

## *Lecture 4*

# **LOVE FOR THE STRANGER. BIBLICAL FESTIVALS AS A PROJECTION OF ETERNITY**

The instructions of Chapter 19 of the Book of Leviticus relate to interpersonal relations. It is here that the well-known “Golden rule” of biblical ethics is stated for the first time: “Love your neighbor, as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Whom should I consider my “neighbor”? Is he my relative, a person belonging to my people, a man living next door or a friend? Everyone answers this question according to the level of his spiritual comprehension. Human soul should pass an immense way starting from seeing its neighbor only in a kinsman, colleague or coreligionist, up to perceiving the whole humanity as an integral unity...

Let us look how this subject is presented in the Bible.

The definition of a neighbor given in the chapter under consideration goes far beyond the notions of tribe and people:

...The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:34*)

The concept of “neighbor,” according to the Bible, is deprived not only of national, but also of social coloring, it encloses all members of the given society without exception:

The rich and the poor have this in common the Lord is the maker of them all. (*Prov 22:2*)

Answering the question of a certain lawyer (that is, an expert and interpreter of the Torah) — “But who is my neighbor?” — Jesus tells the parable of the Merciful Samaritan, who saved a man belonging to a different tribe and a different religion (Lk 10:30–37). Concluding his parable, Jesus calls the lawyer (and any other man through him) “to become a neighbor,” actively, to anyone who requires help:

...Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (*Lk 10:37*)

Thus, Jesus teaches: your neighbor is not the one who owes you his assistance, but the one whom you yourself are able to help.

However, the commandment “love your neighbor, as yourself” (Lev 19:18) remains only an attractive option until one obeys it in practice. To follow it human soul should be prepared not only doctrinally, but also by experience: we are

supposed not only to comprehend mentally the essence of this commandment, but also to continue purifying our hearts in order to be able to obey the commandment joyfully. All the previous instructions of Chapter 19 also serve such preparation. They create a context of “The Golden Rule” of ethics:

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. (*Lev 19:1-2*)

The Hebrew word *vvdq* *<ka`dosh>*, “holy,” means “separated [for the service to the higher realm].” By immersing himself in the elementary physical existence, man likens himself to an animal, and even a spark of love to his fellowman is not able to arise in such a state. Separation from the elementary physical existence (that is, identifying oneself as a spiritual being) means involvement in higher aspects of existence, reminds us of the Lord, likens us to him. These are the initial terms of genuine love: “...You shall be holy, for I am holy...”

The reminder of the Fifth and Fourth Commandments follows:

You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:3*)

It is in the family that each of us receives his primary emotional and intellectual education. This education is based on “reverence” (Heb. *hary* *<yi`rah>*, which can be rendered as “awe,” “deep respect”) of one’s father and mother, whose authority, indisputable in early childhood, subsequently transforms into intelligent love and respect. Parents are the first objects of child’s gratitude, tenderness and therefore love. Without the religious and moral tradition transmitted from generation to generation by means of family education each person individually and the whole society in general quickly enough (sometimes within few years) fall into brutal, animal like behavior. No need to say that in such context love for one’s fellowman becomes impossible. Therefore, the reminder of the Fifth Commandment precedes the words about love.

Unlike in Ex 20:12 and Deut 5:16, here the mother is mentioned before the father: it is she who supervises over the very first “moral experiments” of the child. Besides, one should revere both his parents equally; therefore, the mother is mentioned sometimes after the father, sometimes before him.

However, why does the Fourth Commandment — the precept of Sabbath — follow here the Fifth one? The reason is that the child’s participation in his family’s life precedes his inclusion into social and religious life. In his family he receives the first instructions in piety, including observance of the Sabbath day. Without revering the aged, it is impossible to start awing the Most High, and, therefore, “to enter his rest” (Heb 4:3).

How does the observance of the Sabbath correspond to loving one’s neighbor? The ability to identify oneself with other people’s troubles is the ultimate condition of love and it can be achieved only at a certain spiritual level. This level is obtained through prayer and direct fellowship with the Most High and through studying his word. This is also the purpose of the Sabbath rest.

Further, we find a following caution:

Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:4*)

Having chosen the way of love, one should not escape into the deceitfulness of idols. Such escaping is a betrayal of love relationship. The way of love is a way of sacrifice — those who love would give up even their lives for their beloved.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (*Jn 15:13*)

The next verse of the Book of Leviticus deals exactly with the same issue, telling us about the sacrifice, which is offered to receive Lord's blessing and to make one's spiritual way successful:

When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable on your behalf. (*Lev 19:5*)

The instruction to eat the meat of the offering in the shortest time (vv. 6–8) teaches us to be fast in doing God's will. If we are not zealous in doing his will, we cannot truly love our fellowmen.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:9–10*)

Helping the poor is an effective means of developing love for one's fellowman. Without support rendered to the poor, a call for love remains only a bare declaration.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another.

And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. (*Lev 19:11–13*)

Love is the supreme state of the spirit. However, you cannot reach the pinnacle without starting from the bottom. Love is impossible without respect; the latter is impossible without honesty in interpersonal relations, without full recognition of others' rights and caring for their interests. All this is incompatible with deceit and gaining benefit to the detriment of others.

Immanuel Kant paraphrased "The Golden rule" this way: "Each man should be a purpose for another and never a tool." (The phrase is translated from Russian). Without following this rule, one cannot even speak about love for the neighbor.

You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:14*)

Our tolerance towards others' needs, demerits and imperfections is an indispensable condition of love. Dealing with someone we must take into account his background and inner state. This is also a figurative meaning of this verse, for deafness and blindness are not always literal and physical...

You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. (*Lev 19:15*)

Just as the welfare of any society depends on justice of its courts, so spiritual prosperity of an individual is connected with the kind of judgment he passes on his fellowmen and the kind of measure he uses towards them:

...For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. (*Mt 7:2*)

Loving one's neighbor is impossible without respect for his life and dignity, without considering them to be of supreme value:

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:16*)

A "slanderer" (Heb. *lykr <ra`chil>* — "the one who goes from one place to another [with unpleasant news about somebody]," "spreader of malicious gossip," "informer") not only mistreats his fellowman's dignity, but also finds particular pleasure in spreading abusive things about him. It is not by chance that the second part of this verse speaks of "profiting by the blood of your neighbor," because spreading around malicious things about a person can cause him fatal harm: the discredited person can fall gravely ill or commit suicide; such denunciation can provoke his haters to attack him, etc. The literal rendering of this part of the verse — Kir Md~li dmit al *<lo ta`mod al-dam re`echa>* — would be: "...do not stand at the blood [or: on the blood] of your neighbor," that is, do not be careless, do not stay idle if he is facing a fatal danger; and all the more, do not build your prosperity on his sufferings! Sharing someone's sufferings, treating them as your own is the next step towards genuine love...

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. (*Lev 19:17*)

Love is the opposite of hostility; hence, anyone who rids his heart of any kind of hatred, unfriendliness and even disappointment towards his fellowman frees room for love. Sincere talk can also be helpful, for it assumes confidential relations between people when any admonition is perceived as an expression of friendship and care, not arrogance or malevolence. Besides, here one can see a prohibition to harbor an unuttered discontent towards your neighbor: the complaints should be spoken out, but the one who is being admonished should remain your "brother."

