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The New Covenant

On the night before He died, during that year's Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus took up a cup of wine and said:

"This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." [Matthew 26:28]

That night the wine was symbolic, but the next day the Blood that would drain out of Jesus' body would be very real.

What Jesus was telling them that night, was that a six-hundred-year-old prophecy recorded by Jeremiah was about to be fulfilled:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will conclude a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." [Jeremiah 31:31]

Jesus, and all those present at the meal that night, had been born under the Old Covenant - the Covenant that God had made with Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Horeb (Sinai). Thus they were subject not only to the Covenant itself - the Ten Commandments - but to all the laws and statutes that had been established under the Old Covenant.

Now Jesus was saying that there would be a New Covenant. Which raised many questions. Why was a New Covenant necessary? How would the New Covenant differ from the Old Covenant? What would happen to the Old Covenant? What about those under the Old Covenant, could they make a New Covenant? And so on.

But firstly, just what is a covenant?

A covenant is a binding agreement, a contract, between two or more parties. And for a contract, or covenant, to be valid, both parties must understand the provisions of the covenant and freely agree to become a party to it.

In any covenant, both parties have obligations. One party agrees to do such and such, and in return the other party agrees to do such and such.

When the parties are agreed on the terms of the covenant, the agreement is confirmed, or ratified, and from that point on the covenant is binding on both parties.

In our society it's usual for a contract, a covenant, to be written down in the form of a document, and to be ratified when both parties sign the document. (Although of course a contract can be verbal, in which case it is ratified when both parties declare that they agree to it.)

But God ratifies a covenant in a different manner. God requires blood to be shed in order for a covenant with Him to be ratified. And until blood is shed, a covenant with

God, although the terms might be stated and agreed to, is not in force. Without the blood of the covenant sacrifice the covenant has no binding power. Thus, for the Old Covenant to be ratified, blood had to be shed:

"And Moses sent young men of the sons of Israel who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of bulls to the Lord And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the Covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the Covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words." [Exodus 24:5-8]

And the same with the New Covenant. Even though Moses, in the Book of Deuteronomy, had told the people there would be a New Covenant, it had never been ratified by blood, and had therefore never come into force. Until Jesus was sacrificed.

And this, the blood of a covenant sacrifice, is what Jesus was referring to on that Passover night before His death. He was saying that He was to be the Covenant Sacrifice, and that His blood would be what ratified and inaugurated the New Covenant that Moses had talked about over a thousand years before:

"This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." [Matthew 26:28]

But Jesus was talking about two separate things to His disciples that night. Although the two things are inseparably connected.

Firstly, as we have seen, Jesus was saying that His blood would be what inaugurated and ratified the New Covenant.

Secondly, Jesus was saying that His blood would be the means by which the death penalty, which applied to all sins, could be permanently removed.

This was separate to His blood ratifying the New Covenant. But of course, there could never be a New Covenant without this second effect of Jesus' blood.

Because one of God's obligations under the New Agreement, the New Covenant, is to remove the death penalty for sin:

"This shall be the Covenant that I will conclude with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more. [Jeremiah 31:33-34]

However, until Jesus was sacrificed, God had no power to remove the penalty for sin. Because God had previously said to Adam and Eve:

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may freely eat of every tree in the garden, but you shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." [Genesis 2:16-17]

Adam and Eve did eat of the tree, therefore Adam and Eve had to die. And not only

Adam and Eve, because all humans have sinned and all humans therefore have to die.

If God had later changed His mind and decided that Adam and Eve didn't have to die after all, then God could not be trusted. It would no longer be possible to believe anything God said.

So human sin had to result in human death. Permanent death.

But the whole purpose of God making human beings was that they should live forever, so it seemed that what God wanted could never be achieved.

Except there was one possible, though extremely dangerous, remedy by which God could allow humans to live, without breaking His word.

In His construction plan for human beings, God had built in the concept of ransom, or redemption. The concept that one being could take upon themselves the obligation of another being, and thus free the other from any obligation or penalty:

"Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brothers may redeem him;" [Leviticus 25:47-48]

Where did the concept of redemption come from? From the nature of God. And since the purpose of humans is to become gods, it is natural that God would include the concept of redemption into His construction of the human plan.

