

Part 5 of the Serial Publication, which includes the second half of Chapter Two.

The
PRODIGAL SON
PROPHECY

God's Amazing Plan for the Restoration of the Two
Hebrew Houses and the Salvation of the Gentiles

By Dr. Scott Lively

THE HEBREW FEAST CYCLE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John, written much later than the three synoptic (summary form) gospels, emphasizes the divinity of Jesus and addresses many topics and events not included in the others, while omitting some found in the earlier gospels. However, the most important difference in respect to our study is John's unique chronological narrative of the Lord's earthly ministry, directly tied to the cyclical Hebrew religious calendar.

Significantly, this calendar included not just the seven Biblical feasts of Leviticus 23, but the later Hebrew holidays of Hanukkah and Purim as well, which were ritually observed in that generation. Hanukkah, also known as the Feast of Dedication and Feast of Lights was instituted by the Maccabees in 165 B.C..

Hanukkah plays a surprisingly important role in John's Gospel, it's theme of Jesus as light to the world being prominently featured in the opening paragraphs of the first chapter, interwoven with Feast of Trumpets imagery as a part of the retelling of the Creation story. Hanukkah symbolism dominates a large section of John that spans three entire chapters (8-10), the second lengthiest treatment of any holiday in the book (the final Passover/Unleavened Bread/First Fruits pilgrimage – detailing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ – naturally being the longest and most thorough of all, spanning chapters 12-21).

Purim, also known as the Feast of Lots, celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from genocide by the sacrificial intervention of Queen Esther. (It is the least referenced of the holidays and even then only through symbolism.)

The cyclical pattern of these nine feasts is found not just in the recounting of the Lord's schedule, but in the use of feast-related symbols, themes and images which are presented in the same chronological order as they occur in the calendar.

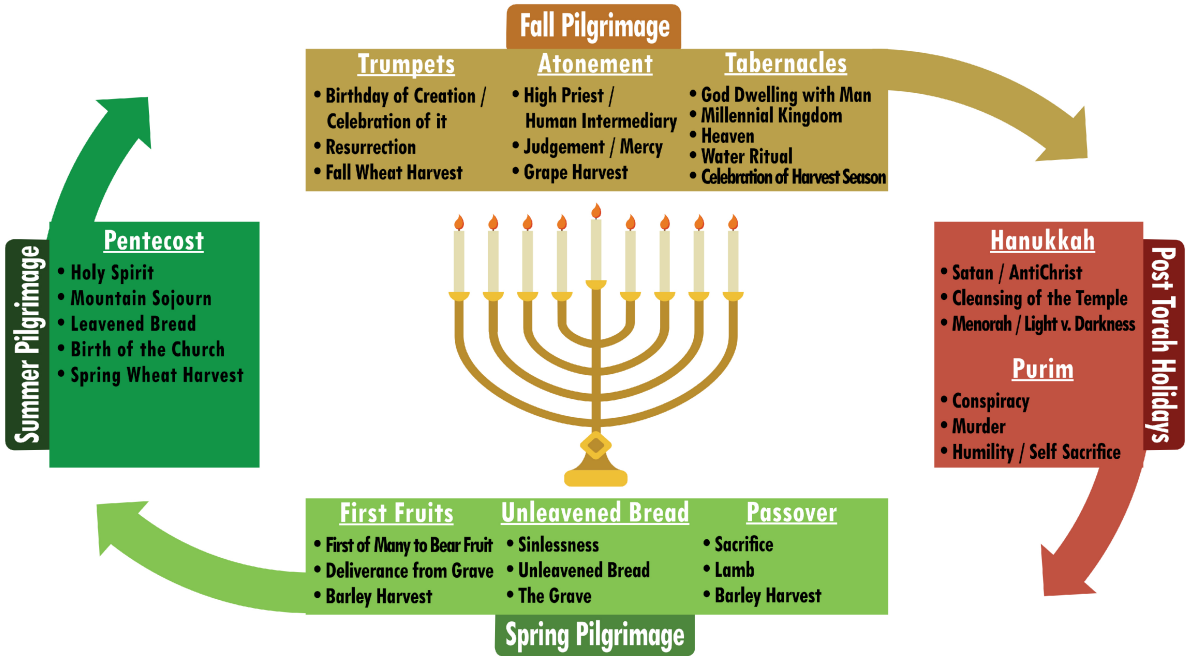
This is a good place to note that even today the Jews use two different forms of the Menora which reflect the two alternative sets of holidays. The seven branch Menora represents the seven feasts of Leviticus 23. The nine branch Menora includes the same seven feasts plus the two later holidays, which both occur between Tabernacles and Passover.