And finally, "the Golden Rule" itself:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (*Lev 19:18*)

The “focal” words of the verse are anticipated by the warning: do not take vengeance or bear a grudge. Love does not take vengeance, but forgives: it is incompatible with rancor (1 Cor 13:4–7).

As for the phrase “any of your people,” it should be understood, as it was mentioned before, according to the level of one’s spiritual development. For those who have reached the state in which they are able to perceive the integrity of mankind, the whole humanity is one family of Adam’s descendants, bearing God’s image:

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth... (*Acts 17:26*)

Verse 18 includes an admonition not to take vengeance or bear a grudge, which has a ring of the words of Jesus:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... (*Mt 5:44*)

This is a good example showing that the major New Testament doctrines are entirely based on the Old Testament and that the very preaching of Jesus is a spiritual interpretation of the Torah and other scriptural books...

The mystery of love for one’s neighbor is rooted in the original integrity of all human souls, which once abode together, constituting one organically congruent unity:

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.  
What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.  
(*Jn 1:3–4*)

This is said about the Word of God, by means of which the world came into existence. In this Word all immortal radiant souls (Greek *fwj tw n anqrwpwn <fos ton an`thropon>* — “the light of men”) constituted one “life” (Greek *zwh; <zo`eh>*). This integrity of souls was destroyed by the Fall and now is gradually being restored in Christ, “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45–49): every soul that returns to God in repentance takes its place in the “body of Christ,” becoming its integral part and joining other saved souls by means of love (1 Cor 12:12–14).

Thus, love for one’s neighbor, which is potentially inherent in every person, is not only rooted in the integrity of the souls that existed before the Fall, but also anticipates the future oneness of the saved in the “body of Christ.”

The spiritual image of an individual is reflected in his fellowman’s heart. The purer, the less obscured this heart, this “inner mirror” of one’s soul is, the clearer is the reflection.

Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another. (*Prov 27:19*)

However, if the heart of the loving person is not properly purified, would he not thrust on his neighbor, whom he loves “as himself,” things that he unreasonably considers to be good? For example, a drunkard can accustom his neighbor to drinking, a drug addict — to drugs, etc. In order to avoid such interpretation of the mentioned commandment, the following warning is given:

You shall keep my statutes... (*Lev 19:19*)

The examples of such statutes follow these words:

.. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials. (*Lev 19:19*)

In the original the word Myalk <*kil'layim*> — “restraining,” “hampering” [each other], is used here three times. It is translated by three different phrases — “with a different kind,” “with two kinds of seed,” “of two different materials.”

According to the laws created by God two different breeds of cattle cannot have posterity or their posterity is born defective (for example, mules, the offspring of a female horse and a male donkey, are born sterile); diverse kinds of seeds sown together can hamper each other’s growth; according to the ancient commentators, garments made of mixed woolen and linen threads are injurious to health, etc. However, biblical precepts of “killayim” have a general meaning as well: it is forbidden to do anything that contradicts God given laws. It is no accident that in the given verse the word *tqc* <*chuk'kot*> — “statutes” — is used again: here it applies to the laws of nature, which are established by God, as well as the laws given to men.

Thus, being considered along with the previous commandment concerning love for one’s neighbor, the precept relating to forbidden combinations “killayim” teaches us that love for another person must be expressed in such forms and within such bounds that assist his good and are congruent with physical and moral laws established by the Most High.

Further precepts of this chapter demonstrate that there is a close affinity between physical and moral laws. Thus, for instance, the law concerning a seducer of a slave woman designated for another man is placed next to the instruction relating to eating the fruit of the trees (vv. 20–25). Having both spiritual and physical nature one should get to know the correlation between ethical precepts and physical laws.

The same chapter also contains the following instruction:

You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice augury or witchcraft. (*Lev 19:26*)

Breaking the commandment to abstain from eating blood one makes his inner world accessible for unclean spirits where they gradually can gain dominion. Eating blood disposes one to turn to “other gods” (that is, evil spirits) by means of augury and witchcraft. The phrase “to practice augury” translates the Hebrew verb *wcn* <*na'chash*> — literally, “to whisper,” “to hiss.” Besides, “Nachash” is a biblical name of the serpent that tempted Eve, i.e. the name of the supreme evil spirit that tries to indulge humans into witchcraft. The kind of sorcery that is called “nechushim” (from the root word “nachash”) consists in chanting incantations, which can evoke demonic presence. The phrase “to practice witchcraft” translates Hebrew *Nni* <*a'nan*> — literally, “to envelop,” “to cover with clouds,” “to dim.” It implies the kind of sorcery that darkens one’s mind, obstructs one’s emotions and subjugates one’s will to the sorcerer’s control (see Deut 18:10–12 and a corresponding note in Lecture 13). All kinds of witchcraft

are forbidden by the Most High once and for all; breaking this prohibition is a grave sin which deserves death penalty:

Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them:  
I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:31*)

Pagan rites in which people express excessive grief over the dead and which are meant to establish contact with dark spirits are forbidden as well:

You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.

You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:27–28*)

Let us emphasize that these prohibitions refer to the rituals of sorcery and have nothing to do with regular hair cutting, shaving, surgery etc. Rituals of this kind were practiced by the priests of Baal. The biblical illustration can be found in the episode when the prophet Elijah challenges the Canaanite priests:

Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. (*1 Kings 18:28*)

This example teaches us once again that causing harm to one's health (lacerating one's own body) can be connected with worshipping unclean spirits. Moreover, if someone is determined to mistreat his own body, he (or she) will not see anything wrong in maiming another person.

...The Lord's commands are the same for the whole creation; they embrace both the outer material world and the inner world of any individual:

I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. (*Isa 45:12*)

The Canaanite worship of idols was accompanied not only with sorcery and lacerating the body, but also with cult prostitution. Therefore the next prohibition reads:

Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity. (*Lev 19:29*)

Instead of idolatry the Bible offers a true reverence of God, which is expressed in sanctifying Sabbaths and worshipping the Creator in his Temple:

You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:30*)

The well-being of God's people consists in respecting the rights of each individual, both the noble and socially deprived. The aged are held in great honor; their life experience and their role in passing tradition from one generation to another grant them a right to be most revered:

You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 19:32*)

An alien is considered the most socially deprived member of Israel's society, for he has got no kinsmen, no roots among the native residents. He needs to be treated with special care, so that he may feel himself a full member of God's people:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.  
The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 19:33-34*)

Let us emphasize that formal equating of aliens' rights with the rights of native-born Israelites is not sufficient: only genuine love expressed by people around them is able to make these aliens turn to God with their whole heart...

Finally, of great importance are those statutes that are called to regulate public relations in general:

You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity.  
You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (*Lev 19:35-36*)

This should be understood not only as honesty while literal weighing and measuring (ephah and hin are a dry and a liquid measures of capacity accordingly), but in a more general sense as irreproachable mutual honesty in every sphere of life. In conclusion it is added: "I am the Lord your God..." — as if a seal of the Legislator has been put, a seal that certifies the great value of the given precept. Those who deal dishonestly with their fellowmen thus encroach on the rights of God himself.