Because the concept of ransom is the heart of God, the heart of love. That one would give up themselves for another. As Jesus said:

"No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." [John 15:13]

So under the law of ransom, if someone could be found who would take upon themselves the penalty for Adam and Eve's sin, then Adam and Eve, and all humans, would be able to escape death and live forever.

But while one human being can redeem a brother from bondage, one human being cannot redeem another human being from death. At least, not from the permanent death we are talking about. Certainly, a person can die in another's place, but eventually both will have perished. Because no man has the price to redeem someone from permanent death:

"Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice," [Psalm 49:7-8] [ESV translation]

The price required to redeem someone from permanent death is a sinless life. That is, a person who had never sinned and was therefore entitled to live forever. Such a person could offer their immortality to redeem a person condemned to permanent death. But one sinless human could redeem only one sinner.

But in any case, no human has ever qualified to redeem another human, because no human has ever lived unscathed by sin:

"For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin."
[Ecclesiastes 7:20]

But. What if a human being could be found who could pay the price that God required? What if there were a human being who had the price not only of one human's redemption, but who could pay for the redemption of all human beings?

If there were a human whose value was greater than all other humans together, then that human, if He were sinless, could be legally ransomed for all humans.

That Human of course is Jesus. Because before He was human He was God, and as God He had made all humans. And logically therefore, He is worth more than all humans, because the Maker is greater than the made.

As God, as one of the two Gods, Jesus created everything. The other God, Whom we know as God the Father, played no part in the actual creation of humans. As John explains:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being." [John 1:1-3]

God the Father could take no part in the actual creation of humans, because the creator of human beings was later to be a ransom for human beings. That is, the creator of human beings would later have to die to ransom them. And if both Gods had created humans, then both Gods would have to die in order to ransom them. And if both died, who would raise Jesus from death?

The Father had to be separate from the creation process in order that He could raise the Son from death. Which He did:

"yea, He shall yet live forever; He shall never see corruption." [Psalm 49:9]

So, in all this, where was the risk for the Gods?

The risk was if the Human, Jesus, sinned. Jesus was born under the Old Covenant, which had no provision for the removal of sin. So if Jesus sinned He would have to die permanently.

So one God, Whom we now know as Jesus Christ, from the heart of love, was willing to risk Himself in permanent death. His existence would end.

The other God, Whom we now know as God the Father, from the heart of love, was willing to risk losing everything He loved - the other God. And in a sense, His existence would also end, because He would thereafter be desolate and incomplete.

So from such love, which is yet beyond human comprehension, the Gods agreed together on their plan: one God would create everything and later surrender His Godness to become a human, subject to the risk of sin and death:

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." [John 1:14]

So a God became the Human Jesus, and dwelt among other humans for about thirty

years. Until that night He said what we've been discussing:

"This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." [Matthew 26:28]

As we have seen, a covenant is an agreement between two parties, with obligations on both sides.

Jeremiah recorded God's obligations under the New Covenant:

"This shall be the Covenant that I will conclude with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Jeremiah was repeating, in different words, what God had said through Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." [Deuteronomy 30:6] And:

"Rejoice, O, nations, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His foes and will be merciful to His land, to His people." [Deuteronomy 32:43]

God's part in the New Covenant is twofold. Firstly, through the gift of His Spirit, to allow human hearts to understand His Law. Secondly, to remove the death penalty for breaking His Law.

Neither of those were available under the Old Covenant, As Moses said:

"But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear." [Deuteronomy 29:4]

And there was no means of removing sin under the Old Covenant. (There was a yearly enactment of removing sin in the activities of the Day of Atonement, but sins were merely covered, not removed.)

But a covenant has two parties, and two sets of obligations. If what Jeremiah recorded was the only side of the Covenant then it wouldn't be a Covenant, it would just be a statement of what God intended to do.

What is the obligation of the other party to the Covenant? That is, what do humans have to do to keep their part of the New Covenant?

To answer that question, we'll start by asking another question, why was a New Covenant necessary?

