



Date: April 6th, 2014

Title: Jesus in the Jewish Feasts

1. Background

a. The Jewish calendar

i. The ancient biblical calendar is identical to the Jewish calendar of these days. The Jewish year has 12 lunar months starting with new moon. This means each month counts 29 or 30 days, which sums up to 354 days a year. To synchronize the calendar with the seasons, an additional month Adar is inserted in leap years (7 times in 19 years).

ii. The 12 months in order with their corresponding months and feasts & holidays:

1. *Nisan* (March/April); Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits
2. *Iyar* (April/May)
3. *Sivan* (May/June); Shavu'ot
4. *Tammuz* (June/July)
5. *Av* (July/August)
6. *Elul* (August/September)
7. *Tishri* (September/October); Trumpets, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot
8. *Cheshvan* (October/November)
9. *Kislev* (November/December)
10. *Tevet* (December/January); Hanukkah
11. *Schewat* (January/February)
12. *Adar* (February/March); Purim

iii. Sabbaths, Sabbatical Years and the Year of Jubilee.

iv. Marking of the new day begins at sunset.

b. What do the feasts mean for us as modern Gentile believers?

c. Leviticus 23 is the single chapter of the entire Tanakh (*the cannon of Hebrew Scriptures; Genesis to Zachariah*) that sums up everything. It is believed that God's eternal plan, from chaos to eternity, is ingeniously revealed through the nature and timing of the seven annual feasts of the Lord. Sacrifice is the major feature of the feasts. While modern Gentile believers in the Messiah Jesus are not responsible to keep these feasts, knowledge of them can certainly enhance our faith. As a faithful Jew, Jesus observed every one of them without fail.

d. The feasts are divided between Spring and Fall with an entire season that passes in between. Some believe that this long period represents the dispensation of grace that we presently live in. Accordingly, the final three feasts of Rosh Hashanah (Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Atonement), and Succoth (Tabernacles) are celebrated in the Fall season and are yet to be fulfilled so they remain prophetic in nature.

2. The 7 Jewish Feasts with an eye to Jesus.

- a. Passover Feast (cf. Ex. 12:1-24)
 - i. An 8-day feast that begins during the full moon in the first month of the year; the 14th through the 22nd day of Nisan. This would roughly follow the timeline of the Jews deliverance out of Egypt with the crossing of Red Sea traditionally believed to be Nisan 21.
 - ii. Called the “*feast of freedom*” since it celebrates the Exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and memorializes the night when the faithful were protected by the blood of the lamb. This is a clear picture of the sacrifice of Jesus who is the Lamb of God. (cf. Jn. 1:29)
 - iii. History. The final plague on the Egyptians was the death of the firstborn. God commanded that on Nisan 10 (*Palm Sunday*) each head of the household should set aside a young male lamb which should be examined for blemishes which might disqualify it as an offering. This period of time allowed each family to become more personally attached to their lamb, so that it would no longer simply be “*a lamb*” (cf. Ex. 12:3) but rather “*their lamb*” (cf. Ex. 12:5). On the afternoon of the Nisan 14 the lambs were to be publicly sacrificed, and even though the entire nation was responsible for the death of the lambs, each family was to apply the blood of their personal lamb upon the doorpost as a sign of their faith in the Lord's deliverance (cf. Ex. 12:7). That night the meat of the sacrifice was to be roasted with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and eaten in haste, since the Jews were to be ready to begin their journey immediately after God smote the Egyptian firstborn sons. Only those families that sacrificed an unblemished lamb and smeared its blood upon the doorposts of the house would be “*passed over*” from the impending wrath from heaven. God further commanded that Passover be observed annually as a permanent reminder of the deliverance from Egypt. Only unleavened bread is to be eaten for seven days.
 1. After the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD Rabbinical Judaism eventually assumed leadership of the Jewish people and the idea of blood sacrifice was changed to mean “*prayer and the performance of mitzvot.*” The rabbis then decreed that Passover should be commemorated by means of the Passover Seder, held on Nisan 15.
 - iv. Jesus, our Passover Lamb, came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (cf. Jn. 12:12-13), which would have been on the 10th of the month. For the next few days, the Pharisees and Sadducees questioned Him about various things, attempting to uncover defects or flaws in the things He said. However, they found all of His answers to be perfect and faultless and were unable to trap Him in what He said, so they stopped asking Him questions (cf. Luke 20:26-40). Thus, as the Passover Lamb, Jesus was found to be without defect or blemish (cf. Ex. 12:5).
 - v. The passover lamb of Exodus would have be sacrificed the evening of Nisan 14 and eaten on Nisan 15 (*keeping in mind that the new day begins at sunset*) followed by their escape at midnight. After the construction of the Temple, the lambs were sacrificed late in afternoon of Nisan 14 and eaten at the beginning of Nisan 15.
- b. Feast of Unleavened Bread (cf. Lev. 23:6, Ex. 12:15-20)

