SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES

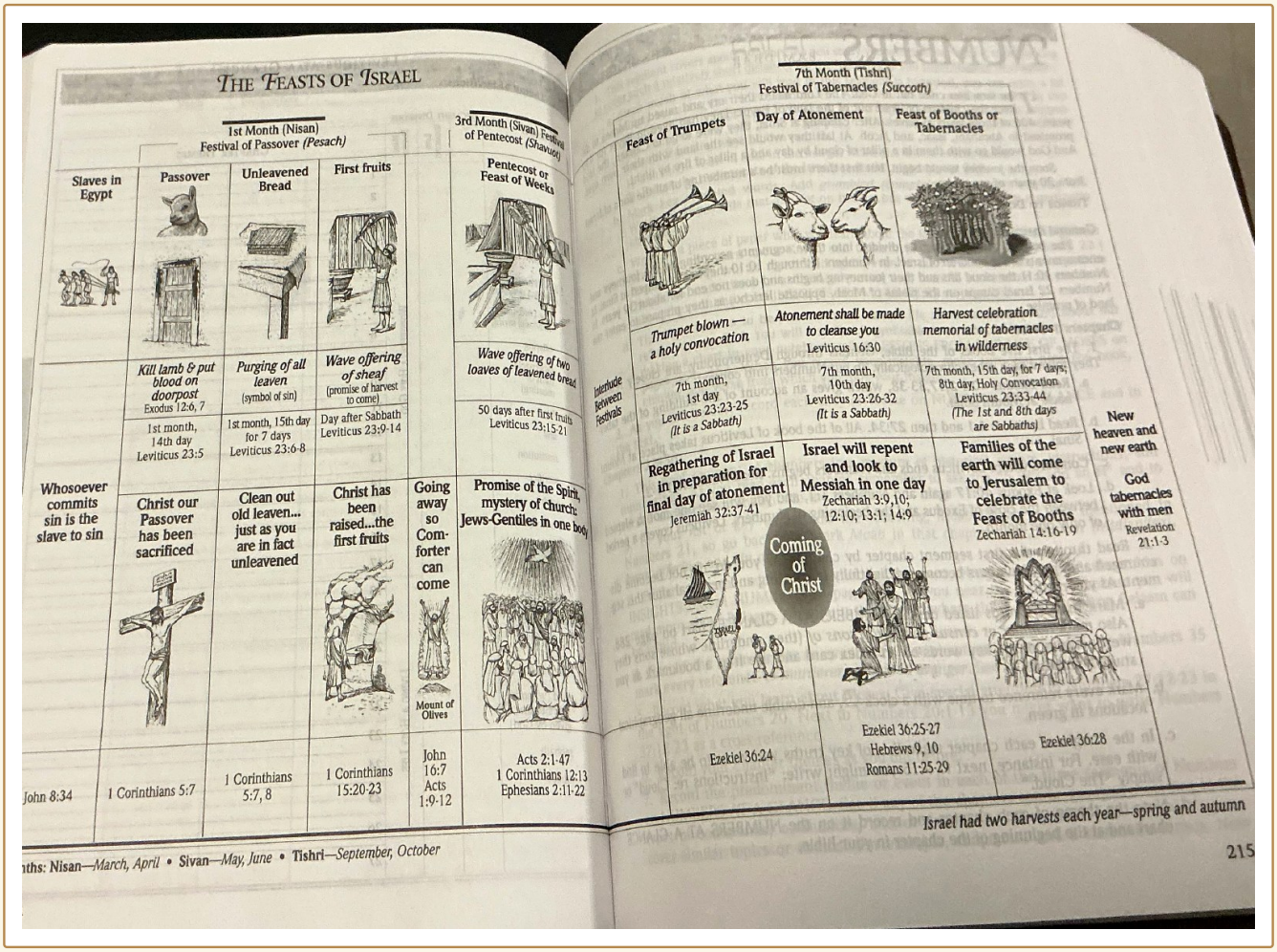
A STUDY IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

The Appointed Times

How God wrote the end of the story into the calendar of Israel — from the blood on the doorpost to an eternity face to face

LEVITICUS 23 | THE SEVEN FEASTS | CREATION TO NEW JERUSALEM

Seven feasts. Two harvests. One Redeemer — keeping every appointment He set for Himself fifteen centuries before He came.



THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL · LEVITICUS 23. The chart this study follows — the four spring feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost) fulfilled at Messiah's first coming, and the three fall feasts (Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles) pointing to His return, ending in a new heaven and new earth where God tabernacles with men.

