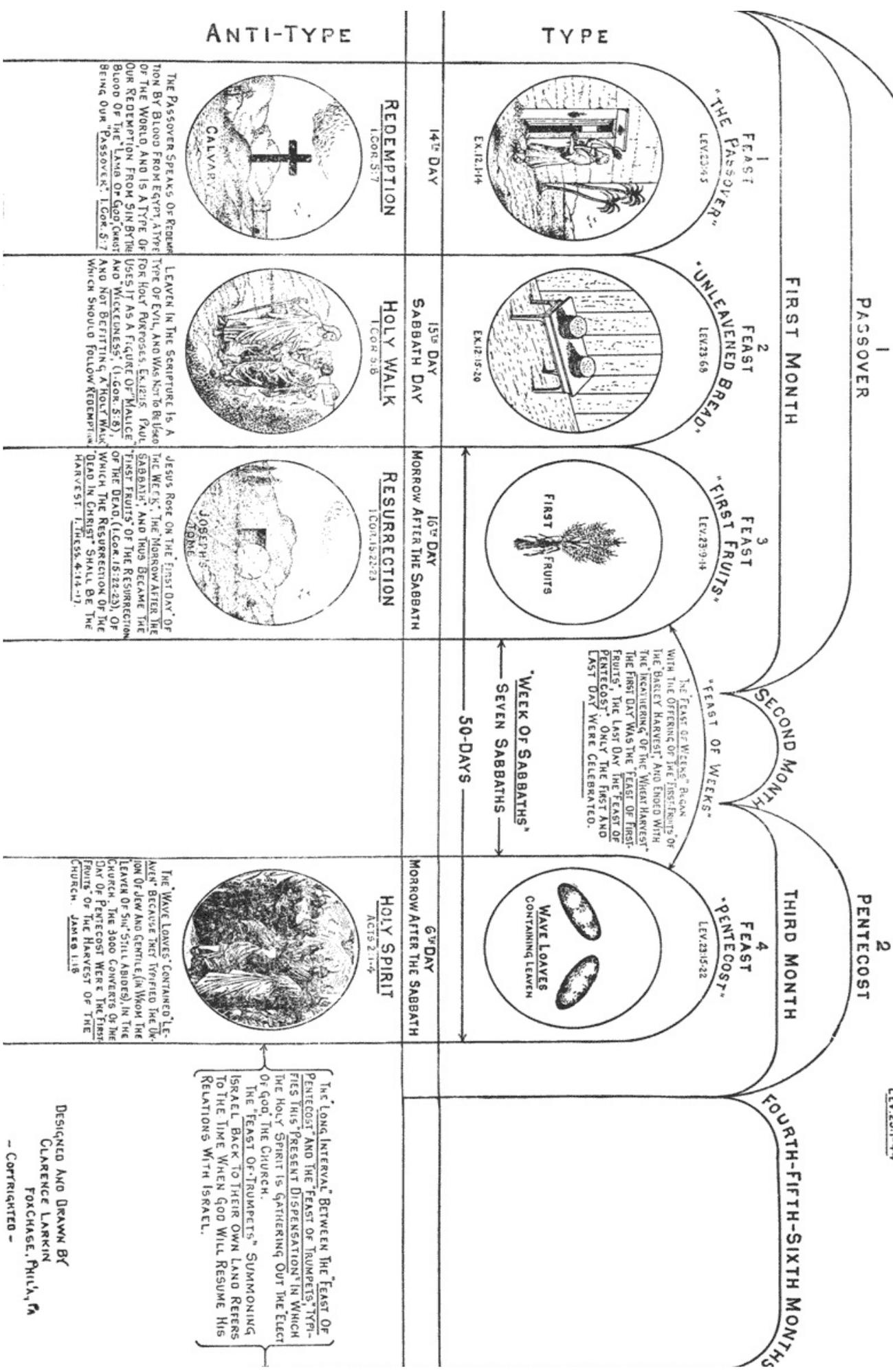


THE SEVEN MONTHS CYCLE
OF THE "THREE GREAT FESTIVALS"