We have already discussed the contents of Chapter 20: it is closely connected with the precepts of Chapter 18.

Chapter 21 is devoted to the matters of ritual cleanness of Aaronic priests (cohanim) and to the acceptability of their service in various cases. The observance of holiness, i.e. separation from any kind of impurity, is shown as a matter of paramount importance for a priest:

And you shall treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I am the Lord your God, I who sanctify you, am holy. (*Lev 21:8*)

The observance of ritual cleanness implies abstaining from any contact with a dead body. A priest should constantly try to keep himself undefiled. Therefore, he can participate in a funeral ceremony only in the case of his nearest kin (vv. 1-4). As for the high priest (Ivdg Nhk <co`hen ga`dol> — literally, "the great priest"), he is forbidden to go to the cemetery, even if his parents are to be buried (vv. 10-11). He is obliged to stay at the sanctuary all the time:

He shall not go outside the sanctuary and thus profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord. (*Lev 21:12*)

The high priest symbolizes the higher aspect of our essence — our spirit, which has a calling to serve the Lord incessantly:

You make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. (*Ps 104:4*)

In the given verse the English word “winds” translates Hebrew *tvcvr <ru`chot>*, which can also designate “spirits.”

Having a ministry similar to that of the angels, human spirit should not leave its inner sanctuary and be exposed to anything “dead,” i.e. something that does not accept life from God. It should constantly burn with love, with zeal for the divine commandments (Rom 12:11).

The priests should not imitate idol-worshippers in any way. Unlike the latter they have a prescription to keep both internal and external grandeur:

They shall not make bald spots upon their heads, or shave off the edges of their beards, or make any gashes in their flesh. (*Lev 21:5*)

Notice that it is not forbidden to “shave one’s head,” but to make *hcrq <qar`chah>* — “bald spot,” i. e. to disfigure one’s appearance intentionally (practice that is required by some pagan cults and that is reviving today in some trends of fashion which are directly or indirectly connected with Satanism).

The requirement of cleanness applies also to the marriages of the priests:

They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God. (*Lev 21:7*)

As to the high priest, the demands made of him are even higher:

He shall marry only a woman who is a virgin.  
A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, a prostitute, these he shall not marry. He shall marry a virgin of his own kin... (*Lev 21:13–14*)

Therefore in the New Testament the church, which is “holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27), is called the “bride” of the Lamb, who is “the high priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1). The true Church has been preparing itself for this condition of being without blemish during the centuries of history — right up to the day when “the voice of a great multitude” will be heard (Rev 19:6):

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready;  
To her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (*Rev 19:7–8*)

This chapter contains other important statutes concerning priests:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:  
Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God... (*Lev 21:16–17*)

Blindness, lameness, ugliness, etc. (vv. 18–20) are mentioned among these “blemishes” (Heb. *Mvm <moom>* — “physical defect”). A priest, who is always in the public eye while ministering, should have a pleasant appearance; besides, he has to cope with many duties and his physical defects can make it difficult.

However, these words have another meaning as well: only that spirit which has reached certain perfection can be allowed to serve the Creator; and may not the person with spiritual defects appear in front of the altar until he or she is healed:

...But he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the Lord; I sanctify them. (*Lev 21:23*)

At the same time, a priest with a “blemish” is permitted to partake of the sacrifices brought by the people:

He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy... (*Lev 21:22*)

The same is with the spirit of believer, which has not been yet purified of its sinful defects, but receives its share of divine mercies, because other people intercede on his behalf in their prayers.

The discussion of ritual cleanness of the priests goes on in Chapter 22:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Direct Aaron and his sons to deal carefully with the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they may not profane my holy name; I am the Lord. (*Lev 22:1–2*)

A priest, who is about to perform his duties in a state of ceremonial defilement, insults the name of the Most High. In this case “that person shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord,” i.e. he will be discharged — exterminated by the divine power. A priest who is affected with leprosy or has an emission of semen as well as the one who has touched anything dead or tasted unclean food — “that which died or was torn by wild animals” (vv. 3–8) — is considered defiled.

In a spiritual sense, leprosy stands for sin. Any discharge from the flesh is a waste of spiritual strength, squandering it “in vain.” Touching a corpse is a symbol of a close contact with something spiritually dead. Finally, eating carrion symbolizes “taking in” mortal ideas of denial of God, revolt against him, misanthropy, etc. Any such state defiles the spirit and prevents it from performing religious rites until it is fully purified:

...He shall be clean; and afterward he may eat of the sacred donations, for they are his food. (*Lev 22:7*)

Eating of the sacred donations means joining in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Such joining in, according to the Gospel, is available only to the true disciples of Jesus. It is unattainable for “those outside,” which perceive only physical, “outside” aspect of their life and do not care about internal matters:

And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables;

In order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand... (*Mk 4:11–12*)

The “lay person” (Heb. rz <zar> — “strange, alien”) is forbidden to taste of sacred donations (sacrificial offerings) even if this “lay person” closely communicates with the priest:

No lay person shall eat of the sacred donations. No bound or hired servant of the priests shall eat of the sacred donations... (*Lev 22:10*)

A person who has joined in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God should not make them known to those people with whom he is connected only externally, not spiritually:

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them. (*Ps 25:14*)

In the given text the English word “friendship” translates Hebrew dvs <sod> — “mystery.”

The case is not the same with the household of the priest, including a person acquired “by purchase”: having become a slave for a while, he is brought up by the priest as a full member of the family:

If a priest acquires anyone by purchase, the person may eat of them; and those that are born in his house may eat of his food. (*Lev 22:11*)

A member of household is the one whose spirit is kindred to a believer’s spirit. That is why he can perceive the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. However, having ceased to be a member of household, he (or she) loses the right to eat of the sacred donations:

If a priest’s daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the sacred donations;

But if a priest’s daughter is widowed or divorced, without offspring, and returns to her father’s house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father’s food. No lay person shall eat of it. (*Lev 22:12–13*)

Marriage with a “layman” (i.e. the person who does not belong to the priestly family) symbolizes the fact that the soul falls away from the communion with saints and immerses into “the vanity of this world.” Only having returned to a former state, i.e. after full repentance, the soul can again partake of the sacred things.

Not only priests should keep purity. The same demand of purity is made of sacrificial animals:

...Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or having a discharge or an itch or scabs — these you shall not offer to the Lord or put any of them on the altar as offerings by fire to the Lord... (*Lev 22:22*)

Only best things are to be offered to God. Remember that Abel brought an offering “of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions” and the Lord had regard for him, not for Cain (*Gen 4:3–4*).

In a spiritual sense, a sacrifice without blemish signifies a prayer:

Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips...” (*Hos 14:2*)

The Hebrew original of the fragment translated as “the fruit of our lips” is *vnytpw Myrp* <*pha`rim sepha`teynu*>, which literally means “the calves of our lips,” i.e. the sacrifice, offered by means of speaking.

A prayer can be “blind,” “injured,” “ugly” etc., if it is said with a vicious, purely selfish motive, if our intentions are malicious, if we pray without humility, forgetting about our fellowmen. It is forbidden to offer “sacrifices” of that sort.