There is a chart tucked into the back of many study Bibles called "The Feasts of Israel." Most of us turn past it on the way to the maps. But slow down over it, and you are looking at one of the most breathtaking evidences in all of Scripture that God has never once been improvising. Down the left side stand slaves in Egypt. Across the top march seven ancient festivals. And running underneath every one of them — in a hand no Israelite could read at the time — is the shadow of a cross, an empty tomb, a coming King, and a city where God finally lives with His people forever.

Long before there was a manger or a Calvary or a rolled-away stone, God handed Moses a calendar. Not a suggestion of holidays — a calendar of *appointments*. "These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them" (Leviticus 23:4). The Hebrew word for "appointed time" is *mo'ed* — a fixed meeting, a date circled on heaven's

calendar. And the word rendered "convocation," *miqra*, carries the sense of a rehearsal, a dress rehearsal. That is exactly what these feasts turned out to be: a fifteen-hundred-year rehearsal for the coming of the Messiah, acted out every year by a nation that did not yet know it was reading its own future aloud.

Here is the fact that should settle the question of God's providence forever. The first four of these feasts — the spring feasts — were fulfilled by Jesus *to the very day*. Not the general season. The day. And if the God of history kept the first four appointments to the day, then the last three — the fall feasts still ahead of us — are not maybes. They are dates already circled. This is the whole Bible on a single page: the Old Testament setting the table, the New Testament keeping the first four appointments, and the book of Revelation keeping the last three, until the calendar itself runs out into eternity.

Let's walk the chart.

BEFORE THE FEASTS

Slaves in Egypt, Slaves to Sin

The chart does not open with a feast. It opens with a picture of bondage — Israel in chains in Egypt — because the whole story of redemption begins with a people who cannot free themselves. That is the human condition since Eden. We were made to walk with God in a garden, and we chose a lie, and the door to the garden closed behind us. Ever since, the race has been in Egypt of one kind or another. Jesus named the true slavery Himself:

> *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."*
>
> JOHN 8:34

Every feast that follows is God's answer to that opening picture. You cannot understand where the calendar is going until you feel the weight of where it starts. Pharaoh is only the costume; the real taskmaster is sin, and the real Exodus is the one God planned before the foundation of the world. So the first feast is not a celebration — it is a rescue.

THE SPRING FEASTS · THE FIRST COMING

Four Appointments Kept to the Day

The four spring feasts cluster in the first and third months of the sacred year — Nisan and Sivan, our March through June. Israel kept them faithfully for fifteen hundred years without fully knowing what they meant. Then, in one astonishing spring in Jerusalem, the Messiah walked into each one and filled it up to the brim.

1. Passover — The Lamb Slain

NISAN 14 · LEVITICUS 23:5 · EXODUS 12:6-7

On the night of the first Passover, every Israelite family killed a spotless lamb and painted its blood on the doorposts, and death passed over every house marked by blood. Fifteen centuries later, at the very hour the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple, the true Lamb hung on a wooden doorframe of His own, and His blood marked out a people over whom judgment would pass. Paul says it without a wasted syllable:

> *"Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7

Jesus did not die during Passover by accident of timing or bad luck with the authorities. He died on Passover because that appointment had been on the calendar since Moses. He kept it to the day.

2. Unleavened Bread — The Sinless Sacrifice Buried

NISAN 15, SEVEN DAYS · LEVITICUS 23:6-8

The day after Passover began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when every scrap of leaven — the Bible's standing picture of sin — was purged from the house. For a week Israel ate bread with nothing corrupting in it. And for the span of that feast, the sinless body of Jesus lay in a borrowed tomb and saw no corruption. The purging of leaven was always pointing at a body that had no sin to purge. Paul draws the line for us: "let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven… but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). The buried Lamb was untouched by the very thing the feast was designed to remove.

3. Firstfruits — The Resurrection

THE DAY AFTER THE SABBATH · LEVITICUS 23:9-14

On the morning after the Sabbath in Passover week — a Sunday — the priest waved the first sheaf of the barley harvest before the LORD, a promise that the whole harvest was coming behind it. On that exact morning, Jesus walked out of the grave, the first sheaf of a harvest of resurrection that will one day empty every believer's tomb:

> *"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20

Three feasts, three days — Friday, the Sabbath, and Sunday — and on each one the Messiah did precisely what the feast had rehearsed for a millennium and a half. If the pattern stopped there it would already be miracle enough. It does not stop there.

