

## God'S Holy Days - Our Shared Vision Of Hope

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This past August 23, the metropolitan area of Chicago experienced the worst series of storms that I can ever remember. It began on a Thursday afternoon, about three o'clock. Nancy and I had just returned from a number of appointments with the rehab doctor and lab, and I was supposed to be heading back downtown.

I had been staying downtown in the hotel since the previous Sunday, because my assistant was out of town at an engineering conference, and the person who usually drives me to work was on vacation. Therefore, on Wednesday, one of my sons had picked me up in the afternoon so Nancy and I could attend a memorial service for a friend and then take care of those doctor's appointments on Thursday. One of my other sons was going to drive me back downtown so I could continue to stay downtown until late Friday afternoon.

It was a relatively quiet day, warm and humid with partially sunny skies. However, during the afternoon, a line of storms formed west of us in Iowa, and by the time we got back home and ready to go downtown, the storms were moving into our area.

These storms were in a squall line moving across the metro area, producing 80- to 100-mile-per-hour winds, as well as heavy rains. My son Mark was supposed to drive me back downtown, but because the emergency sirens were wailing, Mark and his wife and Nancy and I instead took shelter in our safe place in the house.

When it had passed, there were broken trees and limbs everywhere, as well as some localized flooding. Later, we heard of 200-year-old trees blown over by the high winds, as well as some roofs blown off. Power had been lost to 120,000 customers, and some streets were closed due to high water.

Then the weather calmed down. Although it was still gray and overcast, it seemed much better. My son, his wife, and my newest grandchild took me downtown.

As we traveled the thirty miles back into the city, the sky became ominous. The same thing was about to happen again, just a couple of hours after the first storm. Another squall line was moving through. (By the way, the same thing occurred yet a third time overnight!) Sirens began to wail, and we heard later that the control tower at O'Hare International Airport was being evacuated. Several thousand people were brought down

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from the upper levels of the airport to get them away from the windows.

Probably over a million people lost power in that quick series of storms, and they would remain without power for many days. There was much damage everywhere, but no lives were lost, and the injuries were minimal.

Our next-door neighbor told me that after the first storm had passed, she had gone to the local supermarket and was there when the second storm began to go through and the sirens began to wail. They were told over the store's public address system that they were to move to the back of the store into the walk-in coolers—the safest place possible in their store. This is how severe this series of storms were.

The room in which I had been staying in all week was on the twelfth floor, overlooking Lake Michigan. As I was finishing dressing that next morning, I could see the dark clouds in the east. As the predawn light began to define things, I noticed an area at the horizon's edge where the clouds did not seem so thick. I watched as the sun's orange light begin to appear in that particular place, although the sun was still below the horizon. Then, as the sun met the horizon, the orange light became a more brilliant burnt orange, and it was just bright enough that I could see the sun through the clouds as it passed, bringing some definition to the day and the rest of the city.

Finally, about five or ten degrees above the horizon, there was another thin spot in the clouds. Though still cloudy, it was enough to allow me to look directly at it as the sun passed. There had been enough cloud cover to allow me to look directly into the sun without blinding me and to see the definite object behind the clouds that brought form and shape to everything in the city. Again, this brilliance was gone within a couple of minutes, but it was then fully daylight; and everyone went about their business by the light from behind the departing storm clouds.

This is what the Sabbath and Holy Days are to us. They are the magnificently beautiful light on the horizon that gives us a glimpse of the hope lying before us as we deal with the storms of our lives. Because I had the opportunity to be in a room twelve floors up, overlooking Lake Michigan, and because I was looking at the dawn of that particular moment and day, I saw something that the rest of the city probably did not see that morning. I saw a glimpse of the hope that lay behind the storm clouds that still brought light to the day, though almost totally obscured by those clouds. I think that we can easily draw the analogy to the opportunity that all of us have as we sit here this morning.

I remember, during the Feast last year, speaking to so many of you who had been praying for us as we were going through our storm, while in many cases you were going

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through storms much more severe than our own. Also, many of you had not been into the severe weather in your own lives yet, but you could see the clouds building up on your horizon. Then, through the year, so many of us saw those storms become severe and lash us with winds and rain so intense that they made us feel as though they could have just driven us away by their fury. Every week, though, as well as seven times a year, all of us together have been given an incredible opportunity from God to be in the right place at the right time, with the right instructions about where to look to see our glimpse of the brilliant light that lies just behind the storm clouds. That vision we all share is given to us weekly in the Sabbath day and annually in the Holy Days.

Turn with me to those scriptures in Leviticus 23 that we rehearse over and over this time of year. Each time we rehearse them, God expects that our participation in them should sharpen the image we share in this exciting and brilliant glimpse of the light that lies behind the clouds.

**Leviticus 23:1-8** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.'"

If we would read verses 10 through 16, we would see that God gives careful instructions on how to make the wave-sheaf offering and how to count to the day of Pentecost, showing us that Christ is the Firstfruit to be presented before the Father.

