

The 7 Biblical Feasts and What They Mean For Followers Of Yeshua: Part 1

I suspect that I'm talking to many people who, like myself, had NOT spent a lifetime celebrating the 7 biblical feasts as called for in the Holy Scriptures as our Jewish friends have, and so you are somewhat fuzzy about what these festivals are, what is involved, and what they should mean to modern Believers, regardless of how you might label yourself...Christian, Messianic, Hebrew Roots, Catholic or perhaps no label at all.

The most fundamental thing to understand about these 7 feasts is that they are biblical they are God-ordained, and they are all connected. Together they form a series of feasts, each one playing a unique role in an overall picture. So, I'm going to briefly discuss the meaning of the feasts in general, speak to you about the 3 Spring and 1 Summer feasts, and then we'll discuss the 3 Fall feasts that round out the 7 total feasts.

Although a little more 3 decades ago I would not have thought so, I can now see the immeasurable value, and obligation, for gentile followers of Yeshua to join our Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters, as well as the Jewish community in general, in celebration of these festivals, each of which we find commanded in the Book of Leviticus. For us to accept that we do have an obligation to celebrate these Feasts, and then to learn how, is not an easy path. It is something that we must approach carefully and thoughtfully because it represents a paradigm shift in how we express our faith. I caution that we should not treat them as the next new thing, or as a marketing tool to get more Believers to come to church or synagogue. We must do them for the right reasons, and we must NOT disrupt our families or judge our brothers and sisters in the Lord for not doing them.

Following the many well-established Jewish Traditions about these festivals is generally not a bad place to start, because these traditions have been so well thought out and ordered for centuries. That said, we are perfectly free to adopt some of these traditions and not others...or to modify some or even add our own. The key is to understand the proper **meaning** to God's intended purpose for each of His appointed Feasts while avoiding using symbols and icons that are pagan, but believing we can make holy what is actually heathen in substance.

As we begin to look at some of these Festivals... also called Appointed Times... **moadim**... in Holy Scripture... let me point out that while we might reasonably question the multitude of Rabbinical laws and traditions that have evolved surrounding each Feast... Jewish laws that often include minutely detailed requirements of the proceedings... we cannot question the legitimacy of the Festivals themselves since they are called out, by name, in the Bible. Not just in the Old Testament are they ordained... which should be reason enough for us to consider them. Even the New Testament talks about these Festivals. Every time we find Yeshua either in, or on his way to, Jerusalem, (remember, He lived in Nazareth, quite a distance to the north of Jerusalem) it was for **the purpose** of His PERSONAL participation in these Appointed Times. That's right; the observance of every one of these Biblical Festivals was validated by our Messiah in the New Testament if for no other reason than because He celebrated them.

Each of these Festivals is given scripturally-specified days and months for the observances to occur. Yet, in reality, precious little biblical information is given about exactly HOW each of the celebrations are to be observed. So, over the centuries the Jews have come up with various Traditions to fill that void.

Let me be clear: while the exact traditional methods of observance of these Festivals as accomplished 2000 years ago and right on up until today, consist mostly of Hebrew customs, the **command** to celebrate them is entirely biblical and therefore applies to all worshippers of the God of Israel. Contrast this with Christmas and Easter...the highest Christian Holy Days... that are NOT biblically commanded days of celebration (either Old or New Testament) but rather are the result of human traditions that unquestionably evolved from pagan observances. Now, I know it seems almost like sacrilege to point this out, but it is factual and it is the truth. While the Church loudly proclaims being scripturally oriented, upon examination it seems that most of what occupies our time and activities amounts to traditions...things Christians call doctrines... that have little or no biblical basis.

For instance, that Yeshua was born in Beit-Lechem of Judah we can know because it is recorded in the Gospel accounts. We know several facts leading up to and surrounding the birth of the Messiah for the same reason. Exactly **when** it happened...a date...we do not know; not the year, not even the month, let alone the day. But, we can **also** know that there is absolutely NO biblical command or day set aside in Scripture to celebrate His birthday. Christmas on December 25th

as a day to celebrate His birth, was ordained by men and it surprises Western Christians to know that other Christian cultures, such as those of the Middle East, celebrate it on a different date. Christmas is simply a manmade day, chosen to coincide with the already universally celebrated Winter Solstice and it's festival called Saturnalia, that the Romans observed.