To correctly track the holiday cycle in John it is necessary to know both the sequence of the holidays in the Hebrew calendar, and the themes and symbols associated with each holiday.

The Hebrew Feast Cycle in the Gospel of John

Facts to Remember

- The Jewish Religious Calendar Observed During Yeshua's Earthly Ministry Included Nine Holidays: the Seven Feasts of Leviticus 23, plus Hanukkah and Purim.
- The Cycle Begins in the Fall with Rosh Hashana (New Year), the Feast of Trumpets.
- The Original Seven Feasts were Divided into Three Mandatory Pilgrimages. 1. Sukkot (Tabernacles), 2. Pesach (Passover/Unleavened Bread), and 3. Shavuot (Pentecost).
- Each Holiday/Pilgrimage is Associated with Key Symbols and Images which Can Serve as Textual Landmarks.



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It is also helpful to know that the Hebrew civil calendar begins in the fall with Rosh Hashana (the Feast of Trumpets) rather than the spring -- much like the Hebrew day begins in the evening rather than the morning (Genesis 1:5).

To reiterate, the original seven holidays fall into three sets, each representing a time of mandatory pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

Pilgrimage 1) Trumpets through Tabernacles – collectively called the Feast of Tabernacles,

Pilgrimage 2) Passover through First Fruits – collectively called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, officially, but referred to as Passover in John.

Pilgrimage 3) Pentecost.

Hanukkah, which occurs a little over two months after Tabernacles, and Purim, which occurs about a month before Passover, were observed nationally at the time of Christ but were not Biblically mandated.

Our chart above identifies the nine holidays in sequence and key themes and symbols associated with them in the Bible and Jewish tradition.

Feast of Trumpets: Birthday of Creation/Celebration, Resurrection, Fall Wheat Harvest.

Day of Atonement: High Priest/Human Intermediary, Judgement/Mercy, Grape Harvest.

Feast of Tabernacles: God Dwelling with Man, Millennial Kingdom, Heaven, End of Harvest Season.

Hanukkah: Satan/Antichrist, Cleansing of the Temple, Menorah, Light vs Darkness.

Purim: Conspiracy, Murder, Humility/ Self-Sacrifice.

Passover: Altar, Sacrifice, Lamb, Substitutionary Atonement, Barley Harvest.

Unleavened Bread: Sinlessness, Unleavened Bread, The Grave.

First Fruits: First of Many to Bear Fruit, Deliverance from Grave, Barley Harvest.

Pentecost: Holy Spirit, Water, Fire. Mountain Sojourn. Birth of the Church. Spring Wheat Harvest, Leavened Bread.

The Sequence of Hebrew Feasts in John Passage By Passage

	PILGRIMAGE 1	POST-TORAH HOLIDAYS	PILGRIMAGE 2	PILGRIMAGE 3
	• Trumpets • Atonement • Tabernacles	• Hannukah • Purim	• Passover • Unleavened Bread • First Fruits	• Pentecost • Church Growth

	FALL	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER
YEAR ONE	John 1:1-5 1:6-7 1:8-18	1:19-28 1:19-28	1:29	1:32-34 1:37-51
YEAR TWO	1:50 - 2:12		2:13-25	3:1-15 3:16-54
YEAR THREE	5:1 - 6:3	5:16-18	6:4 - 6:14	6:15-51 6:54-66
YEAR FOUR	7:2-39	8:1 - 10:42 11:45-54	11:55 - 21:58	Acts 1:2 - 2:24 2:5-41

Facts to Remember

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter One of John presents the nine holidays as a series of symbols, only the latter of which are part of the real-life timeline of Jesus' ministry. • The Cycle Begins in the Fall with Rosh Hashana (New Year), the Feast of Trumpets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Original Seven Feasts were Divided into Three Mandatory Pilgrimages. 1. Sukkot (Tabernacles), 2. Pesach (Passover/Unleavened Bread), and 3. Shavuot (Pentecost). • Each Holiday/Pilgrimage is Associated with Key Symbols and Images which Can Serve as Textual Landmarks.
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John 1: The Complete Hebrew Feast Calendar in Word Pictures

As we examine the text of the Gospel of John with these facts in mind, the association with the Hebrew feasts is unmistakable. Again, the civil calendar begins in the fall with the Feast of Trumpets, and immediately we notice the start of the pattern.