- i. God instructed Israel to eat unleavened bread for seven days, beginning on the first day of Passover, from Nisan 15 through Nisan 22. It represents a holy week spent without leaven in our lives, a picture of our deliverance from the corrupting influences of the world in response to the redemption of the Lord. (cf. Mt. 16:12; Mark 8:14-15; Luke 12:1; Rom. 6:13-22; 1 Cor. 5:6-8)
- ii. Forgiveness for our sins can only be obtained through the intercession of Jesus Christ. Entry to this feast is possible only because "*Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.*" Both the Passover and the feast without leaven show essentials for the believer. As there were 7 days eating bread without yeast, so for the believer there should be a complete life separate from sin. The sacrifice of Christ is of no benefit unless sinful yeast is excluded from our life.
- c. Feast of Firstfruits (cf. Lev. 23:9-12, 1 Cor. 15:20-23)
 - i. Leviticus schedules this feast "*on the day after the Sabbath*" following the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The intention of the feast was to acknowledge the fertility of the land God gave the Israelites. They were to bring the early crops of their spring planting and wave the sheaf before the Lord. In ancient times this meant that a sheaf (*or omer*) of barley was waved before the LORD in a prescribed ceremony to mark the forty nine day countdown to the harvest festival of Shavu'ot (*Pentecost*).
 - ii. The modern church has come to call this feast Easter which was named after "*Ishtar*" who was the pagan goddess of fertility. Objects of fertility came to be associated with this festival, such as the rabbit and the egg. However, the First Fruits celebration was to be over God's replanting of the earth in the spring. Today this feast celebrates the resurrection of the Lord on First Fruits, which indeed occurred and gives us hope of the eventual, total harvest of the resurrection of the entire Church.
- d. Feast of Shavu'ot (*Pentecost*) (cf. Lev. 23:15-21)
 - i. Shavu'ot marked the summer harvest and required an offering of two loaves of bread, baked with leaven. These loaves symbolize the church being comprised of both Jew and Gentile. Prophetically it gives us a picture of the one new man composed of both Jew and Gentile before the altar of the Lord. (cf. Eph. 2:14)
 - ii. According to Jewish tradition, new moon of Nisan marks the start of sacred time, Passover remembers the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, the first day of Unleavened Bread remembers the Exodus from Egypt, the seventh day of Unleavened Bread remembers the crossing of the Red Sea, and Shavuot remembers the giving of the Torah exactly seven weeks after the Exodus (on Sivan 6). Indeed, Shavuot at Mount Sinai is sometimes considered the day on which Judaism was born.
 - iii. Pentecost is also the birth of Christianity.
- e. Feast of Rosh Hashanah (*Trumpets*) (cf. Lev. 23:23-25)
 - i. Occurs in September. Some contend that this jump in time from the Feast of Pentecost in May or June seems to represent the Church Age in God's planning, since the trumpet appears to represent the Rapture of the Church. The blast from the shofar was the signal for the field

workers to come into the Temple and to jolt us from our sleep. We are to remember who we really are by remembering that the Lord is our King. The high priest would blow the shofar so that the faithful would stop harvesting to worship. Now, when the trumpet sounds in accordance with 1 Cor. 15:51-53, living believers will cease their harvest and rise from the earth and be taken out of the world.

- ii. In traditional Judaism, Rosh Hashanah (*the head of the year*) is celebrated as Jewish New Years Day. The holiday is observed on the first two days of the Hebrew month of Tishri and marks the beginning of a ten-day period of prayer, self-examination and repentance which culminates on the fast day of Yom Kippur. This is due to the Jewish tradition that on Rosh Hashanah the destiny of the righteous are written in the Book of Life while the destiny of the wicked are written in the Book of Death. However, most people will not be inscribed in either book, but have ten days until Yom Kippur to repent before sealing their fate. These ten days are alternatively referred to as the “*Days of Awe*” and “*Ten Days of Repentance*.” Accordingly, many synagogue prayers and sermons are invocations to be made worthy to be written in the Book of Life through repentance because of God's upcoming judgment. The Kingship of God is stressed throughout the services as well. Rosh Hashanah also commemorates the creation of the universe by God.
- f. Feast of Yom Kippur (*Day of Atonement*) (cf. Lev. 23:26-32)
 - i. The Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the Jewish year and provides prophetic insight regarding the Second Coming of the Messiah, the restoration of national Israel, and the final judgment of the world. It is also a day that reveals the High-Priestly work of Jesus as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (cf. Heb. 5:10, 6:20).
 - ii. Actually written in the plural in the Torah, “*Yom Ha-Kippurim*” where “*kippurim*” can be read as Yom Ke-Purim, a “*day like Purim*,” that is, a day of deliverance and salvation as explained in the Book of Esther. Thus the day on which Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross is the greatest Purim of all, since through Him we are eternally delivered from the hands of our enemies.
 - iii. The Torah states that the Day of Atonement was the only time when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and call upon the name of YAHWEH to offer blood sacrifice for the sins of the people. This principle of “*a life for a life*” is the foundation of the Jewish sacrificial system and marked the great day of intercession made by the High Priest on behalf of Israel. In traditional Judaism, the day of Yom Kippur marks the climax of the ten day period of repentance called the “*Days of Awe*.”
 - iv. The great majority of usages in the Tanakh concern making atonement by the priestly ritual of sprinkling of sacrificial blood to remove sin or defilement. The life blood of the “*innocent*” sacrificial animal was required in exchange for the “*guilty*” life blood of the worshipper who placed his hands on the head of the sacrifice and confessing his sins over the animal which was then killed.