However, not only prayers, but also good deeds can be our sacrifices:

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (*Heb 13:16*)

What “defect” can be seen in good deeds? If the latter are performed with a selfish motive, not in the name of the Creator, such “sacrifices” are not pleasing to God:

You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf. (*Lev 22:20*)

“Sacrifices” that are offered without a volitional effort and are deprived of an internal “charge,” which is capable to produce further kindness, are not pleasing to God. Such powerless “sacrifices” are symbolized by castrated animals:

Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the Lord; such you shall not do within your land, nor shall you accept any such animals from a foreigner to offer as food to your God; since they are mutilated, with a blemish in them, they shall not be accepted in your behalf. (*Lev 22:24–25*)

The Most High prohibits to deprive living creatures in general (and humans especially!) of their productive force — in both direct and figurative senses. An attempt to suppress a talent in a person, to extinguish some ability granted from above, to prevent it from being developed or becoming known, is also a violation of this instruction. The main reason of such attitude is envy, which is described this way:

...But through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. (*Wis. of Solomon 2:24*)

This verse states quite clearly that those who belong to the devil’s party are afflicted with envy, and that envy brings death...

The instructions concerning sacrifices are concluded by the following generalizing verse:

You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the Lord; I sanctify you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord. (*Lev 22:32–33*)

A person sanctified by the Lord in his or her turn should sanctify God’s name. Mutual sanctification (of the people by the Lord and of the Lord by the people) is indeed the purpose of the exodus from the land of Egypt — the land of sin and

darkness. In other words, man's abiding in the Lord and the Lord's abiding in man is the purpose of the exodus.

...Chapter 23 is devoted to the festivals of the Lord — “the holy seasons”: the instructions concerning the holiness of one's life in general are followed by the regulations connected with special sanctification of major “times and seasons.” One can regard the contents of this chapter as an extensive commentary on the Fourth Commandment — of the Sabbath as a sanctified day, separated from routine, devoted to the worship of the Most High.

Annual festivals are also called “sabbaths,” irrespective of the day of the week on which they fall, for on these days it is also prescribed to “rest” and to have a special solemn divine service (for example, the Day of Atonement is called “sabbath,” although it can fall on a weekday — Lev 23:32). Therefore, in the list of biblical holidays weekly Sabbath is mentioned in the first place, as a “starting-point,” “a spiritual center” of holy celebration in general:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.

Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlements. (*Lev 23:1-3*)

The word “festival” translates Hebrew *divm <mo`ed>* — “appointed time,” “certain season.” In the Book of Genesis, where we read about the creation of luminaries, it is emphasized that they are intended for marking “the seasons” (*Mydivm <moa`dim>* — “certain times,” “festivals”):

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years...” (*Gen 1:14*)

It means that the dates of biblical festivals should be determined both by the moon and by the sun, for we are told about the creation of “two great lights” to rule the day and the night (*Gen 1:16*). The following psalm mentions a special connection of the festivals with lunar cycles:

You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. (*Ps 104:19*)

The word “seasons” used here translates the same Hebrew word *Mydivm <moa`dim>* — “holidays.” However, the fact that the sun is mentioned here along with the moon shows that the biblical calendar is based on both lunar and solar cycles. Wherever it is said about celebrations on such-and-such day of such-and-such month, the word *wdc <chodesh>* — “month” is used, which means literally “new moon,” i.e. the appearance of a thin crescent. At the same time, festivals should not fall on different seasons as it occurs, for example, in the Moslem calendar, which is based solely on lunar months.

The lunar year (i.e. a year of 12 lunar or synodic months, each of which corresponds to the period of revolution of the moon round the earth) consists of approximately 354,37 days, while the solar year (a period of the earth's revolution round the sun) consists of approximately 365,24 days.

If the lunar cycle is not brought in line with the solar one, there will be the shortage of eleven days between the time of festivals and the seasons every subsequent year. Every three years this shortage will be more than a month. Thus, several years later a spring festival will fall on winter etc. This contradicts biblical instructions. For example, we have a following regulation concerning celebration of the Passover:

Observe the month of Abib by keeping the Passover for the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. (*Deut 16:1*)

“The month of Abib” is a translation of Hebrew *bybah wdc* <*chodesh haa`viv*> — “the month of the ripening ears” or “a spring month,” that is, the first spring month, when the barley is in the ear (cf. Ex 9:31, where we read that just before the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt “the barley was in the ear”). Hence, the Passover should always fall on the first spring month. There are similar instructions concerning other biblical feasts: for example, Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks after the beginning of the wheat season (Lev 23:10–21, Deut 16:9–12), and the Festival of Booths — after the autumn harvest (Lev 23:39–43, Deut 16:13–15).

Since the mentioned kinds of agricultural work are connected with certain seasons, in order to tie biblical festivals to these seasons the years are counted by the sun. A special cycle of 19 years is used (the so called Metonic cycle), in which the 3rd, the 6th, the 8th, the 11th, the 14th, the 17th and the 19th years are leap years, that is, they have an interposed (thirteenth) lunar month. The rest of the years in the cycle consist of 12 lunar months. An interposed month, according to a tradition (borrowed in Babylon) that developed later, is called *ynw rda* <*A`dar shay`nee*> — “a second Adar.”

The names of lunar months acquired by the Jews during the Babylonian Exile (6th century BC), are mentioned in the latter scriptural books (Neh 1:1, 2:1; Esth 3:7, 8:9, 9:1, 15, 19 etc.). In the Torah months are named according to their ordinal numbers, thus the annual festivals fall on the first (Passover), the third (Pentecost) and the seventh (the Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Booths) months. The latest names for these months (that go back to the Akkadian language) are Nisan, Sivan and Tishri. The Scripture mentions also some pre-exilic names: thus, Nisan corresponds to the month of Abib (“head of grain”: Ex 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deut 16:1); the second spring month was called Ziv (“shine,” “flowering;” 1 Kings 6:1, 37); Tishri — the seventh month counting from spring or the first autumn month — was called Ethanym (“strongholds” or “floods”; 1 Kings 8:2); the eighth month counting from spring or the second autumn month was Bul (“ripening,” “fertility”: 1 Kings 6:38).

The Sabbath is mentioned before the rest of the festivals (Lev 23:3); hence, the instructions concerning the observance of the Sabbath rest apply to other festivals as well. Indeed, we read about each of them: “...you shall not work at your occupations...” (Lev 23:7–36). The instructions concerning holy convocations, prayer, sacrifices and studying the Law (Lev 23:3) should be observed during all holy times (v. 4). Other instructions vary depending on the meaning and importance of each festival.

Talking about holy times, we will discuss their connection with historical events, and will examine their prototypical meaning, which serves as the indication of the future, of which the festivals are a “shadow” or a “projection” (cf. Col 2:16–17).