A New Covenant was necessary because the Old Covenant could not accomplish what God wanted. God wanted children who would be with Him forever. That is, they would be immortal. But sin had made that impossible. Which dilemma is exactly summed up in Psalms:

"I have said, You are gods; and all of you sons of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." [Psalms 82:6-7]

And the Old Covenant could not provide a remedy because the blood of animal sacrifices could never redeem human sin.

So a New Covenant was necessary. A Covenant which could accomplish what God wanted. The Covenant which Moses revealed forty years after the First Covenant had been made at Horeb:

"These are the words of the Covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides [separate from] the Covenant which He made with them in Horeb." [Deuteronomy 29:1]

Also in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses, the prophet of the Old Covenant, prophesied that another Prophet would appear after him:

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brothers, one like you, and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall happen, whatever man will not listen to My Words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him." [Deuteronomy 18:18-19]

Why was another Prophet necessary? A prophet is someone who speaks the words of God, and Moses was already doing that. Why couldn't God just tell Moses what He wanted the people to know?

Because God would be saying new and different things through the New Prophet.

Moses was the prophet of the Old Covenant. He delivered the laws and statutes that God decided were necessary for the people. These laws and statutes were not the Old Covenant, the Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments. (At least, the human side of the Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments.) The laws and statutes were added to regulate society, both civil and religious. That is, to regulate the behavior of the Israelites towards each other and towards God.

But Moses foretold of a New Prophet. Which means that God was going to introduce new statutes and laws through the New Prophet. Else why would God raise a New Prophet to speak for Him? If the laws and statutes were to remain the same, there was no need for new words from God.

The human side of the New Covenant would be the same as the Old Covenant - the Ten Commandments, and the New Prophet would not change that. But the laws and statutes that the New Prophet would introduce under the New Covenant would be different.

There would be new laws and statutes to regulate the behavior of people towards each other, and there would be new laws and statutes to regulate people's behavior towards God.

Under the Old Covenant, Moses was prophet, but he was not priest. Under the Old Covenant the priesthood was reserved to Aaron.

Under the New Covenant, The Prophet, Who is Jesus Christ, is also Priest:

"The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, You are a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." [Psalms 110:4]

If the priesthood of Aaron had been sufficient to accomplish what God wanted, there would have been no need for a New Priesthood. But the old priesthood, that is, the old way of connecting to and worshipping God through the Aaron priesthood, the old laws and statutes, especially the activities of the Day of Atonement, were not sufficient.

So the New Priest brought new laws and statutes for the worship of God:

"Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither worship the Father in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem...But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." [John 4:21,23-24]

Jesus was saying that the Temple, where God had placed His name, would soon no longer be involved in the worship of God. And so, forty years after the New Covenant had come into force, God would allow the Roman Government to destroy the Temple. Which destruction Jesus had predicted:

"And Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the Temple. And Jesus said to them, Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone on another that shall not be thrown down." [Matthew 24:1-2]

And if the Temple would no longer be part of the worship of God, neither would the Aaron priesthood be part of the worship of God. Both would be superseded by the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, the Aaron priesthood would have no place whatsoever. That is, the Aaron priesthood, and its laws and statutes, would have no place whatsoever in the life of a Christian. (We are talking of the time after the destruction of the Temple.)

And just as the laws and statutes of the old priesthood would fade, so also the laws and statutes of the prophet Moses would fade. That is, the Old Covenant would fade.

But just as God hid the New Covenant from the Israelites, He also hid the future fading of the Old Covenant. Which fading He signified by the fading glow of Moses' face:

"And when Moses came down from mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony (the Old Covenant) were in Moses' hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face had become luminous through speaking with God...And afterward all the people of Israel came near. and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished

speaking with them, he put a veil over his face." [Exodus 34:29,32-33]

The veil was not to hide the glow of Moses' face from the people, since they clearly saw his face as he spoke to them. Moses put the veil on his face only after he had finished speaking, in order to prevent the people from seeing the glow of his face fade back to normal.

And this cycle of veiling and unveiling, of shining and fading, continued until the Old Covenant had been explained to the people:

"But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he took the veil off until he came out. And he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel that which he was commanded. And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face had become luminous. And Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with Him." [Exodus 34:34-35]

The Israelites were never permitted to know that their Covenant - the Old Covenant, would fade and disappear behind the light of a New Covenant.

