

# Feasts of Israel

I first became interested in the Jewish Feasts back around the turn of the century. I had heard smatterings of information about them before this time, but they were not important to me and so I did not properly catalog them in my mind. In the year 2000, I discovered that a Christian man I knew celebrated these Feasts. I found this odd and wanted to know more, however I still did not diligently pursue the topic.

In the fall of 2006, my church began to study the Feast days and their relation to us today. The study of the Feasts opens windows to understanding God and His plan for mankind, revealing some exciting stuff. I have summarized some of the key points of our studies in this article. I encourage you to follow the Spirit's leading if you are interested in learning more about these Feast Days.

In your studies, always remember that as Christians we are not obligated to keep the Feasts of Israel; in fact if we do so we dishonor God by removing our eyes from Jesus Christ and by implying that His sacrifice is insufficient to provide complete salvation for all mankind.

## **Provision and Redemption**

The Feasts point toward two distinct concepts: God's provision for man, and His redemption of man.

From a provisionary viewpoint, God rains on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45) and as long as the earth shall remain there shall be seed time and harvest (Gen. 8:22). Basic human needs are met by the Feasts: physical benefits of outdoor labor, rejoicing over the harvest with family and friends, planning for less bountiful times, seeding for new beginnings, etc.

From a redemptive viewpoint, God provides enlightening glimpses of His plan for our earthly blessings and our eternal salvation. The Feasts were shadows of things to come (Col 2:17) and pointed toward events of eternal magnitude (Heb 6:20). At the same time, the Feasts made use of the natural cycles of seasons to engrave lessons on every mind, whether or not they were understood on a deeper, spiritual level.

## **Annual Feasts of Israel**

There are seven major Feasts of Israel: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. (Some scholars replace First Fruits with The Last Great Day, which occurs the day after Tabernacles (Lev. 23:36).

The Feasts are not prophecies in the sense that God has to work on the specific Feast Day. Instead, they are reminders of things past and shadows of things yet to be more fully understood.

The annual cycle of Feasts shows us that God has a plan for the calendar year, just like the plan He has for Sabbath and for the Jubilee. God's "planning year" runs from one Day of Atonement, when the temple was cleansed, to the next. This annual planning year also provides for a Time of Double Blessing if your requests are presented to the Lord before the Day of Atonement. But that is an amazing study in itself and will not be addressed here.

### **Spring Feasts (March, April or May)**

Passover - (Ex. 12:1-14, Lev 23:1-8) where a lamb was to be selected and kept from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the Jewish year. From the provisional viewpoint, Passover celebrates deliverance from Egyptian bondage. From the redemptive viewpoint, Passover represents the death of Jesus on the cross and deliverance from spiritual bondage.

Unleavened Bread - (Ex. 12:15-20, Lev 23:1-8) begins the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day and lasts for seven days after Passover, to the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> day of 1<sup>st</sup> month. From the provisional viewpoint, this Feast is in remembrance of the haste with which Israel left Egyptian bondage. From the redemptive viewpoint, sinless Jesus, represented by the unleavened bread, was presented to God the Father and found acceptable, thus gaining the same acceptance for all mankind, even while containing leaven. (See the section on unleavened vs. leavened for a fuller explanation of this concept.)

Presentation of First Fruits – (Ex 13:6, Lev 23:9-14) occurred on the last day of Feast of Unleavened Bread. From the provisional viewpoint, a sheaf of ripened grain represented the promise of a bountiful harvest soon to be fulfilled. From the redemptive viewpoint, the perfect life of Jesus was presented to the Father and deemed worthy to satisfy the claims of the law of God for all mankind.