4. Pentecost — The Spirit and the Church

FIFTY DAYS LATER, SIVAN · LEVITICUS 23:15-21

Fifty days after Firstfruits came the Feast of Weeks — Pentecost. And notice the strange detail God commanded: this time the wave offering was *two loaves baked with leaven*. After a week of purging every trace of leaven, God suddenly calls for leavened bread. Why? Because this feast was pointing to something new — a people gathered out of a sinful world, Jew and Gentile, two loaves made one, still carrying their flaws yet lifted up holy before God. Exactly fifty days after the resurrection, on the very day of Pentecost, the Spirit fell in Jerusalem and the Church was born (Acts 2). The mystery hidden for ages — "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body" (Ephesians 3:6) — walked out onto the stage of history right on schedule.

Four feasts. Four fulfillments. Every one of them kept to the day. That is not coincidence. That is an Author.

THE LONG SUMMER · THE INTERLUDE

The Age Between the Harvests

Look again at the chart and you will see a gap. Between the spring feasts and the fall feasts lies the long, dry summer of the Israeli year — months with no feast on them at all. That empty stretch is not a flaw in the calendar. It is the age we are living in right now. Israel reaped two harvests every year, one in spring and one in autumn, and between them stretched the waiting.

The chart marks the beginning of that gap with a single figure ascending from the Mount of Olives, and a caption drawn from Jesus' own words: *going away, so the Comforter can come.*

> *"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."*
>
> JOHN 16:7

He ascended from that very hill, and two angels made the summer a promise rather than a goodbye: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). So here we stand, in the interlude between the festivals — the age of the Church, the age of the gospel going to the nations, the age of grace held

open like an unlatched door. It has already lasted two thousand summers. But summers end. The autumn feasts are still on the calendar, and their appointments have not yet been kept.

THE FALL FEASTS · THE SECOND COMING

The Three Appointments Still Ahead

The three fall feasts all fall in the seventh month, Tishri — our September and October. If the spring feasts unveiled the Messiah's first coming, the fall feasts sketch His second. They have not yet been fulfilled to the day. But the same God who kept the first four is keeping these, and He does not miss appointments.

5. Trumpets — The Regathering

TISHRI 1 · LEVITICUS 23:23-25

The seventh month opens with the blast of a trumpet and a holy assembly — a summons, a wake-up call, a people gathered. Prophetically it speaks of the regathering of Israel to her land in preparation for the final Day of Atonement (Jeremiah 32:37–41; Ezekiel 36:24). After two thousand years scattered among the nations, Israel is a nation again, back in the land, and the trumpet motif runs straight into the New Testament's picture of the Lord's return: "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:52; see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The trumpet that once opened Israel's autumn will one day open the age to come.

6. The Day of Atonement — A Nation Looks on the One They Pierced

TISHRI 10 · LEVITICUS 23:26-32 · LEVITICUS 16:30

Ten days later came the holiest day of Israel's year, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and atonement was made to cleanse the whole nation (Leviticus 16:30). It points to the day, still future, when Israel as a people will at last recognize her Messiah — when the veil comes off and a nation repents in a single day:

> *"They will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son."*
>
> ZECHARIAH 12:10

Paul saw the same day coming: "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). What the Cross accomplished on Passover will be received, nationally and at last, on a future Day of Atonement. The pierced Shepherd will be welcomed by the very people who once cried, "Not this Man."

7. Tabernacles — God Dwells with His People

TISHRI 15, SEVEN DAYS + AN EIGHTH · LEVITICUS 23:33–44

The last of the seven is the greatest celebration of the year — the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles. For a week Israel lived in leafy shelters, remembering how God had tabernacled with them in the wilderness, and brought in the great autumn harvest with joy. Prophetically it points to the reign of the King, when the survivors of all the nations will stream up to Jerusalem to worship Him:

> *"Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths."*
>
> ZECHARIAH 14:16

That is the crown of the calendar. The whole point of every feast — the Lamb, the purging, the harvest, the trumpet, the cleansing — was always driving toward this: God living with His people, out in the open, forever. And the chart marks it with three words that hold the whole thing together in its center: **the Coming of Christ.**

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THE LAST HARVEST

New Heaven, New Earth, and God With Us Forever

Follow the chart to its far right edge and the feasts run off the calendar into eternity. The final panel is not another festival. It is the thing every festival was a rehearsal for: *a new heaven and a new earth, where God tabernacles with men.* The word is the same word — the booth of the Feast of Tabernacles becomes the eternal dwelling of God with His people. John saw it come down:

> *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'"*
>
> REVELATION 21:3

The New Jerusalem descends out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2). And everything the Fall broke is mended in a sentence: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Revelation 21:4). The garden we were exiled from in Genesis reopens as a city in Revelation — only better, because now the tree of life lines its streets and "there will no longer be any

night" (Revelation 22:5). The whole Bible turns out to be one story, and it has been one story the entire time.