And to this day the veil is still hiding, from them as well as the Churches of God, the fact that the Old Covenant has gone. It began to fade with the appearance of John, and it disappeared with the destruction of the Temple.

Now let's look at another question: What would happen to those who made the New Covenant, but who were already under the Old Covenant?

Well, one of the statutes of the New Prophet says:

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." [Mark 16:16]

To become part of the New Covenant, one must be baptized. Symbolically, in God's eyes, one dies in the submersion of baptism and emerges from the water as a newborn, free of any previous obligations. And since death negates any contracts, a baptized person is free of the obligations of the Old Covenant.

But that's in the eyes of God. Men would not see things the same way. In the eyes of men, especially in the eyes of a Pharisee, a person born under the Old Covenant remained under the Old Covenant no matter how many New Covenants they made.

Not only that, a person born and raised under the Old Covenant was emotionally, culturally and socially tied to the Old Covenant. Their life was bound up in Old Covenant society.

So a person who made the New Covenant could not just walk away from the Old Covenant. Which situation God had accounted for.

The obligations under the Old Covenant rarely seriously conflicted with the New Covenant. The Ten Commandments were not in question, and the laws and statutes of the Old Covenant could be accommodated by a Christian. The God of the Old Covenant was the God of the New Covenant, and if a Christian chose to worship Him at the Temple in Jerusalem there was naught to contradict such worship.

The only serious conflict was in the matter of sin offerings and the Day of Atonement. A Christian clearly understood that neither had any force under the New Covenant, but would surely be able to avoid them without giving offense to others.

So God allotted forty years for the "Old Covenant" Christians to die out before He allowed the Temple to be destroyed and Old Covenant society to disintegrate.

What of other Christians? What of Christians who had never been part of the Old Covenant? Did they have any obligations to or under the Old Covenant? No. None whatsoever. They were obligated only to the New Covenant - the Ten Commandments, and the statutes introduced by the New Prophet, Jesus Christ.

There were, however, some laws that predated the Covenants. These were separate from both the Old and New Covenants, but were required to be observed. These laws existed from the very beginning of God's creation of humans. There are three: To observe the seventh day Sabbath, to not eat blood, and to observe the rules about clean and unclean flesh. All these laws are found in the Book of Genesis, long before there were any Covenants. The Sabbath, of course, became part of both the Old and New Covenants.

What about the Holy Days? Are Gentile Christians required to keep them? Yes, because they are included in the words of the New Covenant that Moses spoke in the Book of Deuteronomy.

But Moses spoke a lot of words that day. How do we know that the Holy Days are included in the New Covenant? Because we read this in a prophecy of Zechariah about the time following Jesus' return to earth:

"And His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives,.. And it shall be, everyone who is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." [Zechariah 14:4,16]

Logic requires that if the Feast of Tabernacles will be kept after Jesus returns, then the other Holy Days will also be kept.

But.

The Holy Days which Moses listed in the New Covenant are different from the Holy Days which Moses listed in the Old Covenant.

In the New Covenant, the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement are absent.

The Day of Atonement is missing because the day acted out a future event in which sin would be removed from human beings. The Day of Atonement looked ahead to a Blood Sacrifice that would once, and forever, take away human sin.

Which Blood Sacrifice, of course, was Jesus Christ.

And after Jesus had died and permanently removed the penalty for sin, there was no longer need for a ceremony which looked forward to the death of Jesus. At least,

no need for such a ceremony for anyone who had accepted the fact that Jesus, the Covenant Sacrifice, had accomplished the permanent forgiveness of sin. And to continue to observe the Day of Atonement after Jesus has been sacrificed is to say that the removal of sin has not yet been accomplished.

The other Feast Day which was part of the Old Covenant, but which has no place in the New Covenant, is the Feast of Trumpets.