1. John 1:1-5 describes the Creation, symbolically invoking the Feast of Trumpets.
2. John 1:6-7 then introduces John the Baptist, first human intermediary to Christ in His earthly ministry, symbolically invoking the Day of Atonement.
3. John 1:8-18 then proclaims that Christ is God made flesh to dwell among men, invoking the Feast of Tabernacles.

4. John 1:19-28 emphasizes John's ministry of baptism, the cleansing of the body (the Temple) from sin, invoking Hanukkah.
5. John 1:19-28 also emphasizes John's qualities of humility and self-sacrifice, which were Esther's defining qualities in the Purim story.
6. John 1:29 declares of Jesus: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*," invoking Passover.

There is no specific invocation of Unleavened Bread or First Fruits here, reflecting the cultural perspective of the three feasts of Passover as a single holiday pilgrimage but any of the key symbols of these feasts serve our purpose of tracking the religious cycle in the Gospel of John.

7. John 1:32-34 describes the "*dove out of heaven*" descending upon Jesus, designating Him as "*the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit,*" invoking Pentecost.

Importantly, Pentecost (the last of the four Biblical Spring Feasts fulfilled by Christ at His first coming) marks the beginning of the church age that will end on a Feast of Trumpets (the first of the Biblical Fall Feasts which Christ will fulfill at His second coming). It makes perfect sense, therefore, that each invocation of the Pentecost holiday in the Gospel of John is followed by commentary on the church. In this first instance John 1:37-51 describes the gravitation to Jesus of John the Baptist's disciples, and His gathering of the Apostles to Himself.

So we can see that this first chapter portrays one complete cycle of the Hebrew religious calendar in a single neat package through imagery and symbolism, but there is more.

A Brief Prophecy of the House of Israel

At the close of the first chapter, the Apostle Nathaniel has a brief exchange with Jesus: "*'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'*" (John 1:50-51).

Theologians have long grappled with the meaning of Christ's response about the opening of heaven and the ascending and descending of angels, their best guess being a figurative claim to divinity by Jesus by reference to Jacob's vision in Genesis 28:10-17. We agree that it is a statement of divinity by Jesus and does invoke Jacob's vision, but there's a deeper meaning to be found in the passage, which should be taken literally because it includes a specific express prophecy by the Lord.

Obviously, Nathaniel died in the first century without this prophecy having been fulfilled. But is there a time in the future when Nathaniel will see Christ and angels in the heavens? Of course there is, because Nathaniel will be resurrected at the second coming, along with everyone else who died in Christ.

We're not limited to mere deductive reasoning in reaching this conclusion. Consider the John 1:50-51 passage in the slightly wider context beginning with John 1:35 (Christ's gathering of the disciples) and continuing through the story of the wedding at Cana in John 2:1-11. From this wider context we recognize three significant things.

First, that the image of Jesus as the gateway to heaven (being attended by angels), followed by the image of a wedding feast is the same sequence seen in the Olivet Discourse, specifically Matthew 24:30-25:13. Note especially Matthew 24:30-31: "*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven....They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*" Then note Matthew 25:10 "[*When*] the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut."

In other words, it is the imagery of the resurrection and rapture followed by the imagery of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, just as we have addressed in our prior discussion and chart on the 10 Days of Awe.

Bolstering the linkage of these parallel passages and their end-times implications is the mention of the "fig tree" in both passages: John 1:50 "*Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe?*" and Matthew 24:32-33 "*Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branches become tender and sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you will know that He is near, right at the door.*"

As we have discussed previously, the fig tree is a metaphor/symbol for the House of Judah, which was symbolically cursed by Christ in Matthew 21:19, and literally verbally cursed by Christ as his last act in Matthew 23:3-39, before giving the Olivet Discourse. The effect of this curse, which is described in Romans 11 as "*a partial hardening...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,*" will be lifted in the generation when the fig tree again puts forth its leaves per Matthew 24:32-34. We share the view that "*this generation*" began with the creation of the modern State of Israel.

Second, in the light of this symbolism and the "Two House" teachings in this book, these two events (the gathering of the disciples and the wedding at Cana) represent a pair of bookends between which is symbolically contained the entire history of the process of the redemption of the divorced House of Israel by Christ: from roughly 30AD to (presumably) the near future.

