

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL

Many Christians do not realize that the seven feasts which God commanded in Leviticus 23 are still observed by their Jewish neighbors. The feasts, as given to Israel, bore a three-fold significance. First there was the seasonal aspect of each holiday; then the feasts were to be a memorial of God's dealings with the Hebrews; and finally there was the prophetic symbolism of God's dealings with His Church, which is made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

A study of the feasts of Israel will not only bring great understanding of the Jewish roots of our faith; it will teach the Christian much about God's plan of redemption throughout the ages. Leviticus 23 lists these seven feasts in order of their seasonal observance: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Booths.

Passover, the first and probably best-known feast comes in the spring, in the Jewish month of Nisan, also called Abib. Passover commemorates the redemption of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. On the first Passover each Hebrew household sanctified a perfect yearling lamb and sprinkled the blood on the crosspiece and side posts of the door. The "Angel of Death" passed over the houses which were protected by the blood of the lamb, but where there was no blood, the firstborn was slain. Even so, we are all slaves, in bondage to sin. We are redeemed and set free by the blood of Jesus, the Messiah, the pure and spotless Lamb of God. 1 Peter 1: 18-19

The Feast of Unleavened Bread occurs simultaneously with Passover. It begins the day after Passover eve, and lasts for seven days. Because they are so closely related in time and purpose, the names are often interchangeable. During Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Jewish people put away all leaven from their houses and eat unleavened bread, or Matzo. Leaven in Scripture is usually a symbol of sin; the unleavened Matzo graphically portrays the pure and sinless Messiah. It is pierced, even as our Lord was pierced by the nails in His hands and feet and the Roman spear in His side; and it is striped in the baking, reminding us that Isaiah said, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...and with his stripes, we are healed." Isaiah 53:5

The Feast of First Fruits is directly related to Passover and Unleavened Bread, for it is to be celebrated on "the morrow after the Sabbath," which means the day after the first day of Unleavened Bread. In Bible times this holiday was a feast of thanksgiving for the barley harvest,

the first grain of the season. The larger harvest to come because the conditions which brought about the first harvest will also bring the rest. Jesus the Messiah is the First Fruit whom God raised from the dead. Just as the barley harvest was the promise of more to come, He is our promise of resurrection and eternal life, through faith in Him, for he has conquered death and the grave.

Pentecost, or The Feast of Weeks, also is calculated from the first feast, Passover. It comes 50 days after the Passover Sabbath, thus the name Pentecost, which means 50. This is a Greek name, but the Jewish people call it Shavuot, which is the Hebrew works for “weeks.” Shavuot, too, is a harvest festival, thanking God for the wheat harvest. According to oral tradition, it is also the day that Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai. On Shavuot, the priests offered two loaves of bread made from the newly harvested grain. Unlike the other offerings, these loaves were baked with leaven. We see in the two loaves a type of God’s people, both Jews and Gentiles, given eternal life and made one in the Messiah Jesus, at the birth of the church on Pentecost.

After Pentecost, a long-time elapse before the next feast. We see in this, our present age of waiting for the return of the Messiah Jesus.

In Autumn, on Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, comes the Feast of Trumpets, more commonly called Rosh Hashanah. This marks the beginning of the civil year and is the Jewish New Year’s Day. In Leviticus 23:24 God commanded the blowing of the trumpets on the first day of the seventh month to call the congregation of Israel together for a very solemn assembly. According to Jewish teachings, Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the ten days of judgment when all the children of men pass before the Creator. The righteous are written into the Book of Life, and the wicked are condemned, and those who are not wholly righteous and those who are not wholly wicked are given ten days to repent and thus escape judgment. We who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life do not fear judgment, but rather we look for His return when He shall come with the trumpet sound and the voice of the Archangel to bring us into His Sabbath of rest.

The ten days of repentance and introspection lead into the most solemn day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It has become a time of fasting and prayer. It was the only time in the Bible days when the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. He went in before the Lord with the blood of a sacrificed animal to beg forgiveness for the sins of the people. Today there is no animal sacrifices and no Temple. the Jewish people rely solely on

repentance for forgiveness of sins, but they have no assurance that God has heard and forgiven, for the Scriptures teach in Leviticus 17:11 that atonement is in the blood. When Christ offered His own blood as our atonement or covering, the veil of the Temple was torn in two, signifying that He had opened the way into the Holy of Holies. By His sacrifice all who believe now have access to God and a covering for sin. We look forward to that great and final day of atonement prophesied in Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1 when all Israel shall mourn for the Messiah and accept the atonement He has made.