In the Old Covenant, this day was a memorial of the blowing of trumpets. That is, remembering and acknowledging a particular time in which the sound of a trumpet played an important part:

"And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people...When the trumpet sounds long, the people shall come near the mountain...Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people in the camp trembled...And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up." [Exodus 19:11,13,16,19-20]

The sound of a trumpet called the people to gather to Mt. Horeb (Sinai) and make the Old Covenant.

But in the New Covenant, what need is there for a day to remember the making of the Old Covenant?

The Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles are all part of the New Covenant, but there are differences from the Old Covenant observance of them.

Firstly, the Passover:

"Observe the month Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God. For in the month of Abib, The Lord your God brought you forth out of Egypt by night. And you shall therefore sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the Lord shall choose to place His name there." [Deuteronomy 16:1-2]

As we have seen, God no longer places His Name at a particular place on earth:

"Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither worship the Father in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem...But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him." [John 4:21,23]

Not only is there no longer a place to sacrifice a Passover, there is no longer any need to sacrifice a Passover. Because Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Passover, and His Blood is effective forever.

As well as being the Covenant Sacrifice of the New Covenant, Jesus is our Passover Lamb, the Blood of Which protects those within the House of God:

"Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth of this month they shall take to them each man a lamb for a father's house, a lamb for a house...And you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month. And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take some of the blood and strike on the two side posts and upon the upper door post of the houses in which they shall eat it...And the blood shall be a sign to you upon the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you. And the plague shall not be upon you for a destruction when I smite in the land of Egypt." [Exodus 12:3,6-7,13]

In place of eating an animal sacrifice, Jesus said to partake of a New Passover meal, His own body:

"And He took bread and gave thanks, and He broke it and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me." [Luke 22:19]

The Passover is now a ceremony not to seek protection, because Jesus has already provided that, but to remember the Human Jesus and what He did.

Then, the Days of Unleavened Bread:

"And there shall be no leaven seen with you in all your borders for seven days...Six days you shall eat unleavened bread. And on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work." [Deuteronomy 16:4,8]

In the New Covenant, there are still seven days of Unleavened Bread, but only one Holy Day. That is, only the seventh day is a rest day.

Now let's look at leaven.

Leavened bread in earlier times was what we would today call sourdough bread. Sourdough was the only way then to produce leavened bread.

Sourdough yeast is made by combining a small amount of flour and water together and then leaving the mixture in the open air. Yeast spores, which are present naturally in air, colonize the flour-water mixture and begin to reproduce, eventually growing enough so that the sourdough yeast can be used to make bread. To get to the stage of being able to make bread with the sourdough takes about a week.

The taste of the bread will vary from area to area, depending on the combination of yeast spores in the air, so when a good-tasting sourdough is produced it's kept safe and handed down from generation to generation.

For the Israelites, their sourdough was from the prison air of Egypt. When God freed them, He said to leave their sourdough yeast, their leaven, behind in Egypt:

"You shall eat unleavened bread seven days; even the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel." [Exodus 12:15]

The Israelites were making a new beginning. And to symbolize the new beginning, God required them to make new sourdough yeast from new air. From the air of freedom.

The Christian parallel is clear: escaping from the old air, the old leaven of bondage, to the new air, the new leaven of freedom. And the process takes time to perfect, hence the symbolism of seven days transition from old to new.

This has nothing to do with sin, or leaven being a symbol of sin. One doesn't remove sin for seven days and then reintroduce it after the seven days have passed. Leaven is not about sin, it's about new leaven symbolizing a new beginning, commemorated every year.

The focus of the Days of Unleavened Bread is the leaven, the sourdough yeast, and the transition from the old to the new. The command is to remove old yeast from one's dwelling, and to have nothing made with yeast in one's dwelling for seven days.

In this context, yeast does not include chemical aerators such as sodium bicarbonate. They are raising agents but they are not yeasts. And since the point is to escape the old air, the old leaven, and begin a new life with new leaven from new air, chemical aerators are irrelevant to the symbolism of new and old leaven.

So, while yeast breads, cakes and buns etc must be absent from the Days of Unleavened Bread, products such as cakes and cookies made with chemical aerators are outside the command and may be eaten. The command is to avoid yeast, not to avoid raised products.