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the Lord,

And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread... (*Lev 23:5–6*)

A Passover sacrifice (csp *pe`sach* — “passing by,” “passing over” or “mercy”) was offered during the first of the annual festivals celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt. The Festival of Passover (see vol. II, Lect. 4) is also called “the Festival of Unleavened Bread.” It always falls on the full moon on the eve of the 15th of Abib or Nisan, i.e. on the beginning of spring when the trees are in blossom. In the Book of Genesis (18:14) this day is named divm *mo`ed* — “holiday” and hyc ti *et hay-`ah* — “time alive,” “time of revival.” It was during the Passover days that Abraham and Lot baked unleavened bread (compare Gen 18:6 and 19:3 with Ex 12:18–19 and Lev 23:6). The blossoming, “revival” of nature coincides with the “revival” of the people of Israel — their escape from Egyptian bondage. The annual Festival of Passover reminds us of the opportunity of the “exodus” from a state of sin and death to “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Each believer on the individual level should “come out of Egypt” and be restored spiritually, perceiving himself as a participant of the great exodus from the darkness to the light:

You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. (*Ex 13:8*)

Passover, “the time of revival,” is also the day that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was executed on the eve of the first day of the Passover — the 14th of Nisan, and rose from the dead on the 17th of Nisan — on “the day of Preparation” (Jn 19:14, 20:1. See also vol. II, Lect. 5). At the same time, it is the festival of the resurrection of the souls of those who follow his teaching and are united with him in “one body” (Rom 6:4–5).

In this festival all the archetypes of deliverance, revival and salvation, shown in the Scripture, meet in a focus like rays. The future gathering of the people of God and their “coming out of the land of the north” are also prophetically presented in the Passover celebration:

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” but “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.” For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors. (*Jer 16:14–15*)

Finally, the Passover is a prototype of the final victory over death, the resurrection of the dead “at the end of days.” The sacred Passover meal symbolizes the participation of the resurrected righteous men and women in a messianic feast of the last days:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations;

He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. (*Isa 25:6–8*)

The lamb that was eaten during a Passover meal symbolizes a sacrifice offered by Christ as the atonement for sin:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (*Jn 1:29*)

Unleavened bread eaten during this meal and for the next seven days stands for the purity of life, from which “the yeast of malice and evil” has been removed (1 Cor 5:8; cf. Mt 16:11–12):

...And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. For seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation: you shall not work at your occupations. (*Lev 23:6–8*)

The first day is celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:51), and the seventh — in memory of crossing the Red Sea on dry ground (Ex 14:19–31).

Next festival is the summer Festival of Pentecost, which is linked with the Passover both by the time of its celebration and by its meaning.

The Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. (*Lev 23:9–10*)

The first fruits of a harvest, as well as the firstborn of people and livestock, are set apart to the Lord (Ex 13:12–13, 34:26). In this case, the sheaf of the first fruits of the barley harvest is meant, because in the Holy Land barley ripens earlier than wheat (compare Ex 9:31–32 with Ex 34:22).

He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall raise it. (*Lev 23:11*)

The word “sabbath,” according to the Orthodox Jewish tradition, denotes here the first day of the Passover, which is a day of rest, devoted to the divine service. The Karaites, adherents of the alternative tradition of interpreting the Torah, understand this verse as a prescription to keep count of days leading to Pentecost starting with the first day of the week, which follows the Passover Sabbath.

On the “day after the sabbath,” i.e. on the 16th of Nisan, the first sheaf “was raised” in the Temple. The ears fell on the ground, symbolizing the grace that would be poured out in future, on the day of Pentecost.

It is forbidden to eat the bread of the new harvest until the first sheaf is raised:

You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. (*Lev 23:14*)

Similar to the first sheaf, all our efforts should be devoted to the Most High (Col 3:17).

From the day on which the first sheaf is raised one should count off 49 days that remind of the events between the exodus from Egypt and Sinaitic revelation (Ex 19:1 – 20:18):

And from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord. (*Lev 23:15–16*)

This festival is called *tvibw* <*shavu`ot*> — “weeks” (Ex 34:22, Deut 16:10), because seven weeks separate it from the first day of the Passover. Another name for it is Pentecost (from a Greek word meaning “fiftieth”), for it is celebrated on the fiftieth day, counting from the second day of the Passover (Acts 2:1, 20:16). However, the word *tvibw* <*shavu`ot*> can be understood and as “oaths”: on this day the Ten Commandments were given, which constitute a basis of the covenant ratified by a mutual oath of God and the people of Israel. The Lord took an oath to observe his promises and the people pledged themselves to keep his commandments:

...To enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, sworn by an oath, which the Lord your God is making with you today... (*Deut 29:12*)

The Festival of Pentecost combines our gratitude for the harvest (in this case the wheat harvest) with the renewal of the covenant and the joy upon receiving the Law and the commandments.

The first, the earliest, “harvest” in human history “ripened,” when the people of Israel was formed that was called to become a community of the righteous. Indeed, the purpose of the creation of man is “gathering the righteous,” spiritual harvest (Mt 13:37–39).

1345 years later, during the same festival the Holy Spirit came on the disciples of Jesus, marking the creation of the New Testament community, which is called to embrace a great multitude of people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9):

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (*Acts 2:1–4*)

This event — the beginning of gathering the righteous from all nations of the world — can also be likened to “the first fruits of the harvest.”

As it has been explained in Lecture 1, both Jews while receiving Torah and Gentiles while the outpouring of the Spirit on them were not yet purified of “the

yeast of malice” (1 Cor 5:8). Therefore, on the day of Pentecost two loaves of leavened bread are brought into the Holy Place; they symbolize “unpurified” Jews and Gentiles:

You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord. (*Lev 23:17*)

The purpose of the exodus was to introduce the people of Israel into the covenant with God by means of the Law; the purpose of Christ’s ministry was to introduce a person into the New Covenant with the Most High by means of the Holy Spirit:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.  
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (*Jn 14:15–17*)

Pentecost should be celebrated as “a statute forever,” that is, in every generation and in every settlement of the people of God:

On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations. (*Lev 23:21*)

Pentecost is one of the three annual festivals (the others are Passover and the Festival of Booths), called *gc <chag>* — “going round [the sacred place],” “celebration,” “pilgrimage [to the Holy Place]” (cf. Arab. “hadj”):

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you. (*Deut 16:16–17*)

Early Christians zealously observed the instruction concerning pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as well as other precepts. For example, we learn about apostle Paul:

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; he was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (*Acts 20:16*)

Since the wheat harvest is mentioned among the statutes concerning this festival, in conclusion the following instruction is given:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 23:22*)

The celebration is not pleasing to the Lord if it is not linked with mercy and care for the poor. Indeed, he reproaches his people for such formal, purely ritual and insensitive “celebrating” through the prophet:

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (*Isa 1:14–17*)

The Festival of Pentecost not only reminds us of the great events of the past, not only marks the fruitful changes in the hearts of those who live nowadays (immersion into the Holy Spirit of certain individuals — Mt 3:11), but also points to the future, when the Holy Spirit will come down on the whole people of God:

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (*Joel 2:28–29*)

The Book of the prophet Ezekiel also contains a prediction that after the world-wide calamities caused by the final return of the Israelites to the Holy Land and by the invasion of Gog's hordes into the land, the Spirit will come down on the whole people of God:

...I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations.

Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind;

And I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God. (*Ezek 39:28–29*)

This outpouring of the Spirit will be accompanied by a plaintive repentance of all Israel. The prophet Zechariah testifies to it, mentioning that prior to this event all the nations that come against Jerusalem, that is, Gog's armies (cf. Ezek 38–39), will have been defeated:

And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (*Zech 12:9–10*)

It is the Holy Spirit who will dispose all the Israelites to recognize that Jesus from Nazareth is the true Messiah and to take close to heart his sufferings for the mankind:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf... (*Jn 15:26*)

Thus, Pentecost commemorates not only giving of the Law but at the same time the establishment of this Law in the hearts of the believers by the Holy Spirit:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...

⟨...⟩

...This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. (*Jer 31:31–33*)

The Book of Joel (2:28–31) tells that the Holy Spirit will come down with great power on God's people just before the Day of Judgment — “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” The next festival which is not directly connected (unlike the Passover and Pentecost) with any event of the exodus from Egypt can be viewed as a prototype of this terrible day. There is a legend that this festival is the day of creation of Adam. Therefore, it was appointed for judging the mankind.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts... (*Lev 23:23–24*)

In the Jewish tradition this festival is called *hnwh war* *⟨Rosh haSha`nah⟩* — “the head [in the sense of the beginning] of the year,” i.e. the New Year's Day. The fact that the Festival of Booths, which is celebrated 14 days later, comes at the “turn of the year” proves that the biblical year starts in autumn. It also means that all autumn feasts are celebrated during the period when one year replaces another:

You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year... (*Ex 34:22*)

Nine days after the New Year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), every 49 years the coming of the Jubilee Year is proclaimed. It follows then that the year begins in the seventh, not the first month:

...Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month — on the day of atonement — you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you... (*Lev 25:9–10*)

This leads us once again to the fundamentals of a lunar-solar biblical calendar: months are counted from spring (*Ex 12:1–2*), and years are counted from autumn (so that the solar and the lunar cycles may be equalized). The tradition of counting years from the first autumn month was kept for a long time in some Christian countries, for instance in Russia, up to the epoch of Peter the Great.

The two different modes of biblical calendaric reckoning used in counting years and months, as well as the rituals of the autumn festivals, contain a special indication of the two aspects of life. Life in the “present age,” which is measured by a period from birth to death, is symbolized by the spring and the summer festivals (the Passover and Pentecost). On the contrary, life in the “coming age” — the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment Day and the eternal bliss of the righteous — is symbolized by the autumn festivals (New Year, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Booths).

In Lev 23:24 the biblical New Year is called “the festival of trumpets” (in the original *hivrt* *<teru`ah>* — “the blowing [of trumpets]”), that is blowing the ram’s horn – the “shofar.” The name of this musical instrument is mentioned in the description of theophany on Mount Sinai (“the blast of the trumpet”):

...As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. (*Ex 19:19*)

The instruction to blow the shofar (“trumpet,” as in our version) is repeated in one of the psalms:

...Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day.  
For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. (*Ps 81:3–4*)

The only biblical festival that falls on the same day as “the new moon” (celebrated on the first day of the seventh month of Tishri) is the biblical New Year’s Day. Hence, it is this festival that is meant here. The word “ordinance” translates Hebrew *epwm* *<mish`pat>* — “judgment.”

This is the day of the annual judgment of the God of Jacob over all sons of man. On the New Year’s Day, according to a legend, heavenly books are opened, and the Most High inscribes the destiny of each person for the coming year — who will live and who will die, who will prosper and who will suffer... In the Book of Daniel we find the awesome description of such judgment:

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. (*Dan 7:9–10*)

During this festival the alarming sounds of the shofar are called to awaken repentance in the souls of believers: even those who are deeply stuck in sin have an opportunity to lessen their punishment by good deeds and prayers. According to the Jewish tradition, this is the purpose of the Ten Awesome Days, the Festival of Trumpets through the Day of Atonement, when the verdict is fixed (“sealed”) by the right hand of the Lord.

Moreover, in the metaphoric language of the Bible the blasts of the trumpet stand for the resurrection of the dead:

...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 heaven to the other. (*Mt 24:31*)

At Messiah’s second coming the dead will be gathered for judgment by the sound of trumpet (1 Thess 4:16). In the same way, the annual sounding of trumpets on the New Year’s Day calls everyone to revive spiritually — to start a new life in the presence of the judging Creator.

Thus blowing ram’s horns on the New Year’s Day is a prototype of both the resurrection of the dead and their summoning for the judgment (a sharp, alarming, shrill blast of the shofar serves as a reminder of this — cf. 1 Cor 15:52).

The resurrection of the dead and the subsequent celebration of the righteous are predicted by the following words of Daniel:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (*Dan 12:2-3*)

The Festival of Trumpets is followed by the Day of Atonement, which foreshadows the Last Judgment:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves and present the Lord's offering by fire;

And you shall do no work during that entire day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God... (*Lev 23:26-28*)

The whole day — “from evening to evening” — is devoted to penitence, prayers, reading the Scripture. It is called Myrpkh Mvy *«Yom haKippu rim»* — literally, “the day of the coverings [of sins]” (see Lect. 3). On this day humility is prescribed as well as abstaining from any occupations except for the divine service and a complete fast — as a sign of one's repentance before the High Judge:

For anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people. And anyone who does any work during that entire day, such a one I will destroy from the midst of the people. You shall do no work: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements. It shall be to you a Sabbath of complete rest, and you shall deny yourselves; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening you shall keep your sabbath. (*Lev 23:29-32*)

How is the Last Judgment described in the Bible? It is presented differently in various places of the Scripture, from various angles so to say. First of all, it is said that the decisive argument while defending or prosecuting a person will be his or her deeds:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.” (*Rev 14:13*)

Those risen from the dead and standing before the throne of the High Judge will be judged according to their works:

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. (*Rev 20:11-12*)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the nations are gathered before him,

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... (Mt 25:34–35)

As an answer to a bewildered question asked by the righteous, when it was that they had the honor of serving the Messiah himself, the explanation will follow:

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Mt 25:40)

The sentence passed upon the wicked will be also based on their deeds — on the fact that they showed no mercy to their suffering brethren, to “the least” of those who are members of Christ’s family:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink... (Mt 25:41–42)

Everyone will agree that these words are of particular importance, for they are connected with the final destiny of each soul. It is according to one’s deeds that this destiny will be determined. Indeed, here Jesus does not ask people about their beliefs: whether they went to such-and-such church, and if yes, how regular it was; in which manner they crossed himself; whether they worshipped icons or rejected them; what “creed” they adhered to and in general to what degree they honored “human precepts and doctrines” (Mt 15:9).

Similarly, according to the testimony of the apostle James, “faith apart from works is barren” — such kind of faith is characteristic of demons:

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder.

Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? (Jas 2:19–20)

What kind of works does the apostle James mean? Certainly, those that will be a decisive factor in bringing in a verdict on the Day of Judgment:

For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (Jas 2:13–17)

These exhortations of the apostle have a ring of the words of Jesus:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (Mt 5:7)

In his epistles Paul says quite clearly that on the Day of Judgment each person will be repaid according to his or her deeds. Some will receive eternal life, others — God’s wrath (see, for example, Rom 2:5–8).