Easter is similar; that Messiah was crucified on Passover and then 3 days later arose on a Sunday (the 1st day of the week), we are certain because the Gospels plainly say so. What year it happened, we're not exactly sure (but it is in a very narrow range of about a 3 or 4 year time span). We're also **sure** that Easter is NOT a God-ordained Holy Day...it is man-ordained...and even the name we give this day is from honoring the pagan fertility goddess Ishtar (this is why the standard pagan fertility symbols of eggs and rabbits have become the outstanding features of this famous Christian celebration).

Now, is it wrong for us to commemorate and celebrate Jesus' birth and His resurrection as a Believer's tradition? Heavens NO! But, for the Church to declare these two days as HOLY... is to do something for which it has no inherent or divine authority. If you are Catholic, you might argue with that because it is Catholic doctrine that the Pope indeed DOES have the authority of Heaven to do so; that is, the Pope CAN declare days, people, religious sites, events, and so on, holy. But, if you are a Protestant, and do not hold to Papal authority, then you're in an even worse bind! And this is because the Protestant denominations say that man cannot unilaterally declare things holy; things which God has explicitly not. Only God declares that which is holy... and the two highest Christian Holy Days are NOT declared to be holy days of observance by our Creator.

So, it is important that we separate those things which are God-ordained from those things which are man's attempt to do something good or pleasing that seems right in our own eyes.

I tell you this as a serious challenge to the traditional Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter by asking an important question that we cannot avoid if we want to

mature as Believers: if we Disciples of Christ find it unthinkable **not** to acknowledge and observe Christmas and Easter...which are manmade observances that admittedly attempt to celebrate two critical events involving

salvation and the Messiah... then how is it that we so easily dismiss the **God**-made, God ordained Biblical Feasts? Feasts that are NOT manmade traditions but are written down in the Scriptures. Not as simply things **mentioned** in Scripture, but as commanded Feasts that the Lord God says are to be perpetual for His worshippers. The stage was set for the creation of what is now two questionable centuries-old tradition, on the part of the church because beginning with the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century, a new gentiles-only religion was formed that essentially declared that for gentile Believers in Jesus the Bible begins with the book of Matthew. Everything before it (the Old Testament with all of its commands, laws and regulations) is dead and gone; obsolete and worthless.

Let me remind you of those critically important words of Yeshua as He was speaking His famous Sermon on the Mount to vast crowds of mostly Jews but without doubt many interested gentiles. He said this during that teaching just so people would NOT do exactly what the Constantinian Church HAS done; and that is to think that because He was explaining the spiritual significance of all the Torah commands and the words of the great prophets, that now that He has come, we can just wad up those laws and commands...the Laws of Moses...and all the prophetic warnings that the Prophets teach...together forming what we call the Old Testament...and throw them in the trash bin of history. Listen to Yeshua:

NAS Matthew 5:17-19 ***Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

So don't think the Biblical Feasts were not for us the followers of Christ. Yeshua said they were. He also said woe be to the man who teaches that even a small piece from the Law of Moses (the Torah) and the Prophets has passed away. When might these commands and prophecies and laws become of no further relevance or obligation to us? Not until heaven and earth pass away, says Jesus. Well, we're still here, standing on terra firma, and we are still looking up into the same nighttime sky that the ancients did, so not one jot or stroke of the Torah

has been ruled invalid, yet. Once more... this is coming from the mouth of Our Savior. It is only a false manmade church teaching that seeks to overturn the command of Yeshua.

Now, let me state without equivocation that our personal salvation is in no way **dependent** on our observation of these Feasts. So...a typical gentile Christian might ask... then why should I feel any obligation to observe them? Because, as Yeshua equates, salvation **is** being born again. Being born is but the beginning of new life, a new way...the first word of the first chapter of our new lives. It's only the start of a journey: not the beginning, middle, and climax. We're not to stay newborns in Christ, though many of us do. We are supposed to grow, and learn, and put into practice...to work...that which results FROM our new birth... or perhaps better, our RE-birth. Because these feasts are commanded by God; because it is a matter both of our obedience and of our wanting, as redeemed people, to please our Lord, we should include them in our lives because He tells us to. Further, they remind us of foundational biblical principles **and** they demonstrate the work of Messiah and the redemptive plan of God for mankind. Within these laws and commands is embedded the only objective biblical code of morality. Without that, we are as a ship without a compass.

