

# CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Brethren,

I am writing this month's letter in the midst of observing the final four festivals of the year. Sharron and I returned earlier this week from a wonderful Feast of Trumpets in Homer, Alaska, where we met with 40 or so brethren who treated us very warmly. They even loaded us down with about 100 pounds of Alaskan salmon to take home with us! It was one of our more memorable Feast of Trumpets.

It was great to enjoy Alaskan salmon and visit with some wonderful people, but what brought us together was the meaning of the festival. The Feast of Trumpets pictures the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints at the sound of the seventh and last trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16). There are six trumpet plagues that precede that final blast, and their fulfillment will result in worldwide chaos and destruction (Revelation 8-11). Only the return of Jesus Christ will prevent humanity from completely destroying itself.

On Wednesday, Oct. 9, we will observe the Day of Atonement. This festival pictures the binding of Satan and his subsequent imprisonment for 1,000 years. In Leviticus 16 we read about an unusual ceremony that took place on this day in ancient Israel. In preparation for the ceremony, two goats were selected as a potential sin offering, but only one was chosen to fulfill that role. The goat selected for the sin offering was sacrificed, representing the death of Jesus Christ; the other goat was released alive in the wilderness. This second goat is called the Azazel (incorrectly translated "scapegoat" in certain translations) and represents Satan's imprisonment for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

Five days after the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles begins on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. During the Feast of Tabernacles, we gather for seven days to picture the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. The Millennium will begin with dire moments as the armies that remain after Armageddon will launch an attack on Jerusalem, but in short order, Jesus Christ, the King of kings, will destroy those armies to usher in a time of peace, happiness and prosperity (Ezekiel 38-39). The Feast is an exciting time when we are commanded to rejoice while learning to fear God (Deuteronomy 14:23-26).

One final day remains, the eighth day of the Feast or, as we refer to it, the Last Great Day. It pictures the final judgment of mankind, the Great White Throne Judgment, as described in Revelation 20. The Last Great Day confirms that the world is not lost and that this is not the "only" day of salvation. This feast represents the day when God will set His hand to save mankind (John 3:16-17).

Eternal life is a gift from God and cannot be earned, but the final judgment will be based on the same principles by which we are being judged today—knowledge and works. The fulfillment of this holy day is found in Revelation 20:11-15 and includes two additional resurrections, both to physical life. The third and final resurrection (the first occurs when Christ returns) will result in death, referred to as the second death (verse 14).

During the Feast of Tabernacles, the meaning of these days will be explained and expounded to groups gathered in locations around the world where “God chooses to put His name” (Deuteronomy 14:24). Since we do this every year, it can become just another feast if we aren’t careful. How many have you observed? I have observed more than 60, but some of those were kept at home in the 1950s when we were unable to travel to East Texas, the only Feast site for the Radio Church of God. That all changed in 1963 when we attended our first Feast of Tabernacles in the “metal tabernacle,” as we called it, in Big Sandy, Texas.

When I walked into that building on the opening night in 1963, it was an electrifying experience. There was so much noise with 8,000 people fellowshipping in a metal building. There wasn’t even a question as to whether we would be in attendance for that opening night. After 10 years of keeping the Feast alone as a family, you couldn’t have kept us away! I will never forget that feeling.

Each year when we leave for the Feast, I feel like that young boy again, on my way to a very special gathering of God’s people. Each year I try to set aside a day or two for fasting in the weeks leading up to the Feast, to examine myself and make sure I am prepared for a spiritual Feast and not just a physical one. With each passing Feast, I know that we are another year closer to the return of Jesus Christ. Sadly, there have been so many predictions setting a date for Christ’s return over the past 2,000 years, that some have given up on what will be the most significant event in the history of mankind. Or, if they haven’t given up, they have become jaded by the world in which we live, failing to keep their focus on the coming Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

I have never seen the world and especially the United States in such a state of chaos as it is today. It really does appear that we are witnessing the world that Paul envisioned when he wrote to Timothy about the “last days.” He wrote that people “will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

The apostle Paul aptly described the society in which we live. It is a very troubling time, but we have the opportunity to leave it behind and celebrate in advance the wonderful future that God has in store for mankind. I am so thankful for this time of year and the four festivals we are celebrating!

Please enjoy the Feast, have a wonderful time eating and drinking and rejoicing, but don’t miss the spiritual lessons and the insight that God gives us about the future through these festivals. The only solution to the problems of this world is in the fulfillment of these four festivals! That makes them very special!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

  
Jim Franks