Next is the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost:

"You shall count seven weeks to yourselves. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time you began to put the sickle to the grain. And you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with a measure of a free-will offering of your hand, which you shall give according as the Lord your God has blessed you."
[Deuteronomy 16:9-10]

Pentecost is a Feast Day, but it isn't a Holy Day. That is, it isn't a day on which work is forbidden.

The next, and last Feast of the year is Tabernacles:

"You shall keep the Feast of Tabernacles seven days after you have gathered in your grain floor and your wine press. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your male slave, and your slave-girl, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow inside your gates. Seven days you shall keep a Feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord shall choose. Because the Lord your God shall bless you in all your increase, and in all the works of your hands, therefore you shall surely rejoice." [Deuteronomy 16:13-15]

There are only seven days in the New Covenant Feast of Tabernacles, and apart from the weekly Sabbath there are no Holy Days.

Throughout the three Feasts - Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, there is only one Holy Day: the last Day of Unleavened Bread. So in the New Covenant Feasts, there is only one day which God emphasizes.

The last Day of Unleavened Bread marks a beginning. The old leaven, the old life has gone, and a new life is beginning. It is the pivot between bondage and freedom.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, God, through Moses, was both revealing and hiding the New Covenant. The Feasts were revealed to be a part of the New Covenant, but they were shrouded by the Old Covenant. The Israelites would understand and be comfortable with the Old Covenant instructions to gather together where God placed His Name, but for Christians, there is no place where God places His Name. Because as Jesus said, God is Spirit and must be worshiped in spirit.

So a Christian folds back the Old Covenant to reveal the New Covenant. Christians can gather together on the Feasts, but they gather together, not where God places His Name, because there no such place, but wherever they deem suitable. Because God is in Christians wherever they are, especially, as Jesus said, when they are in a group:

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." [Matthew 18:20]

And what of the matter of offerings?:

"Three times in a year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose: in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and in the Feast of Weeks, and in the Feast of Tabernacles. And they shall not appear before the Lord empty, but each with his gift in his hand, according to the blessing of the Lord your God, which He has given you." [Deuteronomy 16:16-17]

If there is nowhere on earth where God places His Name, then it isn't possible to appear before Him.

And logically, if there isn't a place to appear before God, there is no offering to bring Him. So clearly God doesn't want gifts, or He would have ensured there was a place to bring them to Him.

But even if God required Christians to give Him offerings, who would receive them on His behalf?

The Aaron priesthood has gone, so who can accept a Christian's offering? No one. No one has the authority to appoint themselves or anyone else as someone who can receive a gift on God's behalf.

But what of the Priesthood of Melchizedek? Cannot the priests of Melchizedek receive gifts on behalf of God?

The Scriptures record the appointment of Jesus Christ as Priest, but where in the Scriptures does God appoint a human as a priest of the Order of Melchizedek? Nowhere.

Christians will become kings and priests in the new world, but even if that is

stretched to apply to the present, all Christians would be kings and priests. If all are priests, which priest can give themselves authority to receive gifts from other priests?

And exactly the same applies to tithes. Who would have the authority to receive tithes? No one. The purpose of tithes in the old Covenant was to support the priests and Levites in all their work for the Temple of God. But in the Church of God, there is no Temple, because Christians themselves are God's Temple. So where is the need for support?

Of course, it's completely natural for a Christian to want to give gifts to God. But since there is no way to physically give a gift to God, a Christian must decide to use their gift in a way they think would be pleasing to God.

And if a group of Christians form themselves into a Church of God, they must decide, as a group, how their collective gifts can be used in a manner they believe would please God. But a Christian's gift can't be commanded, it must always be freely given.

Now let's look at the way Jesus said He wanted His Church to be:

"But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be chief among you, let him be your servant." [Matthew 20:25-27] And later He said:

"But you must not be called Rabbi, for One is your teacher, Christ, and you are all brothers. And call no one your father on the earth, for One is your Father in Heaven. Nor be called teachers, for One is your Teacher, even Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant." [Matthew 23:8-11]

Most societies are a hierarchy. That is, the people at the bottom of the hierarchy show deference to those above them, and those above tell those below what to do. All the way up to the top, where one person is in charge, who tells everyone what to do.