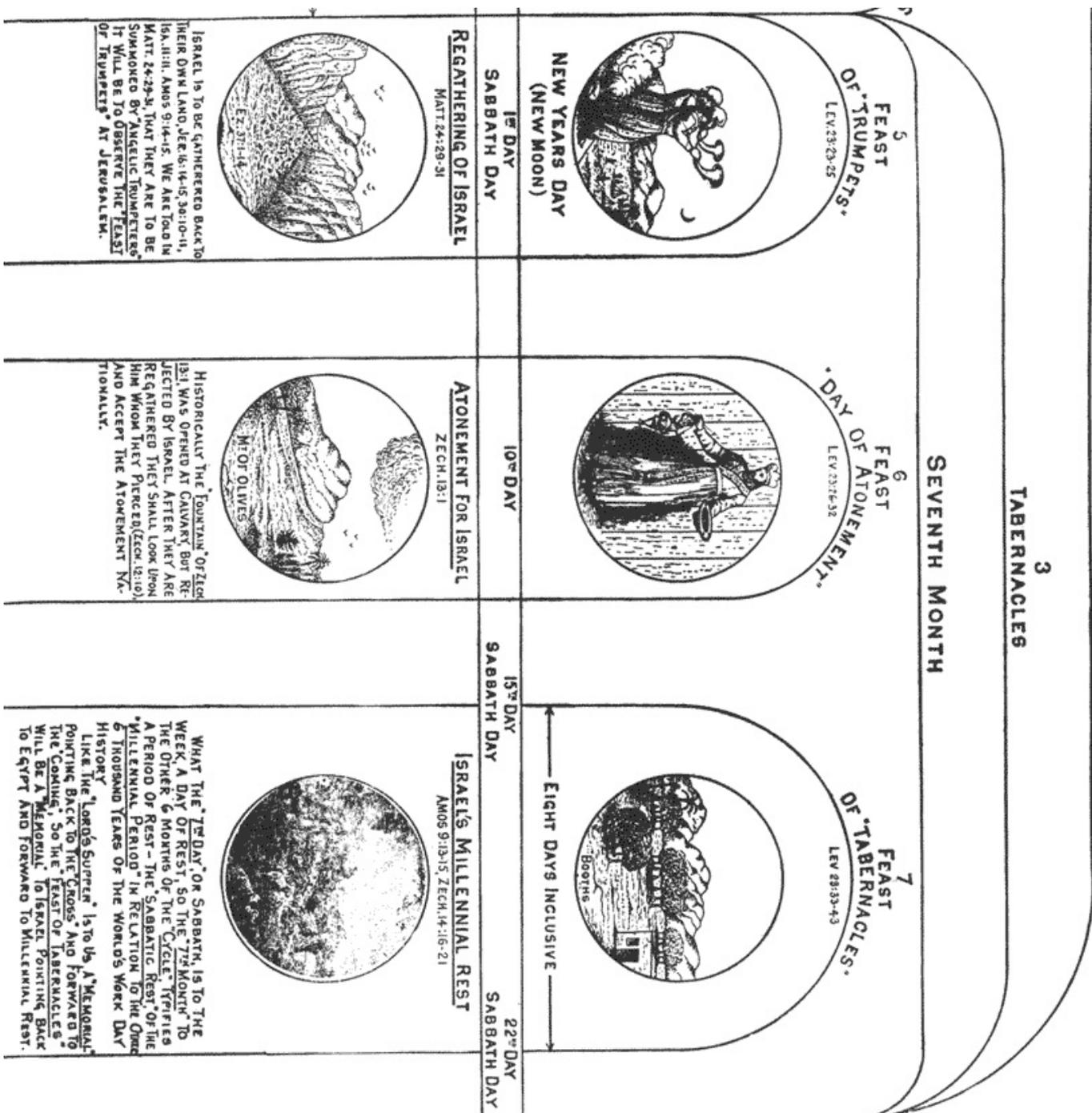
LEV 23:1-44



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TABERNACLES

SEVENTH MONTH



Excerpt from GotQuestions.org

Beginning in the spring, the seven Jewish feasts are Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jewish feasts are closely related to Israel's spring and fall harvests and agricultural seasons. They were to remind the Israelites each year of God's ongoing protection and provision. But, even more importantly, they foreshadowed the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Not only did they play significant roles in Christ's earthly ministry but they also symbolize the complete redemptive story of Christ, beginning with His death on the cross as the Passover Lamb and ending with His second coming after which He will "tabernacle" or dwell with His people forever. Here is a brief summary of the spiritual significance of each of the seven Jewish festivals or feasts. It is interesting to note that the first three occur back to back, almost simultaneously. The Feast of Unleavened Bread starts the very day after Passover is celebrated. Then, on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits begins.