If this is true, why so many preachers right up to the present time have been teaching that salvation comes by faith alone, irrespective of one’s deeds? It is because they base their teaching on the words of the same Paul concerning justification “by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom 3:28). Is it to be admitted that the apostolic doctrine contains a discrepancy, as some liberal researchers love to say? We shall discuss this question at greater length.

“The justification by faith” mentioned by Paul is not identical with salvation “by faith alone,” apart from works. Indeed, a wicked person, who has broken God’s will, must justify himself before him. Through his faith in the sacrificial death of the Messiah a penitent sinner reconciles with God; he is “justified by faith.” However, afterwards he is obliged to undertake observing the commandments that express God’s will:

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (*1 Jn 5:3*)

However, it is only the First Commandment of “the quintessence of the Law,” the Decalogue, that relates to faith (it commands to believe that God, who has brought his people out of Egypt, is One). Thus, faith is observing the First Commandment. Nevertheless, in order to be saved it is necessary to observe all the commandments; therefore faith, although it is the first and important condition of attaining the everlasting life, it is not sufficient:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (*Heb 11:6*)

“Seeking God,” described in the given verse, consists in knowing and doing God’s will, expressed in the commandments.

That is why the psalmist states that during the Last Judgment when everyone will be repaid according to his or her deeds, those who “seek God” will be justified:

But the Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment.

He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity.

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. (*Pss 9:7–10*)

Every search usually ends when the person finds what he has sought. Seeking God ends with “knowing” him (not in the absolute sense, of course, for the Most High is unfathomable in his essence). Here “knowledge” implies uniting with him “in Spirit and truth” by means of the Holy Spirit and obeying his commandments.

Faith in Jesus as the Messiah and following his teaching are interconnected in the same way:

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is

a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked. (*1 Jn 2:3–6*)

After the Day of Atonement, which signifies the present judgment and foreshadows the future Judgment Day, the last of annual festivals comes – the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles):

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to the Lord.

The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. Seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord’s offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations. (*Lev 23:33–36*)

The Hebrew word *tvks* <*suk`kot*> means “tents,” “tabernacles” (or “booths”). Directly after the exodus, before the tents for dwelling in the desert were built, the Israelites lived in hastily erected booths made of branches. That is why the first settlement after the exodus from the land of Rameses (or Goshen; see *Gen 47:5–6*, *Ex 12:37*) was called Succoth (*Ex 12:37*, *Num 33:5*). It is this event that the annual Festival of Booths is called to commemorate:

You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (*Lev 23:42–43*)

Living in a fertile land, the people of God were constantly exposed to a great spiritual danger — forgetting the Lord’s blessings. They could fall victim to ingratitude and disbelief in attributing all their victories and successes to themselves:

Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. (*Deut 8:17–18*)

For this reason the Festival of Booths is celebrated at the end of the year, when the harvest have been gathered in, when each family and the whole people are provided with food for a long period:

...Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press.

Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns.

Seven days you shall keep the festival for the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. (*Deut 16:12–15*)

The festival of ingathering is linked with our gratitude to the Creator for granting fertility to the land. During this celebration each Israelite identifies himself as the one who left Egypt, depending on God's mercy alone. He is prescribed to leave his house, his barns and storehouses full of earthly gifts, and to spend seven days of the festival in a tent made of branches partly open to the sky. In the biblical times booths were built of the plants used in the ritual of this festival:

On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. (*Lev 23:40*)

Having returned from the Babylonian Captivity the people renewed the custom of building booths of these plants:

...And that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.

So the people went out and brought them, and made booths for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. (*Neh 8:15-16*)

According to the Midrash, there is a symbolic meaning in the images of four plants. The first of them is *rdh Xi yrp* <*pe`ri etz ha`dar*>, "the fruit of majestic trees" — etrog, a citrus fruit having fragrance. This fruit has both taste and fragrance and symbolizes a righteous person studying Torah (taste is our inner perception of the word of God) and doing good to others (fragrance is an outer manifestation of inner properties). The second plant is *Myrmt tpk* <*kap`pot tema`rim*> — "palm branches." A date palm bears fruit that have taste but are not fragrant. It signifies people studying the Torah but not doing good. The third plant — *tbi~Xi Pni* <*a`nath etz-a`vot*> — "a branch of a leafy tree." This is myrtle, the evergreen bush that has fragrance but cannot bear edible fruit. It symbolizes a person who does not study the Torah, but does good. Finally, the fourth plant — *lcn~ybri* <*ar`vay-na`chal*>, "willows of the river," — can produce neither fruit nor fragrance. It stands for those who have neither knowledge of the Torah, nor good deeds. If the righteous person, "etrog," can attain salvation of the soul independently, the other three kinds of believers need each other for mutual addition and reaching perfection.

For this reason during the divine service of the Festival of Booths believers hold etrog in their left hand like an orb, and bind together the other three plants and hold them in the right hand like a scepter. Thus, the right hand symbolizes God's mercy and the left hand — his justice. For example, in the Songs of Songs God's justice is presented by his left hand which is "under the head" of a bride, that is our soul (as though testing its thoughts and intentions), and his mercy is represented by his right hand by which he "embraces" the soul:

O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me. (*Song 2:6*)

Only the righteous person can pass the test of God's justice, therefore etrog is held in the left hand. Other "plants" have no choice but to hope for mercy and forgiveness that are symbolized by the right hand...

There are also other interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the mentioned plants: four letters of Tetragrammaton — the holiest of God's names; four names of biblical foremothers — Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel; four ways of perceiving the truth (revelation, intuition, empathy, studying) etc. Such manifold symbolism reflects the correlation of concepts and phenomena, as though "stitching through" the whole creation.

The festivals are also connected with the periods of human life. Thus, Passover corresponds to youth as the prophet Hosea says:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (*Hos 11:1*)

Through Jeremiah the Lord also reminded his people of the exodus as the time of its "early youth":

...Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. (*Jer 2:2*)

Pentecost corresponds to maturity, when the person already sees the first fruits of his earthly works:

...You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field... (*Ex 23:16*)

The Festival of Booths corresponds to the old age: works have been completed, the crop has been gathered in, and the person returns to his initial state of being "an alien and a stranger" in the land, getting ready for moving to another world. Having received the fruits of our earthly works, we should give thanks to the Giver; renouncing worldly matters we should seek to become close to him...

The Song of Songs, the eminent poem about love and youth, is read in the synagogues during the Passover, while Ecclesiastes is read during the Festival of Booths, reminding us that everything in this world is vanity except for knowledge of God and observing his commandments:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (*Ecc 12:13-14*)

Finally, the Festival of Booths is a prototype of the resettlement of the righteous after the Judgment to the Kingdom of God, the sign of the end of history, its transition into a new, higher spiritual dimension.

Apostle John saw the righteous from all nations standing before the throne of the Most High "with palm branches in their hands," that is, celebrating the feast of booths in the supreme world:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (*Rev 7:9–10*)

After the destruction of the last impious power, the armies of the chief prince Gog (Ezek 38–39), the whole mankind will celebrate the Festival of Booths. At the end of times even the Lord's former enemies will submit to his will and start coming to Jerusalem during the festival days for worship:

Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths.

