

# **An Overview of** **THE FEASTS OF THE LORD**

*By Toby Gress*

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying,

'Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even those are my feasts...

(L.v. 23:1—3)

.....shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings..' (Lev. 23:14, 21, 31, 41)

And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord."

(Lev. 23:44)

Leviticus 23 shows that God commanded seven feasts to be celebrated by the children of Israel. These feasts have three common aspects:

- (1) They are seasonal;
- (2) They are historically—based memorials of God's dealings with the Hebrews;
- (3) They are prophetic pictures, shadows, and symbols of God's dealing with His people, the church, and the fallen creation through the atonement of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

## **PASSOVER**

The festival year begins with Passover to be held at the beginning of spring.

"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's Passover."

(Lev. 23:5)

This is the feast which commemorates the deliverance of Israel from slavery's bondage in the land of Egypt. Israel was told to remember how God instructed them to slay a male lamb or goat, without blemish (Ex. 12:5) and spread the blood on the doorposts of their homes, so that the angel of death might pass over

the house. Later, Jesus, the Messiah, was sacrificed on the Passover; It had to be that way to perfectly fulfill the picture. The Passover Feast commemorates the salvation bought by Messiah for all of humanity—our deliverance from sin and death.

## FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The second feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, begins on the night after Passover.

**And the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. (Lev. 23:6)**

God told the Jews to eat only unleavened bread to bring to remembrance the flight from Egypt, but also to foreshadow a walk of holiness (since leaven symbolizes sin and evil). Paul, as a Jew who had practiced the feasts all his life, beautifully commented upon this aspect of the feast:

**Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (I Cor. 5:7-8)**

## FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

The third feast, the Feast of Firstfruits, is held on the Sunday following the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

**When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. (Lev. 23:10)**

The body of Christ has come to celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits on a day called, 'Easter,' a name derived from the Babylonian goddess of fertility, *Ishtar*. In not using the biblical name of the Feast, many Christians miss the greater significance of the feast's name, which implies *second fruit, third fruit, etc.* This Feast is a foreshadowing of the resurrection from the dead.

**For as in Adam, all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. (I Cor. 15:22-23)**

Jesus was the fulfilment of the first three feasts: He was crucified on the Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread, and resurrected on Firstfruits, presenting an offering to His Father. (We also read how graves were opened up on that day and the dead were seen in Jerusalem. [Matt. 27:53])

## FEAST OF WEEKS

The fourth feast is called the Feast of Weeks--*Shavout*.

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days . . . (Lev. 23: 15-16)

Today the body of Christ calls this celebration "*Pentecost*." This feast was to commemorate the second harvest. (More was harvested at this time than at Firstfruits, but not as much as would be harvested during the fall Feast of Booths.) Oral Hebrew tradition the law was given at Mt. Sinai during the Feast of Weeks. For the body of Christ, it commemorates the fulfillment of our Lord's promise to send His Spirit.

It is significant to note that during that Pentecost, Peter delivered Spirit-filled sermon, and 3,000 people were added to the harvest--the same number put to death by God when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai (having received the law) and found the people worshipping the golden calf.

The letter of the law kills, but the Spirit of God is life--the empowerment to be doers of the law which is no longer written on tablets of stone, but is engraved upon our hearts.  
(Joel 2:28, Acts 2:16-41, Rom. 2:29, Ez. 37:27)

The first four feasts are followed by a growing season--a time of work in the fields and watchful waiting. The great fall harvest is marked by three consecutive feasts beginning in the seventh month of the year--the sabbatical month, *Tishri*.

In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall he have a sabbath, a memorial of [the] blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.  
(Lev. 23:24)

## FEAST OF TRUMPETS

Little instruction or reason is given for the first of the fall feasts, the Feast of Trumpets, commonly called *Rosh Hashanah*. This feast ushers in ten days of self-introspection and repentance before God. Interestingly, Jewish tradition teaches that during this time *the children of men pass before their Creator--the righteous are written into the Book of Life; the wicked are condemned, and those neither wholly righteous nor wicked are given a certain amount of time to repent and escape judgment*. It is during the Feast of Trumpets that Genesis Chapter 22 is read in synagogues all over the world. This scripture is referred to as the "*Binding of Isaac*."