Passover reminds us of redemption from sin. It was the time when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was offered as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is on that basis alone that God can justify the ungodly sinner. Just as the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorpost of Jewish homes caused the Spirit of the Lord to pass over those homes during the last plague on Egypt (Exodus 12), so those covered by the blood of the Lamb will escape the spiritual death and judgment God will visit upon all who reject Him. Of all the Jewish festivals, Passover is of the greatest importance because the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal (Matthew 26:17–27). In passing the elements and telling the disciples to eat of His body, Jesus was presenting Himself as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately after Passover and lasted one week, during which time the Israelites ate no bread with yeast in remembrance of their haste in preparing for their exodus from Egypt. In the New Testament, yeast is often associated with evil (1 Corinthians 5:6–8; Galatians 5:9), and, just as Israel was to remove yeast from their bread, so are Christians to purge evil from their lives and live a new life in godliness and righteousness. Christ as our Passover Lamb cleanses us from sin and evil, and by His power and that of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are freed from sin to leave our old lives behind, just as the Israelites did.

The Feast of Firstfruits took place at the beginning of the harvest and signified Israel's gratitude to and dependence upon God. According to Leviticus 23:9–14, an Israelite would bring a sheaf of the first grain of the harvest to the priest, who would wave it before the Lord as an offering. Deuteronomy 26:1–11 states that, when the Israelites brought the firstfruits of their harvest before the priest, they were to acknowledge that God had delivered them from Egypt and had given them the Promised Land. This reminds us of Christ's resurrection as He was the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Just as Christ was the first to rise from the dead and receive a glorified body, so shall all those who are born again follow Him, being resurrected to inherit an "incorruptible body" (1 Corinthians 15:35–49).

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) occurred 50 days after the Firstfruits festival and celebrated the end of the grain harvest (the Greek word Pentecost means "fiftieth"). The primary focus of the festival was gratitude to God for the harvest. This feast reminds us of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send "another helper" (John 14:16) who would indwell believers and empower them for ministry. The coming of the Holy Spirit 50 days after Jesus' resurrection was the guarantee (Ephesians 1:13–14) that the promise of salvation and future resurrection will come to pass. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in every born-again believer is what seals us in Christ and bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed "joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16–17).

After the spring feasts conclude with the Feast of Weeks, there is a period of time before the fall feasts begin. This time is spiritually symbolic of the church age in which we live today. Christ's sacrifice and resurrection are past, we have received the promised Holy Spirit, and now we await His second coming. Just as the spring feasts pointed toward the Messiah's ministry at His first coming, the fall feasts point toward what will happen at His second coming.

The Feast of Trumpets was commanded to be held on the first day of the seventh month and was to be a "day of trumpet blast" (Numbers 29:1) to commemorate the end of the agricultural and festival year. The trumpet blasts were meant to signal to Israel that they were entering a sacred season. The agricultural year was coming to a close; there was to be a reckoning with the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. The Feast of Trumpets signifies Christ's second coming. We see trumpets associated with the second coming in verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord, Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice

of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” Of course, the sounding of the trumpet also indicates the pouring out of God’s wrath on the earth in the book of Revelation. Certainly, this feast points toward the coming Day of the Lord.

The Day of Atonement occurs just ten days after the Feast of Trumpets. The Day of Atonement was the day the high priest went into the Holy of Holies each year to make an offering for the sins of Israel. This feast is symbolic of the time when God will again turn His attention back to the nation of Israel after “the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and . . . all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25–26). The Jewish remnant who survive the Great Tribulation will recognize Jesus as their Messiah as God releases them from their spiritual blindness and they come to faith in Christ.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) is the seventh and final feast of the Lord and took place five days after the Day of Atonement. For seven days, the Israelites presented offerings to the Lord, during which time they lived in huts made from palm branches. Living in the booths recalled the sojourn of the Israelites prior to their taking the land of Canaan (Leviticus 23:43). This feast signifies the future time when Christ rules and reigns on earth. For the rest of eternity, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will “tabernacle” or dwell with Christ in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9–27).

While the four spring feasts look back at what Christ accomplished at His first coming, the three fall feasts point us toward the glory of His second coming. The first is the source of our hope in Christ—His finished work of atonement for sins—and the second is the promise of what is to come—eternity with Christ. Understanding the significance of these God-appointed Jewish festivals helps us to better see and understand the complete picture and plan of redemption found in Scripture.