

Historic and Prophetic Shadows of God

“I’m not Jewish, why should I learn about the feast days of ancient Israel? Aren’t these rituals nailed to the cross? Perhaps the Feasts of Israel are culturally important for Jewish believers, but what about for Gentiles?”

By Christopher J. Patton

Don’t confuse the observance of holidays with salvation. Salvation is by personal faith alone in Messiah’s redeeming sacrifice and resurrection. Believers are washed in His blood and have received the Holy Spirit as the earnest of God’s eternal promises. (Romans 8:9) All issues of tradition and practice are dwarfed by the importance this necessary re-birth for biblically defined salvation.

That said up front, the biblical festivals of Israel are important to understanding God’s plan for mankind. As Paul points out in Colossians 2:16-17, the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals are a “shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” The use of “substance” refers back to verse 9, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

Note from Colossians Chapter 2’s Context:

1. The Feasts of Israel are revealed as prophetic - foreshadowing what is to come.
2. Salvation comes not by means of behavioral obedience but by repentant faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Messiah, thus entering into the substance of his body, holding fast to him from whom all sustenance flows. (Verse 19)
3. Two philosophic errors are condemned as deceptive worldly wisdom:
 - a. The Jewish traditions of religious observance provide saving grace.
 - b. The various pagan traditions of enlightenment and behavioral humility provide spiritual substance from living by the elementary principles and/or laws of the natural world or derived from angelic communion.
4. Biblically based choices regarding food, drink and festivals are not condemned as long as one does not depend on them for the essential means of salvation.

The New Testament reveals the prophetic significance of the Feast Days of Israel. The scriptures at the time of the early church only consisted of what is often called the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. Based on these scriptures, the early church taught that the biblical feast days were rooted in the history of Israel, which provides spiritual training for believers in Yeshua/Jesus. (I Corinthians 10:6, 11-13)

Please note that I Corinthians 10:1-4 states that the Rock of Israel (God) was inclusive of the Messiah Yeshua. Thus, the Torah and Old Testament spiritual sustenance of the ancient Israelites’ experiences is the same kind and quality of spiritual food and drink as the Gospels and New Testament. **In other words, New Testament believers worship the same God of Israel, as did the ancient patriarchs and prophets of the Bible.**

The Torah presents the Feasts of the LORD as historical reminders of what God has already done to fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – primarily through the

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Exodus events. It does not explicitly state that the feast days provide prophetic glimpses of what God will **YET** do to fulfill His promises of blessing all of the nations of the world with His loving liberation and redemption through Israel. The prophetic aspects of His promises are clearly implied in the Torah's explanation of the feasts, but only understood clearly with the New Testament writings that explain the Messiah's atonement for sin and His promised return to politically liberate the world from the kingdom of darkness, imprisoning Satan for a thousand years. (Revelation 19:11-20:5)

Reflections of Biblical Truth

For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 6:12)

From the biblical perspective, anything mortal – bound to time – is a shadow. Eternity is the only true substance. As mortals, we can only perceive the spiritual substance of Godly things “through a glass darkly.” We can only partially understand God's love and character in this life. Our present perceptions of the Holy One will vaporize in his presence when we meet face to face. (I Corinthians 13:8-12; I John 3:2)

So it is with the festivals of Israel: they teach us what is possible to know about God and His plan for mankind – both in history and in prophecy. When Yeshua/Jesus returns, He will restore all things on earth as promised to Abraham and his descendants by the prophets. (Acts 3:21) Not only will Israel dwell safely in her land, but also His Spirit will dwell within them. (Jeremiah 31:23-40) The Temple will be rebuilt, and the annual observance of the Feasts will be mandatory. In fact scripture states that all nations will observe the biblical feasts during the millennium.

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. (Zechariah 14:16)

The Connection with Christianity

Just as the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27), so the other biblical feasts were given to help people to remember what God has done as well as what he will yet do. The most important lesson of these days is that God is real. He has intervened, he does intervene, and he will intervene in the affairs of people and nations.

