to be done except for preparing what a person must eat. In local churches there is to be a convocation held on the day, just as we find in the example of the disciples on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 (Acts 2:1).

As with every Holy Day when any of you are unable to gather together in an assembled convocation, there should be a great deal of Bible study. If you are

keeping this day alone and with opposition from the family, be very considerate of the others. Give the day a festive atmosphere! *Don't withdraw yourself totally from your family.* Be happy with your family. Let them all enjoy the bounteous material blessings of God in a dinner with you. Avoid, however, any statements that would precipitate religious strife. Let them see that the Holy Days which God set in motion are so much more enjoyable than the world's burdensome holidays.

The Day of Trumpets

As autumn approaches, there is another single Holy Day — the Day of Trumpets. It is an annual Sabbath day when no servile work should be done, except what is necessary for preparation of food on that day. Make this a day of joy for members of your family. And spend time studying the Bible.

If any of the annual Sabbaths falls on the weekly Sabbath, then *that annual Sabbath takes precedence* and we are allowed to prepare meals on that day.

The Day of Atonement

A most unusual day is this! Imagine God commanding one *fast day* for His people annually.

The Day of Atonement is a *commanded fast*. Leviticus 23:27 uses the term "afflict your souls." Psalm 35:13 explains this to clearly mean fasting. Here David said of himself, "I humbled [*afflicted*, see margin] my soul with fasting." Leviticus 23:27-32 also explains that there is no work to be done on it. God's people are to congregate whenever possible, as on the preceding Holy Day.

A fast without water is the Bible example. See the accounts of Moses and the prophets where details of spiritual fasts are given. In each case, fasting was without food *and* water.

In relationship to fasting, no explicit instruction is given for infants. Nursing infants were assembled in a special fast (Joel 2:16) but there is *no* indication that they did not nurse on the Day of Atonement. Since fasting on this day has a special *meaning*, little children should be taught to fast *when they can first comprehend the fact that God commands it*, and *not* before.

We should not eat the usual heavy

evening meal on the beginning of the Day of Atonement (remember, God's days begin at sunset). Also eat in *moderation* the evening meal that follows the Day of Atonement. Always be careful not to eat the usual amount of *heavy foods* immediately after a fast.

If some of you have never fasted, for the first time, there might be slight physically uncomfortable reactions. But how small are these compared to the heart-warming benefits that come from doing the will of God!

Since God instructs that no work whatsoever be done on this day, be sure that as much preparation as possible for the day has been previously made so that unconverted members of your family will not have cause to complain. Sometimes a converted wife and mother may have to do certain limited work on this day for her unconverted family.

The Festival of Tabernacles

The greatest and most joyous festival is, without doubt, the Feast of Tabernacles. What can be more wonderful, after a hard summer's labor, with much of the winter's store in, than that we should rejoice before the Lord of heaven and earth? As we read in Nehemiah 8:9-10 of all the festivals in general: "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep . . . eat the fat [animals], and drink the sweet [wine], and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH."

The Festival of Tabernacles is a time when we should be separate from the world, rejoicing as in a festive dance, before God who has given us every wonderful material and spiritual gift in the past year.

Although the Festival itself is only seven days long — with one annual Sabbath at the beginning of the Feast — the last annual Holy Day coming immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles makes it customary to refer to all eight days as part of the same Festival. On the first and eighth days no work is to be done except what is permitted for meal preparation. If you are alone and unable to journey to one of the Festival

locations, because of some *great* unforeseen circumstance, be sure to study your Bible, and especially the Law, during these days.

If you are unable to attend the Festival, the intervening six days are to be celebrated in the same manner as are the five intervening days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread though you can eat *normally* during the Feast of Tabernacles! Work is permitted on them, although God does not intend you to do the usual routine. The Festival was given to relieve you from your normal duties so that you can rejoice with the brethren. It is to defeat the purpose of the Festival if, when you are unable to attend, you merely rest on the two High Days and neglect the entire Festival as a whole period of supreme happiness.

If you have not yet been able to meet once a year during the Feast of Tabernacles with the brethren, *begin now to save your second tithe* — which is God's way of providing you an annual vacation in His spiritual presence with all the brethren.

Of course some of you reading this article may not know of any other people keeping God's Holy Days. In fact, you may be wondering if there is any group who is. There is a way to find out the answers to these questions if you are interested.

Festival Information

One way we are prepared to serve YOU that many of you may not realize is this: As a part of the ADULT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, we now have TRAINED MEN — graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE — available in all parts of the United States and in many parts of the world, ready to counsel with you PERSONALLY, to answer questions, to help you with any spiritual problems — even to baptize any who are ready for it, if any should, voluntarily, and with no solicitation from us, so desire. Please do not construe this announcement as an "invitation" of any sort — but from time to time, people write to us, wanting to know if a *personal* visit is possible.

Because we say in literature, and you hear on radio, "there is no follow-up —

no one will call on you" — many may have MISUNDERSTOOD. What we mean to say to the public is that there will be no follow-up trying to sell them something, or trying to talk them into becoming a "member" of anything. We have NOTHING TO SELL. Giving us your name and address for requested literature, or a subscription (free — already paid) to our magazines does not mean someone will come knocking uninvited on your door.

We WON'T send anyone to see you,

UNWANTED. Not unless you REQUEST IT! But, if you would like one of our trained men, graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE, to call and counsel with you about any problems, answer any questions — even explain anything in the Bible, there is such a man NEAR YOU! So please feel free to invite such a visit. That's what they are there for. And of course you know they have nothing to sell. They won't ask you for money. They won't plead with you — or even urge you — to "be converted" or bap-

tized, or to join anything. Of course, if you WANT and request help in finding God and letting Christ REALLY come into your heart and life, they are fully qualified to HELP. But they will not try to shove anything on you. They are qualified to EXPLAIN the Bible if you ask, but never will they argue. Actually most of them are consecrated and ordained ministers. They, and we here at the Headquarters of this great Work, want only to HELP — to SERVE. We count it a PRIVILEGE to do so. □