**Leviticus 23:17** "You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD."

We see the firstfruits being presented to God.

**Leviticus 23:20-22** "The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LOORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LOORD for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LOORD your God."

As we continue reading in verses 23 through 27, God gives us the Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement, including very careful instructions on how to keep the Day of Atonement because it is so sacred to Him. If we go farther down, to verse 33, we finally come to the days that we are celebrating this week:

**Leviticus 23:33-37** Then the LOORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LOORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LOORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LOORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it. These are the feasts of the LOORD which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations...'"

**Leviticus 23:39-44** "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LOORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LOORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LOORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LOORD your God." So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LOORD.

Brethren, are these days, times, and seasons expanding our vision of the shared relationships in God's Family and solidifying our commitment to our Father, our Elder Brother and each other? Or are they merely something we read over during this season when God has told us to gather our blessings and have a good time? (Oh yeah, there are somewhat interesting analogies there, too.)

My dear brethren, I think that you all know that there is so much more at stake here than just a few interesting words and a good time. Our strength and courage to overcome the storms and survive, now and through eternity, depend on our continually improving our vision of the Family of God with each and every Sabbath and each annual Sabbath and Holy Day—and doing it together. A major reason for His command for a holy convocation on each and every Holy Day is for us to work it out together with fear and trembling, practicing what we have learned.

Our Great God is a God who works out His plan and purpose down to the smallest detail. He is giving us this insight as a gift, sharing those details with us, if we are willing to do as He commands. During the last century, our loving Father gave us a great gift: His people through the most recent era of His church have had a understanding of the length, breadth, and depth of the hope that God gives us in bringing His perfectly detailed plan to fruition. They are the road map of hope that brings us more closely to understand our Creator's mind and perfection in details. This is an incredible gift to be cherished and worked at, but it is also a great responsibility to share this vision among ourselves in humble appreciation for the strength it should bring to all of us as we face the awesome obstacles at the end of the age.

How carefully do we seize this magnificent opportunity—every week and throughout the year—to learn the way of holiness and to tenderly care for one another as our Father cares for us? He commands us to be together on these days and share His time with each other.

Why do you think that God has given us such a clear vantage point of the light behind the storm at this time? Could it be because the storms are increasing in their power and frequency? Could it be because without the vision produced by living these days as God commands in loyalty to Him and in lock-step with Him and each other, we would be swept away by the perfect storm that is yet to come?

Our Father will find out at the end of these days who among us truly loved and trusted Him and grabbed onto the vision that is ours for the taking if we follow the directions that we have here together. Are we sharing this magnificently wonderful gift in the right way

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so that we can better learn to realize the opportunity to be of service to each other so that we can properly know the blessings that God has for His elect and, eventually, for all of mankind? Are we bolstered in our confidence, our strength, and our purpose in service before God's most holy throne as He reveals the details of His purpose to us in this His holy time in these last days?

Please turn with me to a set of scriptures we normally associate with only one particular Holy Day. As with all of God's word, we can see its multi-faceted use in this application. I will be reading this from the Amplified Bible, because I think it makes a greater impact.

**Isaiah 58:1-10** Cry aloud! Spare not! Lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgressions, and the House of Jacob their sins. Yet, they seek and inquire for, and require Me daily and delight externally to know My ways, as if they were, in reality, a nation that did righteous judgment. They delight to draw to God in visible ways. "Why have we fasted, " they say, " and why do You not see? Why have we afflicted ourselves and You have taken no knowledge of it?" Behold, O Israel! On the day of your fast, when you should be grieving for your sins, you find profit in your business, and instead of stopping all work in which you and your workmen should do, you extort from your hired servants a full amount of labor. The facts are that you fast only for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. Fasting as you do today will not cause your voice to be heard on high. In such as fast as yours (what I have chosen is a day for a man to humble himself with sorrow in his soul) is true fasting merely mechanical? Is it only to bow down your head like a bulrush, or to spread sackcloth and ashes under him to indicate a condition of the heart that he does not have? Would you call this fast an acceptable day unto the Lord? Rather, is not the fast I have chosen the one to loosen the bonds of wickedness, and undo the bands of unrighteousness, and the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every enslaving yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, that when you see the naked that you would cover him, and that you hide not yourself from the needs of your own flesh and blood? Then would your light break forth like the morning, and your healing and restoration and power of a new life shall spring forth speedily. Your righteousness, rightness, your justice, and right relationship with God shall go before you, conducting you to peace and prosperity, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord shall answer. You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am!" If you take away from your midst the yokes of oppression, wherever you find them, and the finger pointed in scorn toward the oppressed, and the godly,

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and every form of false, harsh, and unjust wicked speaking, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.