### **Festival of Pentecost (May, June)**

Pentecost or Feast of Weeks – (Lev. 23:15-17) where fifty days are counted, beginning with the first Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The feast is observed on the fiftieth day, which always falls on the first day of the week. The Festival of Pentecost celebrates the giving of the Decalogue. Seven weeks of seven days each, plus one additional day after leaving Egypt the Israelites were given the Ten Commandments. This was their opportunity to have direct contact with God, but they were frightened by His Majesty and asked Him to speak only to Moses. While Moses was on the mountain, the Israelites built the golden calf and 3,000 people died in the apostasy. At the time of Pentecost referred to in Acts, the believers had an opportunity to have contact with God through the Holy Spirit and 3,000 were brought to new life in Christ. The key realization that excited the believers in Acts was that Jesus Christ was the Unleavened Bread of Life. Through Him, all the leavened loaves were purified and made acceptable to God. They could now lay aside the chains of the Law. From the provisional viewpoint, Pentecost was a time of celebrating the giving of the Law. From a redemptive viewpoint, Pentecost is a time of celebrating the giving of the Holy Spirit.

### **Fall Feasts (September, October)**

Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah – (Lev. 23:23-25) is the first day of the seventh month. This is a warning that the Day of Judgment is coming, the beginning of the Civil New Year. Rosh Hashanah is preceded by the month of Eul, a 30 day period of soul searching and repentance. Rosh Hashanah is followed by a ten-day period of introspection and repentance, called the Ten Days of Awe, lasting until Yom Kippur. From the provisional viewpoint, Rosh Hashanah is a time to sound the trumpets and call the community of Israel together. From the redemptive viewpoint, the Feast of Trumpets probably refers to the second coming of Christ.

Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur or The Day of Judgment – (Lev. 23:26-32) is the day after Rosh Hashanah, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of 7<sup>th</sup> month. From the provisional viewpoint, this was when the sins of the people were placed on the scapegoat. From the redemptive viewpoint, this is probably the time of judgment between the second coming and the earth made new.

Tabernacles or Booths - (Lev. 23:33-44) is a time of rejoicing in the Lord, five days after Yom Kippur, which lasted for seven days, the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> month. From the provisional viewpoint, this is a time of rejoicing in the promise of the New Year. From the redemptive viewpoint, this is probably living in heaven, temporarily, until the earth is made new.

### **Unleavened vs. Leavened**

We can see the different symbolism that an ancient writer might use from bread baking to represent certain concepts: leavening represents a connection with the past, a flavoring when it becomes old, a force that invisibly spreads, a change that is also unseen, complexity, activity/festivity and involves labor. Dough without leaven represents haste, a break with the past, an absence of extra flavor, simplicity, inactivity, powerlessness and a lack of labor. So leaven was not always an evil thing.

Leavened bread was almost never to be involved with sacrifices. There is only one time when leavened bread was offered, and that was to represent the thanksgiving of the people. See Lev 7:13 and 23:17. Leaven thus represents the works of the people, which they offer to God with thanksgiving.

### **Feast Tidbits**

Purim is a time the Jews celebrate their deliverance during the days of Queen Esther. It is in February or March. The word “Purim” means “lots” and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre of all the Jews in Persia.

Hanukkah, or the Feast of Lights, is a celebration of a little oil that lasted eight days in the year 165 BC. It celebrates the rededication of the temple in the time of the Maccabees. It comes around November or December.

Sabbatical Year, or Year of Release, is every 7<sup>th</sup> year. The Jews neither sowed nor worked, giving rest to the land.

Year of Jubilee occurs every 50<sup>th</sup> year and emphasizes that everything we think we own actually belongs to God. Like the sabbatical year, the jubilee is celebrated by neither sowing nor working, with the addition that the inherited earth is given back to whom it was originally given by God and all slaves are freed.

Feasts of Peregrination, three special Feasts related to the liberation of Egypt where every Jew tried to go to Jerusalem for a full week: Passover, the day of liberation, Pentecost, the giving of the Decalogue to Moses, and Tabernacles, the 40 years wandering in the desert. The idea of special offerings brought at these times of year comes from the following text: *“Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the **Feast of unleavened bread**, and in the **Feast of weeks**, and in the **Feast of tabernacles**: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.”* Deut 16:16-17, also see Exod 23:14-16.