The 7 Biblical Feasts lay out the plan of redemption for mankind in 7 stages. They model the mission, the sequence, and the significance of Yeshua's redemptive work in carrying out His Father's saving will. In other words, these feasts, in addition to being literal commands of God that are fully meant to be practiced, also outline a prophetic pattern that will be carried out by the Savior, with much of it already having happened.

The 7 Feasts are timed to be in tune with the agricultural seasons; so, when the Bible speaks of seasons, remember that for the Hebrews a season was all about when to plant and when to harvest, and these are organically connected to when to observe God's appointed times. There are 3 Spring Feasts, one Summer Feast, and 3 Fall Feasts, for a total of 7. These 7 are NOT the total of ALL of God's appointed times, only the appointed Festivals.

Because these feasts are based on the ancient Hebrew calendar, which was based primarily on lunar cycles, by our modern **solar** calendars, the days...even the months...that these Holy Festivals occur vary a bit from year to year

compared to our Gregorian calendar. However, by the Hebrew calendar, they remain the same; the first feasts being in the month of Nissan, the final feasts in Tishri.

Briefly, each biblical feast is significant and prophetic as follows: 1) Pesach, The Feast of Passover, speaks of redemption...that the Messiah, our Passover Lamb, was slain for us and His blood atones for our sins. 2) Matza, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is about sanctification. The ordinance against the use of leavening is biblically symbolic of a) absence of sin, and b) absence of decay and corruption. Christ's sinless body was put into the tomb and it did NOT decay. 3) Bikkurim, the Feast of Firstfruits, speaks of firstlings...the first of things which always belongs to God. In the work of Messiah, it is about resurrection; Messiah is called the firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead. These are the 3 Spring Feasts.

Next, we have a Summer Feast: Shavuot, also called The Feast of Weeks. Christians know this one better as Pentecost. While Bikkurim, the final Spring Feast, represented the firstfruits of the first grain harvest of the year, which was Barley...Shavuot represents the celebration of the SECOND grain harvest of the year, which was wheat. Shavuot was timed to occur exactly 50 days from Bikkurim, the Feast of Firstfruits. The Greeks gave this Holy Day the name "Pentecost" meaning 50. This is the awesome day that the Holy Spirit came to indwell men. And, by the way, just so we're clear: a new holy day was NOT created by Christians to celebrate the New Testament happening of the coming of the Holy Spirit; rather, the Holy Spirit CAME on the long established (over 1300 years established) feast day of Bikkurim. And, in fact, we'll find that Jesus died on

Pesach, went into the tomb on Matza, arose on Bikkurim, and the Holy Spirit descended on men on Shavuot. Now, that is 4 very interesting "coincidences", are they not?

Naturally, I say "coincidences" tongue-in-cheek...for this was not coincidence, this was the whole point of the festivals in the first place. Am I allegorizing each of these important works of the Messiah so that they equate with a Festival? No. The **New** Testament tells us that's what occurred.

We've reviewed the first 4 Festivals...so, now we come to the final 3... the Fall Festivals. What is important for us to grasp is that Messiah has already fulfilled the first 4 Festivals on the exact appointed day of each of the Festivals as laid down in the Book of Leviticus. By doing this He has shown us something we can count on: the pattern of the great works of redemption occurring on the Feast days will continue. Why would we think that the acts and works of the Messiah that are perfectly typified in the first 4 Biblical Festivals would suddenly STOP being so in the final 3? Therefore, without doubt, ALL of the final works of Christ will occur on the last 3 biblical Feast celebrations. Interestingly, these last 3 feasts occur in a very narrow scope of time... 15 - 23 days. Indeed, as the Bible tells us, we can't know the year of Messiah's return; but we CAN know the season. And that season is the Fall. Let's look at these Fall Feasts now.