Third, in using the imagery of resurrection and rapture to invoke the Feast of Trumpets, John completes Chapter 1 by emphasizing the turn of the cyclical calendar, because each new cycle starts with that holiday. But by invoking the Wedding Feast at the opening of Chapter 2 he identifies that *specific* Feast of Trumpets as the final holiday which the Bride of Christ will celebrate in their human form, since the believers who transition to the Wedding Feast (to pass from betrothed “Bride of Christ” to “Wife of God”) will be glorified in that process and assume their perfect spiritual state.

When the holiday cycle resumes in Chapter 2, it skips Hanukkah and Purim and begins with Passover.

It is helpful to remember here that the Hebrew calendar has two “beginning” holidays. The civil calendar begins with Rosh Hashana (the Feast of Trumpets), while the religious calendar begins with Passover. John 1 reflects the civil calendar. John 2 reflects the religious calendar.

John 2-11: The Hebrew Feasts in Jesus’ Ministry

While John 1 portrayed the religious cycle primarily through symbolism, the remainder of the Gospel of John tracks the actual holiday calendar which dominated Hebrew life at the time of Christ. John supplements the narrative with symbolism wherever specific feasts are not mentioned by name. To be sure, there are events and teachings unrelated to the holidays interspersed through the book, especially in the latter chapters, but the holiday cycle and related symbolism follows an unmistakable thread through every chapter from beginning to end.

8. **Passover.** John 2:13 states “*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*” Verses 13-25 describe His time there.
9. **Pentecost.** John 3:1-15 tells the story of Jesus teaching Nicodemus about being born again through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is associated with Pentecost. Importantly, in verses 13-15, Jesus prophesies to Nicodemus about his impending ascension, which would occur just prior to Pentecost.
10. **Church Growth.** John 3:16-4:54 describes the growth of the church, which we have noted follows every mention of the Pentecost holiday.
11. **Tabernacles.** John 5:1 reads “*After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*” This was the pilgrimage for the three feasts collectively called the Feast of Tabernacles. This chapter has special significance for those familiar with the 10 Days of Awe/Wrath, because it heavily emphasizes Christ’s power of judgment and the choice of life or death for human beings based upon belief in Him and is heavily laced with resurrection symbolism. For example, note the key themes of resurrection and judgment in verses 25-29:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

This passage conflates the two resurrections (Revelation 20:5-6) at the beginning and the end of the Millennial Kingdom, which correlation is itself symbolic of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Hanukkah and Purim are not specifically addressed in this cycle in chronological order in the text of John, Chapter 5. However, if Chapter 5 can be viewed as “a summary of events that occurred between the Pentecost of John 3-4 and the Passover of John 6,” and if we assume that the murderous intent of the Jewish authorities toward Jesus in John 5:16-18 is symbolic of Purim, its appearance in the text prior to the Trumpets symbolism (John 5:25-29) could be simple consistency in the narrative. What we mean is that Jesus’ supposed “violation of the Sabbath” that led to the Jews’ *decision* to kill Jesus occurred before the Feast of Trumpets, while the *acts* in furtherance of the conspiracy to murder Him may have occurred afterward, but both the decision and the acts were addressed in the same paragraph for narrative consistency.

The on and off inclusion of Hanukkah and Purim in the holiday cycle in John may simply reflect their lesser Biblical status (notwithstanding Hanukkah’s special treatment in chapters 8-10), or might serve to highlight the distinction between the seven and nine branch Menoras, or both. In contrast, however, the three Biblically-mandated pilgrimages honoring the seven Biblical feasts of Leviticus 23 are presented in perfect sequential order from start to finish.

12. Passover and Pentecost. Chapter six of John spans the time period from just prior to Passover (6:4) to just prior to Trumpets (7:2). Interestingly, while John’s narrative of Jesus’ ministry centers on the feeding of the five thousand and seems to span just a few days time, the feast symbolism in the narrative covers all four holidays. Moreover, there is no indication in John that Jesus went to Jerusalem for either the Unleavened Bread or Pentecost pilgrimages during this particular holiday cycle.

- **Passover.** John 6:4 states “*Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.*”

- **First Fruits.** John 6:13 reports “*Here is a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish.*” Barley, as we have noted is symbolic of First Fruits, the third and final holiday of the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread pilgrimage.