Christian traditions from Lent to Pentecost were derived from the spring festivals of Passover-Unleavened Bread to Weeks or Pentecost, but the fall festivals are ignored. In other words, Christianity recognizes the First Coming of Christ, but mostly ignores the Second Coming when the King of the Jews shall literally reign over the nations of mortals from Jerusalem.

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The biblical festivals are summarized in Leviticus 23. They break down into two primary groupings:

Spring - the first coming of Messiah

- Passover – God’s physical deliverance from Egypt & spiritual deliverance from death and sin by the Lamb of God
- Wave Sheaf of First Fruits – the first of the Spring harvest is God’s fruit
- Unleavened Bread – exodus from Egypt & repentant, sinless living in faith
- Pentecost or Weeks – giving of the written Word & living Spirit

Fall - the second coming of Messiah

- Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah – New Year call to accountability & return of Messiah to judge the world
- Atonement or Yom Kippur – judgment: the sacrifices of man not enough & marriage oneness of the Bride to her Savior-King
- Tabernacles or Sukkoth – life is a temporary wandering in the wilderness & God will lead us to his Kingdom, including the Millennial Restoration
- Last Great Day or Shemini Atzeret – last assembly renews the annual religious cycle & the Holy Spirit given to all nations freely (John 7:37-38)

There seems to be a direct correlation between the Christian ignorance of the fall festivals to most churches’ blindness to the plain biblical prophecies about Jesus’/Yeshua’s Second Coming. Without the annual reminders of festival recognition to remind us, it is no surprise that the majority of Christians reject a theology that includes the restoration of Israel as part of the immanent coming of Christ/Messiah to establish His millennial reign over the nations from Jerusalem.

The Weekly Sabbath

In addition to being the fourth commandment and having its own special set of covenant promises (Exodus 31:12-17), the seventh-day Sabbath is also listed as a feast day in Leviticus 23:3 and Colossians 2:16. Without getting into a long debate about Saturday-Sunday observance, Hebrews 4:9 restates the fourth commandment, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”

The main reason given for Christian Sunday observance focuses on the resurrection of Messiah, but please note that Leviticus 23:9-14 foreshadowed the resurrection on a Sunday. The referenced Wave Sheaf of First Fruits offering took place during the days of Unleavened Bread on the day after the Sabbath following Passover, which indeed was the historical day and hour of Jesus/Yeshua’s resurrection. For example, Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch the risen Savior because He had not yet ascended to the Father – lifted up and waved before Him. (John 20:16-18)

While Sunday does come once in seven days, western culture commonly sets aside time for services and then moves on to football and personal use of the rest of the day. On May 31, 1998 Pope John Paul II noted this fact in his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, which

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calls for Sunday Legislation and for a Roman Catholic observance of Sunday rooted in the traditions of the twenty-four hour observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

The weekly, seventh-day Sabbath reveals core truths of God's plan for all mankind. Living through the biblical weekly cycle (by setting aside the whole seventh day, sunset-to-sunset instead of just going to a service) rehearses the following lessons:

- Salvation comes by grace alone through repentance to God in faith, so accepting the sacrifice of Yeshua for our sins and not by works - anything we can do.
- God worked six days in creating the heavens and the earth in six days and rested as a shadow that looked forward to the promised restoration of the natural world.
- About six thousand years of sinning human government of the earth will be followed by one thousand years of Messiah's rule before the last judgment.

Does it make any difference whether one observes one day in seven or *the* seventh day? The theological answer lies beyond the scope of this short paper. As stated above, I don't believe that matters like festival observance determine one's salvation, but they do impact the level of one's biblical understanding – especially about God's plans for Israel and the rest of humanity.

Without question, choosing to honor “one in seven” automatically rejects the ordinal significance of observing “the seventh day” following God's six days of Creation or man's six days of labor. In other words, the rehearsal lessons that were meant to follow from the biblical cycles of hallowed time (the Sabbath and other feasts) are lost. If one doesn't recognize the days in their season, he or she loses the opportunity to be reminded of what follows what in God's calendar as reflected in history and prophecy.

