
Holy Days Revisited

by: Ronald L. Dart

The holy days are, to me, an endless source of fascination. Every year I approach them with renewed anticipation. Long ago someone pointed out to me a simple, elegant pattern in the meaning of these days. The Passover, for example, portrays the sacrifice of Christ. The days of Unleavened Bread remind us to put sin out of our lives. Pentecost pictures the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Trumpets looks forward to the return of Christ and the resurrection. Atonement represents the binding of Satan and the whole world being "at one" with God. The Feast of Tabernacles look forward to the millennium, and the eighth day pictures the "Great White Throne" judgment.

Few concepts have done as much to open my understanding of the plan of God as this neat little sequential outline. Observed and expounded year-by-year, it has pushed our understanding forward little by little.

But there is, I think, one important error that has kept us from understanding even more: We assumed that this one-dimensional outline was all the holy days had to offer. In fact, these days represent some of God's richest and most complex revelations.

Do you remember a toy called a kaleidoscope? A simple device, it was composed of a cardboard tube, some mirrors, and bits of colored glass. When you held it up to the light and peered through it, the mirrors reflected and repeated the random pieces creating complex patterns of light. A simple turn of the tube dropped the pieces into a new position creating a whole new design from the same few pieces of glass. The variations were endless, and the pattern never seemed to repeat itself. I'm told some ladies used the kaleidoscope to develop original quilt patterns.

To some extent, the holy days are like that. Each time the seasons turn them over it seems I notice something I've never seen before. It's not that I tear up the old quilt. It's just that new patterns, new relationships, and new ideas present themselves year by year.

Failing to understand this, some people take a one-dimensional view of the holy days. When they see something new, it seems to contradict the old. Instead of seeing it as another dimension, another undiscovered facet of the same truth, they see it supplanting what they thought they already knew.

One man, for example, wrote to me expressing confusion about the Day of Atonement. "Why do we fast on the Day of Atonement," he asked. "After all, Jesus Christ is our atonement. We have already been made at one with God. Why do we fast?"

At first, I didn't understand his question. Jesus stated clearly that after His departure, His servants would fast. If not on Atonement, when would we fast?

To be truthful, I found myself wondering if the fellow really believed in keeping the Day of Atonement at all. More than once I've encountered someone who dissembled by making a major argument out of the meaning of the day when they did not even believe in keeping the day in the first place.

But this fellow believed in keeping Atonement. He just believed that we who are at one with Christ no longer need to fast. Not only was he overlooking Jesus' statement that His servants would fast, but he also overlooked the fact that we keep the Lord's Supper every year. After all, Jesus is our Passover and we still observe that. Why not Atonement?

But as the Day of Atonement approached this year, I reviewed in my mind again the man's question. Why do we fast on the Day of Atonement?

There is an important, fundamental difference between Passover and the Day of Atonement. Paul told the Corinthians that as often as we eat the bread and drink the wine of the Lord's Supper, we do show forth the Lord's death till He come. What the Passover is about is Christ's death. The Day of Atonement, on the other hand, is about our being made "at one" with God.

"But," one may ask, "doesn't Christ's sacrifice make us 'at one' with God?" If it does, then why isn't everyone "at one" with God? Is the sacrifice of Christ all-sufficient for your salvation? If so, then why isn't everyone saved?

The answer to these questions is simple enough. Everyone isn't saved or "at one" with God because not everyone has responded to the gospel.

Are we then saying that there is something other than Christ's sacrifice required for salvation? It would seem so. In fact, two things are required if we are to be made at one with God: Christ's sacrifice and our response.

On the Day of Pentecost when Peter made his first presentation of the gospel, the men who heard about Jesus' sacrifice replied to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They plainly realized that Jesus' death was only half of the equation.

Peter's answer is simple: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Passover on the one hand pictures Christ's sacrifice-His death in our place. On that side of the equation there is absolutely nothing we can do. Jesus Christ did it all for us.

But on the other side of the equation there are some things we're expected to do. Initially, Peter spoke of it as repentance and baptism.

Paul approached the subject from a slightly different angle. Referring to the "righteousness of faith," he asked which of us ascended into heaven to bring Christ down, or which of us ascended into the grave to bring Christ up (Romans 10:6-7). He concludes that we had nothing whatever to do with accomplishing Christ's mission.

But he concludes that there are at least two things we must do if we are to achieve salvation, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

So, unless we believe, repent, confess, and are baptized, we are not saved. It seems safe then to conclude that Jesus' sacrifice alone is not sufficient. It requires a response on our part.

It is quite true, then, to note that the Passover pictures the sacrifice of Christ-Jesus Christ is our Passover. There is, however, a response required from us that is not pictured in the Passover itself.

Then, when we look at the Day of Atonement, we see a very strong correlation between its ceremony and the response of the repentant sinner. The Day of Atonement involves fasting (Leviticus 23:26-32), which is an outward sign of our remorse and our repentance of our sins. Of old, fasting was the commonly- accepted means of expressing humiliation, mourning, and repentance. The full priestly ceremony of the Day of Atonement is described in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, and there we find that the confession of sin plays an important role in the atonement process (Leviticus 16:20-22). Washing, an obvious corollary of baptism, is also prominent in the ceremony of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:4, 24, 26).

The writer of Hebrews comments extensively on the Day of Atonement in chapters 9 and 10. Having drawn the full analogy with much meaning for Christians, Paul says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22, 23). He is referring to the sprinkling of blood and the washing of water mentioned in the service of the Day of Atonement. His analogy is of Christ's blood and the water of baptism.

So, there is a powerful connection between the Passover and the Day of Atonement, but they are still very different in meaning.

We have elsewhere noted the similarity between Pentecost and its prophecies of the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:14-21) on the one hand, and the Feast of Trumpets which plainly looks forward to the Day of the Lord on the other. Then, if we peer closely at Pentecost, turning the kaleidoscope slightly, we see yet another interesting comparison. In his sermon on Pentecost, Peter explained that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on that day was a fulfillment of that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaids I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy."

Compare this with Jesus' pronouncement made on "the last day, that great day of the Feast," when Jesus stood in the temple and cried, saying "If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spoke He of the spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive" (John 7:37-39).

Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 55:1. What Jesus is saying to His disciples is that not only are we to receive the Holy Spirit, but having received it, we can actually become a source: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

None of this is intended to supplant our traditional exposition of the meaning of the days. The holy days plainly outline the plan of God-the gospel. But if we are to understand the depth of the riches of God's plan for us, the holy days should be revisited again and again.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts about what the Holy Days represent?
2. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's kaleidoscope analogy?
3. What are your thoughts on the point that salvation "requires a response on our part"?
4. How important to you is fasting?
5. Does it make you feel a little closer to God?
6. Do you learn something new each time you revisit God's Holy days?
7. Does the new insights you learn build upon each other, or have you come up with something new that actually negates your old belief?