The Fall Feasts always begin on the 7th month of the year according to the Hebrew civil calendar, which is the same thing as the 1st month of the year of Hebrew religious event calendar; Tishri. On Tishri 1 is Rosh Hashanah, Tishri 10 is Yom Kippur, and Tishri 15 begins the week-long celebration of Sukkot.

The first Fall feast is most typically called Rosh Hashanah.... Jewish New Year. However, it is never called that in the Bible. Rather, it is Yom Teruah. Rosh Hashanah is a tradition. We won't spend too much time with this nuance, but be aware that there are a number of different Jewish calendar years; one is the civil calendar year, another is the tithing calendar year, and still another is the religious event year (and, there are others). By the civil calendar year, Yom Teruah (Rosh Hashanah) occurs on the 1st day of the 7th month. But, on the religious event calendar, Yom Teruah (Rosh Hashanah) occurs on the 1st day of the 1st month. Don't let that confuse you...it doesn't mean they change the names of the months around because of this. It's like the idea we have in Western society where we have a civil calendar year (the one we're all familiar with), but we also have in business a Fiscal Year, or we have a School year, which can begin and end on any number of months. For instance, in Florida a school year is typically August through May. August is the FIRST month of the school year, right? Or in the Hebrew way of thinking about it, the school year is from the 8th month to the 5th month. That is, the 8th month of the year, August, is the FIRST month of the school year and it is exactly synonymous to the idea that Tishri is the 7th month of the regular calendar year, but it is the 1st month of the religious event year. That is how it can be related that the New Year is on the 1st

day of the 7th month...because although it is the 7th month of the regular calendar year, it is also the FIRST day of the religious event year. It's just that for us, New Year is a secular civil event... for the Hebrews, New Year is a religious event.

Yom Teruah was first established in the book of Leviticus chapter 23, and more information was given about it in Numbers chapter 29. Together with the next Feast we'll discuss, Yom Kippur, these two Feasts and the intervening days are called the High Holy Days, and also known as the Days of Awe by the Jews.

Yom Teruah is also called the Feast of Trumpets. Yom Teruah in Hebrew literally means "the Day of Trumpet blasts", because on that day, the Shofar...the Ram's horn... is to be blown. During the 10 days that connect Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur, every person is supposed to carefully consider their lives and repent for their sins... but, note, THAT is a Tradition. **Biblically** what is ordered by God, it is to be a holy day of convocation... meeting together... and a day of Sabbath rest. Those who have studied with me for a while know that in addition to the weekly 7th Day Sabbath that we are all familiar with, God appointed other 'sabbaths', usually associated with the various feasts. Yom Teruah is one of those OTHER Sabbaths. On that day special sacrifices, centering around the 'Olah class of sacrifices (what we usually call the Burnt Offering sacrifices) was to be presented to the Lord. And, finally, a Shofar...what many Bibles mistakenly call a 'trumpet"... was to be blown. Indeed, on certain occasions a trumpet...specifically a silver trumpet...was to be blown. But in this case the word is teruah, which not only indicates that the instrument is to be a Ram's horn...NOT a silver trumpet...but that a teruah is a very specific series of blasts on the horn that has a certain meaning.

Like a military Bugler or a Drummer used to do in times of war...that is, they would play certain notes, or drum a certain cadence as signals to the troops to advance, or retreat, or form-up, or rest, or whatever...the Shofar was played using different calls to tell the troops what to do. The teruah is such a signal; it consists of 9 or more short blasts in rapid succession and it is an alarm, a warning; it was the "assemble to go to war" signal; a kind of battle cry.

What I've just told you is the sum total of what the Bible instructs for Yom Teruah, the first of the Fall Feasts. All other celebration associated with the way that holiday is typically celebrated today is Tradition. That said, we should pay close

attention to these traditions because the Rabbis knew well that these Holy Days had a significance much greater than just days of celebration and the rather simple instructions that come with them.

Yom Teruah, by tradition, is the day God sits in Judgment on the Universe. This is NOT an eternal judgment, but rather it is when He hands out merits for those who have been obedient and discipline upon those who have not; it applies to individuals and to nations. On Yom Teruah it is believed that God decides who will be blessed in the following year, and who will be cursed. Does one have abundance or famine? Does one have a time of peace, or war? Is it to be a year of sickness, or of health? Biblically speaking, Yom Teruah, more than any other day, exemplifies Yahweh's judging attribute. So, while there is celebration, it must be tempered with soberness of mind and heart.