Think of the arc. It began with a Lamb's blood on a wooden doorframe so that death would pass over a people in bondage. It ends with the Lamb on the throne, and His people — no longer slaves, no longer scattered, no longer waiting — seeing His face: "they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). From doorpost to throne. From Egypt to the New Jerusalem. From a shadow acted out by a nation that could not read it, to the substance enjoyed by a people who will never stop seeing Him.

THE WHOLE CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

Seven Feasts, One Redeemer

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL · LEVITICUS 23 · SHADOW AND FULFILLMENT

FEAST	APPOINTED TIME	WHAT IT REHEARSED	FULFILLED IN	
Passover	Nisan 14 Lev 23:5	The lamb slain, blood on the door	The Cross 1 Cor 5:7	KEPT
Unleavened Bread	Nisan 15–21 Lev 23:6-8	Sin purged; bread without corruption	The sinless burial 1 Cor 5:8	KEPT
Firstfruits	Day after the Sabbath Lev 23:9-14	First sheaf of the harvest waved	The Resurrection 1 Cor 15:20	KEPT
Pentecost	Fifty days later Lev 23:15-21	Two loaves — a new people	The Spirit & the Church Acts 2	KEPT
Trumpets	Tishri 1 Lev 23:23-25	Trumpet blown; a people gathered	The regathering & return 1 Cor 15:52	AHEAD
Atonement	Tishri 10 Lev 23:26-32	The nation cleansed	Israel's repentance Zech 12:10	AHEAD
Tabernacles	Tishri 15–22 Lev 23:33-44	God dwells with His people	The King reigns; God with men Zech 14:16; Rev 21:3	AHEAD

ISRAEL REAPED TWO HARVESTS EACH YEAR — SPRING AND AUTUMN · NISAN: MARCH-APRIL · SIVAN: MAY-JUNE · TISHRI: SEPT-OCT

HOW THE WATCHMEN READ IT

Three Voices on the Feasts

This same calendar has been pressed by teachers who spend their lives watching it. Three of them read it from three angles — Israel, the Cross, and the design of the whole Book — and where they overlap, the case only gets stronger.

AMIR TSARFATI · Behold Israel

Tsarfati reads the feasts through Israel and the land. The spring feasts, he stresses, were fulfilled by Messiah exactly on schedule — and that precision is his strongest reason to expect the fall feasts to be fulfilled just as literally. Trumpets speaks of Israel regathered (already underway in our own lifetime), Atonement of the day the nation finally looks on the One it pierced, and Tabernacles of the coming Kingdom when the surviving nations keep the feast in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14). His point is one he never lets go of: God is not finished with Israel, and the autumn feasts are the proof.

JOHN MACARTHUR · Grace to You

MacArthur keeps the full weight on Christ Himself. The feasts are real shadows — "a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:17) — but the point was never a hidden code to be decoded; it was always the Lamb. He presses Passover as penal substitution: Christ bearing the very wrath the sinner deserved. And he treats the precision of the spring fulfillments as evidence of a sovereign God who authored history in advance — the same God who will just as surely keep His promises to a future, redeemed Israel and return as reigning King.

CHUCK MISSLER · Koinonia House

Missler loved to call the Bible "an integrated message system" — sixty-six books, one Author outside of time, engineered as a single whole. The feasts were one of his favorite proofs. That Christ died on Passover, rose on Firstfruits, and poured out the Spirit on Pentecost — each to the exact day — was, to him, the fingerprint of a Designer who writes history before it happens. And if the spring feasts were kept that precisely, he argued, the still-unfulfilled fall feasts are not symbols to spiritualize away, but appointments still standing on the calendar.

Faithful summaries of each teacher's known emphasis on the feasts — not verbatim quotations. See each ministry's own materials for their exact words.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A God Who Keeps His Appointments

Here is why an old chart in the back of a study Bible is worth an evening of your life. The four spring feasts prove that God writes history in advance and then keeps it to the day. He is not reacting to the news; He wrote the calendar the news is following. And that means the three fall feasts — the trumpet, the cleansing, the King in His booth — are not wishful thinking. They are appointments already on the books, as certain as the ones already kept.

So the only real question the chart leaves you with is a personal one. There is still a door in this story with blood on the frame, and death still passes over everyone standing behind it. The spring feasts have been kept; the summer of grace is still open; the autumn is coming. If the Lamb kept every appointment He made for your rescue, you can trust Him with every appointment He has made for your future — all the way to the city where He wipes the last tear from your eye and you finally see His face.

He kept the spring feasts to the day.
He will keep the fall feasts to the day.
And then the calendar ends — in an eternity with Jesus, forever.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times.
— Ed Smith, Smith For Christ

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