Therefore, I suspect that there is a connection between the general Christian ignorance concerning the biblical festivals of Israel and the following, unbiblical beliefs among most who call themselves Christian:

- Most cultural Christians believe in some form of evolution in place of the biblical account of Creation.
- Most (in their heart of hearts) rely on their good moral behavior and works of worship or charity rather than on an intentionally humble and will-submitted dependence on Yeshua's sacrifice when it comes to their relationship with God.
- Most cultural, reform, and orthodox Christians do not believe that Yeshua/Jesus is coming after a Great Tribulation to reign, beginning with Israel, as a conquering King of Kings over all of the nations for 1000 years.

Not Strictly Jewish

The New Testament did not forbid Jewish believers from generally conforming to traditional forms of Jewish worship as practiced in the first century. Paul did not act hypocritically in Acts 21:15-26. The contemporary, non-believing religious leaders of the Jewish community noted James/Jacob the brother of Jesus/Yeshua for his piety and traditional observance of the Law. There was no spiritual conflict within James/Jacob because he had his priorities straight. Just read the book of James!

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Remember, this was the same James/Jacob who summarized the consensus decision of the twelve that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised – become nationally Jewish – in order to be saved. Specifically, Jewish believers were permitted to relax traditional rules that separated them from Gentiles, particularly in areas of fellowship and food. (Galatians 2:4-21)

Even so, the Sabbath and the festival days remained important to all believers, Jewish and Gentile. The New Testament mentions them often – both in regards to the calendar as well as in explaining spiritual principles. (Acts 12:3-4; 20:6; I Corinthians 5:6-8; and Hebrews 11:28)

“And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 66:23)

The Hebrew word here translated as “mankind” is *basar*, which is more literally translated as “flesh” – and many translations do so. During Messiah’s millennial rule on earth from Jerusalem mortals will mark time using the Israelite calendar. (Isaiah 2:2-4) The phrase “from new moon to new moon” references the monthly cycle beginning with each new moon. Naturally, there continues the seven-day weekly cycle ending in the Sabbath. Mortals will observe the Sabbaths because God’s plan is even then not complete. After all, “the Sabbath was made for man.” (Mark 2:27)

During the millennial reign of Jesus as King of Kings, all nations will be required to go up to Jerusalem and keep the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths/Sukkoth. From the triumph of his return, Jesus will be the ultimate secular political ruler of all peoples - each of whom will have their own king or human government. Therefore, Sukkoth, the Feast of Tabernacles, is for all nations and not just Israelites. It both reflects the Messianic Covenant promises to Israel as well as the blessings of peace and prosperity that will come to all peoples resulting from righteous government by the ONE revealed and true God. Anyone believing in a literal return of Jesus to reign on earth would naturally revere this day. Thus, this feast reminds believers of the many millennial promises and prophecies made to Israel AND the nations through the covenants. (Ephesians 2:10-16)

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

The Biblical Festivals of Israel:

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And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. (Zechariah 14:9, 16-17)

Immortals, however, are not bound by time and therefore do not observe calendars and feast days. When the perfect is fully come, the imperfect will be done away. When we are no longer living in fleshly bodies, we will not need shadows of the spiritual because we will be fully spiritual in body unlike the present. (I Corinthians 15:42-44, 50-58) Time, calendars and feast days cease to have a purpose to serves at the same time that prophecy, the temple or any mortally oriented teaching form of knowledge about God will cease in God's direct presence. (I Corinthians 13:8-12; Revelation 21:22-27)

My primary purpose for this article is one of encouragement. I encourage you to learn more about the God of Israel through His appointed feasts. It will help you to better understand and more deeply appreciate the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and our coming King. They are shadows that teach us about God's plan for humanity – pointing to both the fulfilled history of Israel and to the yet to be fulfilled biblical prophecies.

The biblical Feasts of Israel are shadows cast by the true Light that enlightens every man in whom Life dwells.