- **Pentecost.** John 6:15 states “*Then Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.* Remember that the original Pentecost featured Moses going up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. Moses was the human witness provided to the people to testify about God’s commands. In 6:32-33 after He (Jesus) had come down from the mountain, “*Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’*”

In John 6:35 Jesus expressly declares “*I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.*” Importantly, Bread is symbolic both of the Passover (unleavened – called “*the bread of affliction*” in Deuteronomy 16:3) and Pentecost (leavened, per Leviticus 23:17 “*Bring two loaves of bread from your dwellings as a wave offering...baked with yeast, as the firstfruits to the Lord.*”). The context of John 6:22-47 strongly suggests that Jesus was referring to Himself in His role as the Bread of Pentecost, in contrast to His role as the Bread of Passover.

13. Church Growth. This chapter ends with a passage addressing church members falling away because of a hard teaching (John 6:54-66). Again, every invocation of Pentecost in John is followed by information about the status of the church.

14. Tabernacles. Chapter 7 of John takes place almost entirely in Jerusalem during the fall pilgrimage. John 7:2 states “*Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Tabernacles, was near.*” Verses 37-38 state “*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’*”

Remember that all three of the fall feasts, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles, are celebrated in the pilgrimage called the Feast of Tabernacles. Trumpets and Atonement are celebrated over the first ten days, then five days later the eight-day feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) begins. Traditionally, the eighth day, “*the great day of the feast*” was celebrated with a water ritual, explaining the context of Jesus’ teaching on living water/the Holy Spirit.

Importantly, this particular pilgrimage marked the beginning of Jesus’ final year – or rather half-year -- of earthly ministry. The remainder of the Gospel of John shows the Lord’s heavy ministry schedule in that it is loaded with teachings.

15. Hanukkah. John Chapters 8-10 are rich with Hanukkah imagery and symbolism. The story of Hanukkah is much bigger than the miracle of the holy lamp oil commemorated with the Menorah. As told in the Book of Daniel and the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, the

Hanukkah story begins with the Satanic seduction and defilement of the Jewish people by the Antichrist figure Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who lead Jerusalem and Judea into idolatry that culminated in the Abomination of Desolation. 1 and 2 Maccabees are essentially the fuller historical account of what is briefly summarized in Daniel 11:31-32 *“His forces will rise up and desecrate the temple fortress. They will abolish the daily sacrifice and set up the abomination of desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.”*

The Hanukkah story continues with the narrative of the Maccabees family (*“the people who know their God”*) who led a successful righteous revolt to overthrow Antiochus.

The cleansing of the temple after the Maccabees victory is the third part of the much larger narrative and recounts and celebrates the miracle of the single day’s worth of holy oil that lasted seven days.

John 8 opens with the story of the woman caught in adultery. While we accept that as a true story with major theological significance, we also recognize that adultery is the most common metaphor for idolatry in the Bible (see especially Hosea 1-3). As noted above, the Hanukkah story begins with the intentional defilement of the Jews by Antiochus through the introduction of idolatry.

When Jesus forgives this actual woman of her actual sin, His act is at the same time represents the forgiveness He offers the Jews for their past idolatry if they will accept Him as Savior.

This would not have been lost on the Jews of that day, for whom the Hanukkah story was a matter of relatively recent history (roughly as close in time to them as the US Civil War is to Americans). Indeed, the wounds of that painful experience had been freshly reopened by Herod the Great, the Edomite convert to Judaism who came to power by slaughtering (with the backing of the Romans) the entire royal family of the Hasmoneans, the descendants of the Maccabees. (This is the Herod, of course, also tried to murder the toddler Jesus, and whose son Herod Antipas was the Tetrarch of Galilee who murdered John the Baptist.)

Be that as it may, the most direct connection of the adulterous woman account to the Hanukkah story, however, is John 8:6: *“Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with His finger,”* an act unique in all the Scripture. What Jesus wrote is one of the great mysteries of the Bible, but what was no mystery to the Jews of that day was the metaphor of “drawing a line in the sand” and its association with Antiochus IV Epiphanes. That metaphor originated in the famous historical account of Roman Consul Gaius Popillius Laenas, who in 168BC threatened Antiochus with war if he refused to immediately withdraw his forces from Egypt. Laenas drew a line in the sand around Antiochus, promising that a Roman declaration of war would be issued against him if he crossed the line without

first capitulating. Antiochus famously backed down, shortly thereafter turning his attentions to Israel instead (in 167BC) . The Jews of Jesus' day were undoubtedly intimately familiar with these facts.

Immediately following that account, Jesus declares in John 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."* Jewish legend holds that Herod's Temple boasted an eighty foot tall Menorah, and it is suggested by Messianic Jewish leaders today that Jesus made his proclamation while standing beneath this Menora. Whether or not that is true, we know with certainty that Hanukkah was also known as the Feast of Lights and the connection of His statement to the holiday theme would have been unmistakable to the hearers.