If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. (*Zech 14:16–17*)

This will be the age of universal reconciliation of nations, the age of deep knowledge of God, which is impossible to imagine nowadays:

...They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (*Isa 11:9*)

During this age even material things will be spiritualized to such an extent that, according to the prediction of the prophet Zechariah,

On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord." And the cooking pots in the house of the Lord shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar. (*Zech 14:20*)

An inscription "Holy to the Lord" was engraved on a golden plate that was fastened over the forehead of a high priest (Ex 28:36–38). This plate was the holiest element of a priestly vestment. It bore the unpronounceable name of the Creator and symbolized the thought that was constantly directed unto him. In the age of the Millennial Kingdom of Messiah (Rev 20:4) such sacred inscription will adorn even ... the bells of the horses!

Thus, the Festival of Booths points to the overcoming the physical conditions inherent in the existence of the present-day mankind and to its exaltation, that is hard to fathom today:

On that day the Lord will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head. (*Zech 12:8*)

The feeblest of the righteous persons will be like David, and Jesus — the Messiah from the house of David — will appear before the people in the image of the angel of the Lord. In this image his beloved disciple saw him in his vision:

In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. (*Rev 1:16*)

Thus, the annual circle of festivals can be regarded as the presage of the whole history in its "sacred" cut, i.e. in the culmination moments of its spiritual

development. At the same time, the circle of festivals can be viewed as the way of each soul.

With regard to the people of God it can be described this way: having received freedom from the Lord (Passover) and later the Law along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), at the end of days, being close to the completion of their way, the people rise from the dead (New Year's Day) and are summoned for the Final Judgment (Day of Atonement). After that, the righteous will inherit the Kingdom of God (Festival of Booths).

The same way is foreordained for each soul that receives great mercies from the Most High, and then gives an account of its earthly life at the court of judgment:

The slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating.

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. (*Lk 12:47-48*)

Such "inquiry" awaits every one of us at the end of our earthly life, immediately after the separation of the soul from the body (cf. *Lk 16:19-31*, *2 Cor 5:10*).

However, every person can choose another sequence of events: it is not without reason that the biblical year can start in autumn or in spring. Every soul can experience awakening — "resurrection" — even during its earthly life (Festival of Trumpets); then it will examine itself and repent before the Lord (Day of Atonement); and after that a complete transformation of life will take place, the "resettlement" from a state of sin and death to the everlasting life (Festival of Booths):

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (*Jn 17:3*)

As a result of this one experiences freedom — he or she is completely delivered from spiritual death (Passover) and is united with the Creator by means of the Holy Spirit, who engraves the commandments in his or her heart (Pentecost).

This festival celebrating the complete return to God was highly esteemed by the Therapeutae — the Egyptian version of the Essenes — at the beginning of our era. Philo of Alexandria, philosopher living in the 1st century AD, writes, that the Therapeutae had "...the greatest holiday which fell on the fiftieth day — the holiest of numbers and most conformable to nature. It is equal to [the sum] of the squares [of the sides] of a right-angled triangle [with the sides 3, 4 and 5], which is the beginning of the birth of existence" (*Concerning the Contemplative Life*, 65) (The excerpt is translated from Russian. It would be better to find the English translation from Greek).

It would be reasonable to ask why the majority of Christian confessions reject the festivals that have such profound meaning and are prescribed by the Creator himself (the biblical New Year's Day, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of

Booths) or celebrate them on the days different from those appointed in the Bible (the Passover, Pentecost).

First, we shall discuss the attitude of early Christians towards these holidays. We know that they kept Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 13:42–44, 15:21, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4; Heb 4:9). It is obvious that they also celebrated Passover — on the day prescribed by the Torah (Acts 20:6; 1 Cor 5:7–8). Certainly, they celebrated Pentecost as well (Acts 2:1, 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8). They strictly observed other sacred days, for early Christians were genuine adherents of the Law (the Torah):

...You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law... (*Acts 21:20*)

If this is so, when did a change of “the sacred seasons,” the digression already predicted in the 6th century BC by the prophet Daniel, take place?

This is what he said: “As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth that shall be different from all the other kingdoms; it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

He shall speak words against the Most High, shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time. (*Dan 7:23–25*)

This prophecy was fulfilled in the 4th century AD when Constantine, the emperor of the fourth, Roman, world empire (which in the given prophecy acts under the name “the fourth beast”) declared himself a Christian and turned Christianity into the dominant religion of the empire (that made him “different” from the former emperors). Formal acceptance of Christianity (without observing the spirit and the letter of the teaching of Jesus) transformed it from the persecuted religion into the religion of persecutors. It also entailed the rejection of the biblical calendar. Instead, the church authorities accepted the Roman pagan calendar as it is clear from the names of the months given in honor of Roman gods (January — in honor of Janus, February — Phoebus, March — Mars etc.).

As far back as the first Church Council (325 AD) the decision was made to transfer weekly celebrating from Saturday to the first day of the week and to prohibit celebrating Passover “together with Jews.”

In introducing such radical changes Constantine (at that time he was not baptized even formally, but nevertheless, thrust his will on the council) likened himself to Jeroboam, the ancient king of Israel who had shifted the celebrating of the Festival of Booths to the month ahead, and replaced levitical priests with his officials:

He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites.

Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah...

He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had devised... (*1 Kings 12:31–33*)

The Scripture clearly teaches us to distinguish between God's Law and human precepts and to reject the latter altogether if they contradict the will of the Most High:

The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;

So I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden. (*Isa 29:13-14*)

Jesus himself cited these words from the Scripture to prove that observing human precepts is "worshipping in vain":

You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said:

'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' (*Mt 15:7-9*)

Following the spirit of Jesus' teaching the apostles retorted their persecutors in this way:

"Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;

For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. (*Acts 4:19-20*)

Did anyone ever have a right to cancel Lord's festivals or to alter their dates? The Scripture itself gives us the answer. It says about all these festivals that they are eternal and should be celebrated "throughout your generations" (*Ex 12:42; Lev 23:14, 21, 31, 41*). The Lord himself exults together with his people on the days of holy convocations:

...He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. (*Zeph 3:18-19*)

There is a prophecy about "a time, two times, and half a time" (in other words, "a year, two years and half a year") that determines the term during which the king who attempted to cancel God's statutes (*Dan 7:25*) will still have influence. The same term is specified in the Revelation of John, where it refers to the persecution of "those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus," as consisting of 1260 "days," each of them being equal to one year (*Rev 12:6, 14, 17; cf. Num 14:34*).

Thus, 1260 years should have passed from the epoch of emperor Constantine to the time when the large number of believers could get direct access to the primary source of their belief, the Holy Scripture.

Indeed, it was not until the end of the 16th century (325 + 1260) that the attitude towards the freedom of religion became tolerable in Europe as a result of numerous debates and fights between Protestants and Catholics. This led to a new scrupulous studying of the Bible, and millions of people in different countries,

due to the activity of translators and educators, at last could read it in their own languages. The huge number of believers started examining the word of God, about which the One who uttered it said:

...So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but I shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (*Isa 55:11*)

Thus, we see that the prophecies are fulfilled and in the end God's truth triumphs.