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. (Gen. 22:13)

## DAY OF ATONEMENT

The sixth and most solemn feast of the year is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you~ and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. (Lev. 23:27)

“Kippur” is Hebrew for “covering.” (On the Day of Atonement the lamb that was sacrificed was to be a blood covering for the sins of the nation.) In Lev. 16 detailed instruction is given for making sacrifices at the temple during this day. Yom Kippur was the one day of the year that the high priest laid aside his garments of beauty and glory. Clad only in white linen, he was instructed to enter into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the mercy seat of God seven times with the blood of the bullock upon which the lot had fallen to be a sin offering for the nation.

This laying aside of his garments is a picture of our High Priest Jesus taking upon Himself flesh, laying aside the glory He had with the Father and, entering into the heavenlies, and presenting His own blood before the mercy seat of His Father.

## FEAST OF BOOTHS (TABERNACLES)

The last of the seven feasts is called the Feast of Booths, Tabernacles, or *The Ingathering*. The Hebrew name is *Sukkot*.

“Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Booths for seven days unto the LORD. (Lev. 23:34)

This feast was to bring to remembrance the 40 years that Israel wandered in the desert and dwelt in booths. There is much that could be said about the Messianic nature of this celebration through the examination of temple practice during the feast. One of the outstanding features of the Feast of Booths was the daily pouring of water in the temple. This was done with a two-fold expectation: first, that God might abundantly bless the land with rainfall for the coming year; second, the hope for the outpouring of God’s Spirit and the coming reign of Messiah.

The Feast of Booths culminated in the *Day of the Great Hosanna (Hashana Rabba)*, with ritual pouring of water from a golden pitcher while the

priests blew mightily on the trumpets, the Levites sang sacred chants, and the people waved *lulavs* (palm branches) and chanted the *Hallel* (Psa. 113-118)(Lev. 23:37-41). This last day of the feast took its name from the Psalm prayer: "*Hoshana, SAVE NOW.*"

Picturing in our minds the fervent activity in the temple permits a greater understanding of the impact that Jesus must have made when John wrote,

**In the last day, that great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'** (John 7:37-38)

Understanding this seventh and last day of the seventh and last feast, *Hoshana*, adds dimension and significance to the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The shouts of "Hosanna" and the palm branches which were laid before Him became part of a completed picture.

For believers, the Feast of Booths speaks of the Kingdom of God to be established here on earth. As God established it to be a remembrance of the time He dwelt among the people of Israel, it also foreshadows the time He will again have a tabernacle in the midst of the nations of the earth. The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles, Sukkot) is *the only feast we know for certain will be celebrated during the reign of Messiah.*

**And it shall come to pass, that everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths.** (Zech. 14:15)



If the first four feasts were so perfectly fulfilled by Messiah during His earthly ministry and were originally given as prophetic pictures, it is more than a reasonable hope to believe, in faith, that God will bring the rest to pass. Jesus said,

**"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:46-47)

**"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. . .then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. (Luke 24:27,45)**

Each of us needs to have a personal revelation concerning the Old Testament--to fully know Whom we have believed. Then we will be accessible to the Holy Spirit to be burdened to *pray for the peace of Jerusalem*, as God's Word

instructs. We need it to be ready to play our part in bringing Israel to her Messiah.

**For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, "Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God." For thus saith the LORD, "Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel." (Jeremiah 31:5-7)**

God is speaking to His church that the time is now to favor Zion. Let the Spirit of God move upon you and break you concerning a people who celebrate, seven times a year, your salvation and have no understanding of their own.

**I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?  
(Rom. 11:11-12)**

**For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? (Rom 11:15)**