Hanukkah is also uniquely associated with Satan and the Antichrist because of the evil acts of Antichus. In John 8:39-47 we find the clearest profile of Satan in the Gospels (e.g. verse 44: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, refusing to uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, because he is a liar and the father of lies."*)

In John 9, Jesus again declares Himself to be the light of the world, and the entire chapter is devoted to the theme of blindness.

John 10:22 states specifically *"At that time the Feast of Dedication took place in Jerusalem,"* a closing bookend confirming the Hanukkah theme that began in John 8.

16. Purim. In John 11:45-54 the Purim theme of conspiracy to murder is again seen in the plot to kill Jesus.

17. Passover. John 11:55 then states *"Now the Jewish Passover was near, and many people went up from the country to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover."*

John 12-21: Jesus Fulfills the Spring Feasts Prophecy

We have learned that the Spring Feasts of Leviticus 23 were a prophecy of and preparation for the first coming of the Messiah: they foretold that He would die on Passover, be entombed as the Unleavened Bread for which the Spring Feasts are named, and rise from the dead on First Fruits. The entire Gospel of John points to this prophetic fulfillment from the beginning, when John the Baptist declares *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* All of the topical teachings throughout the book relate to His deity and most depict Him fulfilling various prophecies related to His authority and purpose, but fully half – the latter half – of John's Gospel is set during a short period of time centered on these three feasts when most of His teachings were given.

18. **Passover.** As we noted, John 11:55 said Passover was near. Just a three verses later, John 12:1 reads “*Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the hometown of Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.*”

Two days later, four days before Passover, was His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem (John 12:12-16). This confirmed His role as the Passover Lamb per Exodus 12:1-13: “...*on the tenth day of this month each family must choose a lamb... The animal you select must be...with no defects...take special care of this chosen animal until the evening of the fourteenth day of this first month*” (four days).

John 13 begins with “*It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father*” the third of three successive chapters to expressly invoke Passover. There can be no mistaking the heavy emphasis.

John 14-18 are packed with teaching and instruction by Jesus to the disciples. He knows his time is short, but they don’t recognize the reality of what is about to happen.

In John 19:14 we find a fourth reference: “*It was the day of Preparation for the Passover, about the sixth hour.*” Very shortly thereafter, Jesus died on the cross. Importantly, the sixth hour was noon, the time when the Passover lambs were slaughtered in preparation for the Passover meal at twilight.

19. **Unleavened Bread.** As recorded in Leviticus 23:5-8 “*The Passover to the LORD begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of the same month begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD. For seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall hold a sacred assembly; you are not to do any ordinary work. For seven days you are to present an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly; you must not do any ordinary work.*” There are two “High Sabbath” days during Unleavened Bread, for first and last days. Passover is not a “High Sabbath,” nor is First Fruits.

Immediately after Jesus “*yielded up His spirit,*” in John 19:30, verse 31 reads “*It was the day of Preparation (Passover), and the next day was a High Sabbath (Unleavened Bread).*”

And again in John 19:41-42: “*Now there was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. And because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*”

20. First Fruits. John 20:1 states “*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.*”

The first day of the week was the day after the High Sabbath, meaning it was the Feast of First Fruits, per Leviticus 23:9-11 “*And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say, ‘When you enter the land I am giving you and reap its harvest, you are to bring to the priest the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD so that it may be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.’*”

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 “*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the firstfruits; then at His coming, those who belong to Him.*”

Following His resurrection, “*He presented Himself to [His disciples] with many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a span of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 1:3) and then “*Jesus...led them out as far as Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was carried up into heaven*” (Luke 24:50-51).

Very significantly, remember that Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “fiftieth day,” meaning that the period between Jesus’ ascension and His return in the person of Holy Spirit was ten days. Thus His first coming ended with a foreshadowing of the still-future Ten Days of Awe/Wrath that frames His second coming: “*...each in his own turn: Christ the firstfruits; then at His coming, those who belong to Him*” (1 Corinthians 15:23).

The Book of Acts continues the history of the church and the official launch of the human-stewarded church age under the auspices of the Holy Spirit ten days after Jesus ascended. But the Gospel of John ends its holiday-anchored chronology with First Fruits, having closely linked the entire 3 ½ year earthly ministry of the Lord to the framework and symbolism of the Hebrew religious calendar.