- v. The message of the central book of the Torah (Leviticus) is that since God is holy, we must be holy in our lives as well, and this means first of all being conscious of the distinction between the sacred and the profane, the clean and the unclean, and so on: *"distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean."* (cf. Lev. 10:10, Ezek. 44:23) Just as God separated the light from the darkness (cf. Gen. 1:4), so we are called to discern between the realms of the holy and the profane, the sacred and the common, and the clean and the unclean.
- vi. The word *"sacrifice"* is *"korban"* which means to *"draw close or come near."* Therefore, God instituted sacrificial blood as the cleansing agent that purified from the effects of defilement and sin. (cf. Lev. 17:11, Heb. 9:22) This is the only Holiday of the year where fasting is explicitly commanded by the LORD and it was a *"Shabbat Shabbaton,"* a day of complete abstention from any kind of mundane work.
- vii. It is enlightening to note the sequence of these holidays where God commands that we repent, or return to Him in earnestness of heart, and then He provides the means for reconciliation or atonement with Him.
- g. Feast of Sukkot (*Tabernacles*) (cf. Lev. 23:28-x)
 - i. God wanted to celebrate the fact that He provided shelter for the Israelites in the wilderness so each year on Tabernacles, devout Jews build little shelters or booths outside their houses and worshipped in them. Tabernacles represents the Lord's shelter in the world to come where He will establish His Tabernacle in Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 37:26), and the world will come every year to appear before the King and worship Him (cf. Zech. 14:16-17).
 - ii. King Solomon is said to have dedicated the Temple during the festival of Succoth (cf. 1 Kings 8:2, 65).
 - iii. Since it immediately follows the Days of Awe and Repentance, Sukkot represents the time of restored fellowship with the Lord. In light of the work of Jesus as our High Priest of the New Covenant, we now have access to the heavenly temple of God (cf. Heb. 4:16). We are now members of the greater Temple of His body; we are now part of His great Sukkot. Sukkot is a time to remember God's Sheltering Presence and Provision for us.
 - iv. The festival of Sukkot has a prophetic dimension awaiting fulfillment. As the "Day of Ingathering" of the harvest, Sukkot prefigures the gathering together of the people of God in the days of the Messiah's reign on earth (cf. Is. 27:12-13; Jer. 23:7-8). All of the nations of the earth that survived the Great Tribulation will come together to worship the LORD in Jerusalem during the Feast of Sukkot (cf. Zech. 14:16-17).
 - v. During the seven days of Sukkot a sacrificial pouring out of water was performed at the Temple. The High Priest would lead a procession to the pool of Siloam where he would fill a golden pitcher with water and then return to the courtyard of the Temple. During the last day of Sukkot Jesus cried out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* (cf. Jn. 7:2, 37-38).

- vi. After the water ceremony, during the evening, special festivities called “*happiness of the house of the water-drawing*” occurred. During this time the four towering menorahs were lit up and the priests would put on a light show, performing torch dances while the Levites sang and played music. These shows would occur every night of Sukkot, all through the night and were apparently very spectacular. In this connection, Jesus revealed Himself to be the Light of the world. (cf. Jn. 8:12) Jesus used the very water from the pool of Siloam to heal the man born blind, thereby miraculously enabling him to see the Light of the World. (cf. Jn. 9:5-11)

3. Take-aways

- a. Always keep your eyes on Jesus
- b. Jesus’ sacrifice delivers from death
- c. Jesus’ sacrifice frees us from sin
- d. Jesus is the first fruit of those who believe
- e. In Jesus a new man is created out of two
- f. Judaism was at Mt. Sinai
- g. Christianity was born at Pentecost
- h. Wake up sleeper
- i. Discern between clean and unclean
- j. Jesus’ sacrifice draws us closer to God
- k. Rest in His house

Easter Timeline:

- Nisan 14 evening (*Wed. night*) – Jesus’ early Seder
- Nisan 14 daytime (*Thurs. day*) – “*Preparation day*” (cf. Luke 23:54; Mark 15:42) for Passover. Jesus died on Thursday afternoon at the same time that the Passover lambs were sacrificed at the Temple and was buried before sundown.
- Nisan 15 evening (*Thurs. night*) – The High Sabbath of Passover begins which is the actual Seder night
- Nisan 15 daytime (*Fri. day*) – The High Sabbath of Passover
- Nisan 16 evening (*Fri. night*) – The weekly Sabbath begins after sundown
- Nisan 16 daytime (*Sat. day*) – Weekly Sabbath, waving of the omer
- Nisan 17 evening (*Sat. night*) – Jesus was resurrected some time before sunrise on Sunday.
- Nisan 17 daytime (*Sun. day*) – Women bring spices to the tomb early in the morning and the disciples encounter risen Messiah.