Brethren, we must apply these principles to all of His Holy Days. We see that keeping them the wrong way will produce a distance from God, going in the wrong direction not only from God but also from each other. Fulfilling God's purpose for our participation in them, including the weekly Sabbath together, will sharpen our vision of the brilliant light behind those clouds as we keep them in the way that God intends.

Our next passage shows what carelessness with the gifts of His Sabbaths caused God to think of Israel:

**Amos 5:21** "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves."

For further emphasis of what it could do to us:

**Ezekiel 20:11-13** "And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.' Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LOORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them."

**Ezekiel 20:16** "...because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols."

**Ezekiel 20:19-21** "I am the LOORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign

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between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LOORD your God.' Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness."

**Ezekiel 20:24-26** "...because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols. Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts..."

That word *polluted*, or *unclean*, means, "to make common, violate the honor of, to treat as common." God had blessed them with Sabbaths to keep at specific times and in specific ways in order to set them apart as His, but they debased them and made them common even as they kept them, as we saw in Amos. Because of the way that they kept them, God says, "I polluted them in their own gifts."

Returning to Isaiah, we see the clear instructions that God gives us to make sure that we are keeping His Holy Days in a way that is pleasing to Him and all of those around us.

**Isaiah 58:13-14** "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LOORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LOORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LOORD has spoken."

God shows us that it is very easy for His people to get caught up in the status quo and to take the precious gift that He has given us regarding His Sabbaths and pollute it, not only to the point that they obscure the vision of His light behind the storms, but they become part of the storm themselves.

I asked earlier in this message, "Why do you think God gave us such an awesome gift through Mr. Armstrong in the last century—the gift of a vantage point that should be

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making our Father's mind and His plan and purpose more clear to us every season, every week?" It is this vision that should make us able to move together in a time that would otherwise crush us, because we are committed to the vision and implementing our part in it together.

**Hebrews 10:22-25** ...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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are commanded by God to stir up each other as we move forward, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together on the annual Holy Days or the weekly Sabbath. We are to use this time to exhort one another, to build each other up, to encourage and to strengthen as the day approaches. This rolls back into the solution we read in Isaiah 58 of not doing our own pleasure on His Holy Days, not speaking our own words, but finding what is honorable and pleasing to God as we move forward together.

**Acts 1:14** These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

**Acts 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

**Acts 2:46** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...

This idea of "one accord" here is from the Greek word *homophimodon*. It is Strong's #3661, and it means "with one mind, with one accord, with one passion." Thayer's lexicon says about this word, "It is a unique word, used 10 of its 12 times in the book of Acts. It helps us to understand the uniqueness of the Christian community."

*Homophimodon* is a compound of two words, meaning, "to rush along," and "in unison." The image is almost musical. A number of notes, although different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great orchestra blend under the direction of a

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conductor, so God's Holy Spirit blends together the lives of the members of God's church. Are we passionately harmonizing in synch? We have been given this great gift just as the first century church of God had the apostles to relay to them the vision of Christ on earth.

We have been given this remarkable vision of the plan and purpose of God restored to us through these Holy Days. Each of us has been given this precious opportunity so that we can speak the words to one another on His holy Sabbaths and stir and encourage one another. I would like for you to remember Revelation 13:8, where it shows us that God's plan and purpose was set from the foundation of the world. As I read this final passage, please keep the Father and Son in mind.

**Exodus 12:1-2, 6 (The Amplified Bible)** "The Lord said to Moses, and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month shall be to you the beginning of months, the first month of the year to you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month, they shall every man take a lamb according to the size of his family, of which he is the father, a lamb or kid for each house...And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, and the whole congregation of Israel shall kill this lamb in the evening.'"

**Genesis 22:1-12** Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And

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Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

We have here Abraham taking Isaac on what would later be revealed to Moses as the tenth day of the first month, going on a journey for four days; and the third day, he and Isaac went by themselves up to Mount Moriah. Probably on the fourteenth day, he went to sacrifice his son.

What do you think they were talking about as they were moving along, as they faced probably the greatest storm of their lives? They undoubtedly were looking to the vision and the hope that God had given to Abraham, and he may have shared that with Isaac, and maybe even with the two men servants who were with them up until the third day—and they greatly, greatly pleased God.

Brethren, I cannot even begin to tell you when the Father and the Son decided to do what they have done, but I can assure you that every step They have taken along the way, They have given the elect the vision we need to stand in the face of the trials that would be along those ways. Yesterday Brian Wulf reminded me of a sermonette he gave a couple of years ago in which he showed that Abraham was called the friend of God because he shared with the Father something that none of us will ever do.

He has called out His few to go through our own trials as we prepare for this awesome responsibility before us. He has given us His Son, His Spirit, His mind, His plan, and His purpose for healing the nations and us. He expects quite a bit from us, and, more importantly, He expects us to rejoice with the shared vision we have of the hope He has laid before us. We must keep these Sabbaths as He has commanded us, as we wrap our arms around our Father's neck and rejoice in the vision He has given to be in His Family for eternity.