The seventh and final feast is the Feast of Booths, known in Hebrew as Succoth. In Bible days this was the final fall harvest festival, a time of ingathering at Jerusalem. The Jewish people builded booth-like structures and lived in them during the feast as a reminder of the temporary dwellings the Israelites had in the wilderness. Even today many Jewish people build open-roofed three-sided huts for this festival. They decorate them with tree boughs and autumn fruits to remind them of harvest.

Everyone in Israel who was able, came up to Jerusalem for this harvest festival every year. The Temple worship for the holiday included the ritual pouring of the water from the Pool of Siloam, symbolic of the prayers for the winter rains. It was at this time that Jesus cried out, "...if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." (John 7:37-38)

After Israel's final day of atonement, the Feast of Booths will be celebrated again in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16)

Booths speaks of the final rest, as well as the final harvest. John wrote in Revelation 21:3:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." It is our prayer that soon there will come the fulfillment of all which He promised, saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." (Revelation 21:6)

Now, here are some tables, for those who like tables for illustration:

FEAST: PASSOVER

SEASON:

Spring (New Beginning)

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

Redemption from the bondage in Egypt

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

Believers in Messiah redeemed from bondage of sin

SCRIPTURE:

Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Messiah, as a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:18-10

EVENT:

THE CRUCIFIXION (Redemption)

FEAST: UNLEAVENED BREAD

SEASON:

Spring (New Life)

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

Purging of all leaven (Symbol of Sin)

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

All believers in Christ are cleansed from sin and empowered to walk in newness of life.

SCRIPTURE:

Purge out...the old leaven that ye may be a new lump...for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. 1 Corinthians. 5:7

(God) made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians. 5:21

EVENT:

SANCTIFICATION – Illustrated by first scripture

JUSTIFICATION – Illustrated by second scripture

FEAST: FIRSTFRUITS

SEASON:

Spring (First of grain harvest)

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

Thanksgiving for firstfruits, the promise of the harvest to come (first of the grain presented to God)

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

Christ...the first to rise from the dead – the promise of resurrection and eternal life for all who believe on Him.

SCRIPTURE:

But now is Christ risen from the dead...the firstfruits of them that slept...even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 22b

EVENT:

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

FEAST: FEAST OF WEEKS (Pentecost)

SEASON:

Late Spring 7 weeks after Passover (ingathering of the harvest)

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

Thanksgiving for first harvest

According to oral tradition, the time of the giving of the Law at Sinai

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

God’s first harvest of those redeemed in Christ (Jews and Gentiles)

God’s law written on the hearts of the redeemed

SCRIPTURE:

And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... Acts 2:1a and 4a

...the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Acts 2:41b

I will put my law into their hearts and in their minds will I write them. Hebrews 10:16

EVENT:

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – Applies to first scripture

BIRTH OF THE CHURCH – Applies to second and third scripture

(SUMMER, A TIME TO LABOR IN THE FIELDS, AND PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL HARVEST – THE CHURCH AGE)

...Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. (John 4:35)

FEAST: FEAST OF TRUMPETS

SEASON:

Early Autumn

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

A Solemn Assembly. (trumpets blown to prepare for the Day of Atonement)

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

The beginning of the re-gathering of Israel to the land in preparation for the final Day of Atonement.

SCRIPTURE:

I will gather them out of all countries whither I have driven them.. and I will bring them again unto this place and I will cause them to dwell safely. Jeremiah. 32:37

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God:...and...shall be caught up together...to meet the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17 also 1 Corinthians. 15:52

EVENT:

ISRAEL REGATHERED – Applies to first scripture

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH – Applies to second scripture

THE RETURN OF CHRIST – Applies to second scripture

FEAST: DAY OF ATONEMENT

SEASON:

Autumn

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

A Solemn Assembly for repentance and forgiveness under the Law. (repeated annually)

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

Believers in Christ forgiven by one Atonement for all time. The rest of Israel will repent and look to her Messiah in one day.

SCRIPTURE:

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many... Hebrews 9:28

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him...in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. Zechariah 14:16

EVENT:

ISRAEL TURNS TO HER MESSIAH

FEAST: FEAST OF BOOTHS

SEASON:

Autumn (final harvest)

TEMPORAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL UNDER THE LAW:

Harvest celebration and Memorial of Tabernacles in the Wilderness

FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE UNDER GRACE:

Joyous Assembly – all peoples brought under the rulership of the King Messiah.

SCRIPTURE:

...everyone that is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and keep the feast of tabernacles.
Zechariah 14:16

EVENT:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

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