This is exactly what Jesus said He did not want in His Church. He said all Christians are brothers, and that no Christian is above another Christian in authority. There are no offices of rank in the Church of God, all brethren are equal. There are no titles in the Church of God, all are addressed according to the normal standards of respect and courtesy. There is no deference in the Church of God, apart from the deference of good manners that all Christians owe to each other.

And there are no teachers in the Church of God. That is, there is no one who tells others what to believe and how to behave. Jesus Christ, through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, is the teacher of His people. The doctrines of the Church of God come not through a human at the head of a hierarchy, but through Jesus Christ. And all Christians have equal access to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures.

How then is the Church of God administered? Because a group of Christians, if

they decide to associate together, must have rules on how to conduct themselves in order to ensure order and direction.

And how does a group of equal Christians arrive at a set of rules for their own behavior as a group? They discuss and debate until they are agreed, and then abide by the rules they decide on. And depending on the size of the group, they may decide to appoint a member, or members, of the group to perform certain administrative functions on their behalf. But anyone appointed to an administrative task by the group can never have spiritual authority over the group. The spiritual authority over a Christian or a group of Christians always rests in Jesus Christ and never in a man or woman.

Without a hierarchy, and without tithes, a group of Christians who gather together as a Church of God, will always remain a small Church, confined to a small area. Just as the seven Churches of the Book of Revelation are seen to be: local autonomous Churches of God, independent from each other and with no central authority.

The only authority over a Church of God is the Scriptures.

Of course, there never has been a church claiming to be Christian which did not say that its beliefs came solely from the Scriptures. And there never has been a church claiming to be Christian which did not mold the Scriptures to conform to its own beliefs. And has there ever been a church claiming to be Christian which understood what Scripture is?

The Scriptures begin with the Book of Genesis and end with the Book of Malachi. And in the Book of Deuteronomy there is a command and a warning not to tamper with the Scriptures:

"All the things I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it." [Deuteronomy 12:32]

But also in the Book of Deuteronomy is the provision for changing the Scriptures:

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brothers, one like you, and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall happen, whatever man will not listen to My Words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him." [Deuteronomy 18:18-19]

The Prophet is Jesus, and His words become part of Scripture. Thus, the words of Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament, together with the words of Jesus in the Book of Revelation, are Scripture, with the binding force of Scripture.

The words of the early Christian churches are not part of Scripture. The way the early Christian churches conducted themselves, and the rules they made for themselves, were for themselves and their own particular circumstances. They are not a template of rules and laws to be followed by later Churches of God.

As we saw earlier, Jesus said He did not want His Church to become a hierarchy. But it quickly did, and thus became vulnerable to change and corruption.

Because, while it's comparatively hard to change doctrine when everyone has a say, it's comparatively easy to change doctrine when only one person has the say and is able to impose new doctrine on all below them.

Thus the Churches of God, over several generations, lost the New Covenant, embraced the old familiar pagan beliefs, and were transformed into the mainstream Christian churches that we see today - the Latin church and its Protestant offspring in the west, and the Orthodox church in the east.

However, although they had embraced error, the new churches performed God's work by spreading, throughout the whole earth, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and what He had done. And they made the Scriptures available to every nation on the planet.

The new churches tilled the soil, but the ground they prepared would lay fallow until the time of restoration which Jesus spoke about.

In the time of the fifth King of Revelation 17 and Daniel 11, the New Covenant reappeared, though dimly and imperfectly, in a Church of God.

Towards the end of the rule of the sixth king, the New Covenant began to shine more brightly.

And to come, in the time of the eighth king, the final king, in a time of great distress, the many will learn from the few:

"And those who understand among the people shall instruct many; yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by exile, and spoil, for days. And when they stumble, they shall be helped with a little help, but many will join them, with hypocrisy. And many of those who understand shall stumble, to refine and purge them, and to make white, to the time of the end. Because it is still for the appointed time." [Daniel 11:33-35]

"For this commandment which I command you today is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. It is not in Heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to Heaven, and bring it to us, so that we may hear it and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us to the region beyond the sea, and bring it to us, so that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may do it." [Deuteronomy 30:11-14]

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