### **Jewish Months of the Year**

1. Nisan or Abib (Canaanite)
2. Iyyar or Ziv (Canaanite)
3. Sivan
4. Tammuz
5. Ab
6. Eul
7. Tishri or Ethanim (Canaanite)
8. Marcheshvan or Bu l(Canaanite)
9. Chislev
10. Tebeth
11. Shebat
12. Adar

### **Babylonian Equivalents**

1. Nisanu: the month of sacrifice.
2. Ayaru: the procession month
3. Simanu: the fixed season or time of brickmaking
4. Du-uzu: the month of Tammuz the god of fertility
5. Abu: the month of torches
6. Elulu or Ululu: The month of purification
7. Teshritu: the month of beginning
8. Arah-samna: the eighth month
9. Kislimu: of uncertain meaning
10. Tebitu: the month of plunging (into water)
11. Shabatu: the month of storms and rain
12. Adaru: the month of the threshing floor."(Cox, pg 5)

### **Warning Against Error**

The Feast Days -- a hot topic in Christianity today. The Holy Spirit is shedding light all abroad on the blessing available by understanding God's Word more fully. However, when the Holy Spirit is working, there is usually a counterfeit at work as well.

Recently my daughter asked me to listen to a sermon in which a well known television evangelist taught about the Feast Days. I discovered that the evangelist had twisted the truth to try to support a timeline he was advocating. At first, I wrote it off as homiletic license. But a few days later the warning in 2 John 7-11 was brought to my attention. In not speaking out against error, I share responsibility in the evil. Therefore, I now boldly attach this warning to my notes on the Feast Days.

### **First Fruits Error**

If anyone teaches that First Fruits occurred three days (not seven days) after Passover and thus represents Christ's resurrection, run far from his teaching because he will lie to you about other things as well.

This erroneous teaching is used to distract the disciple from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and place the focus on prophetic timelines. The plan is subtle, but deadly. Basically it teaches us to limit our understanding of God to our understanding of God.

For instance, if I am teaching that there is a second chance to stand for Christ after the “Secret Rapture”, I may be lulling myself or others into a false security that results in eternal loss. Or if I am looking for my spiritual allegiance to be tested by a law enforcing church attendance on a specific day, I may be blindsided when the devil gets me on a technicality due to my over commitment to church work at the sacrifice of personal spiritual growth. Conversely, if I am concentrating only on how many hours a day I read my Bible, then I may not notice when God puts someone in my path that really needs a friend.

Anyway you cut it, I am a firm believer that we need to leave “elbow room” in our lives for God to just pop right in whenever and wherever He wants. Keep your focus on the Relationship, not the Religion. Remember, “It’s All About Jesus.”

### **Holy Spirit Error**

If anyone teaches that Jesus was given the Holy Spirit upon His ascension to the Father, just prior to the Feast of Pentecost, run far from his teaching because he will lie to you about other things as well.

Pentecost was when the Spirit was first poured out upon the new Church, not when it was first poured out upon Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly states that the Holy Spirit rested like a dove on Jesus at His baptism.

This misleading teaching is meant to shore up the error that the Holy Spirit witnessed at Pentecost was a one-time event that only occurred because Jesus Christ had just been given the Holy Spirit. This error helps build walls of prejudice against the spiritual gift of tongues, which God in His Sovereignty grants to whomever He chooses. Never be afraid of any spiritual gift that God in His mercy and wisdom grants. In fact, Matthew 12:32 gives an even stronger warning: “*Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.*” You may not understand the gift, and you may not experience the gift, but never speak against it for the Lord may be working in ways you do not comprehend.

### **Subject to Change**

I hope you were blessed by this overview of the Feast Days. Keep in mind, this is a work in process, like life, and is subject to change without written notice! (Elbow room, you see.) May God truly bless you in your continued study of His Word.

Your servant in Christ,  
Polly Cunningham

(Many Biblical references may be found in Lev 23, Ex 23, Num 28, Deut 16)