Today, preparation for Yom Teruah usually begins by a week of prayer BEFORE Tishri 1, asking for forgiveness of sins. An interesting ritual is also performed by many Jews (not all), called **Tashlikh**. It means "casting off", and on the day of Yom Teruah Jews will either gather in a group, or as individuals, near a body of water; they'll pray a specific prayer of Tashlikh, and then they will typically cast bread crumbs into the water symbolizing the casting away of their sins (remember, leavening in the bread represents sin).

The spiritual significance for this day, according to the great Hebrew sages, is quite interesting. Before I tell you about it, let me point out something of interest: Yom Teruah is the ONLY Biblical Feast that occurs on the day of the new moon. Unlike what you might think, the new moon is NOT that huge, bright FULL moon...rather, the **new** moon is when the moon doesn't shine at all... it is when the moon is just a dark disk hanging in the sky. It is the darkest night of the month.

Listen to a Rabbinical sage's viewpoint of Yom Teruah from the Talmud, in chapter Rosh Hashanah 11a: "**...in the month of Nissan (Passover) our ancestors were redeemed, but in Tishri (Yom Teruah) they will be redeemed in the time to come...**" This Orthodox Rabbi's view was that redemption came to the Israelites in 2 stages: first from Egypt (symbolized by the Passover), and second it was redemption from eternal darkness (symbolized by Yom Teruah).

Prophetically, Yom Teruah signals the Day of the Lord; or as Christians usually call it, the Day of Judgment or Day of Wrath. Biblically the Day of Judgment does NOT mean a single day...a single 24-hour period. The Day of Judgment means the event of God's wrath, and there have been a few of them in times past. But in the future, in what is widely called The End Times, it is probably the day Messiah returns and begins to execute God's punishment on a wicked and unrepentant world. I say "probably" because we need to be cautious in expressing certainty about how any prophetic day of the future will play out. All of the prophets refer to it as a "day of darkness". Amos says in chapter 5, "**Is not the Day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not VERY dark, with no brightness in it**". Zephaniah said in chapter 1, "...**the great day of the Lord is near...a day of wrath.....a day of darkness AND a day of trumpets...**". In the New Testament John, in Revelation, says the sun became black and the moon red as blood...for the great day of God's wrath has come.

Yom Teruah is the Biblical Feast that seems to typify the return of Messiah, that also seems to happen in conjunction with the **beginning** of judgment by God. A period of time that will go on for a few days. A time of both literal AND spiritual darkness for most inhabitants of planet earth; but, a day of wonder and awe for those who trust in Him. I have little doubt that whether it is next year, or in some year after that, it is the Biblical Feast of Yom Teruah on which the Messiah will return; otherwise, it would break the pattern of the Feasts that up to now signaled precisely every redemptive event of Messiah. A pretty good reason to celebrate, and look forward, to Yom Teruah each year, I think. But at the same understand it will only be a day to celebrate for a relative few. The majority of the world's population will curse the day as the greatest day of planet-wide horror ever known.

10 days following Yom Teruah, on Tishri 10, is THE holiest day of the year: Yom Kippur, which means "Day of Atonement". What this day means to the Hebrew people is probably best summed up by means of a prayer usually recited by most observant Jews either in private, or in Synagogue, on Yom Kippur. It is a most profound prayer and it affects me deeply every time I read it or hear it... so, please quiet your minds for a moment, and pay heed to the Lord, and listen carefully:

"For the sin which we have committed before Thee by unclean lips, and for the sin which we have committed before Thee by impure speech; for the sin which we have committed before Thee by our evil inclination, and for the sin which we have committed before Thee wittingly OR unwittingly; for all these, O God of Forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement. In the book of Life, blessing, peace and good sustenance, may we be remembered and inscribed before thee."

Wow. What that says in a few words is enough spiritual food for a lifetime. But, also notice a certain element of that prayer that is quite different from what I think is a far too narrow gentile Christian view: it constantly uses the word "we", instead of "I". This is a prayer for the body of Israel as a whole. This is a prayer of confession and repentance on a national and congregational basis. Naturally, by definition, a nation is made up of individuals. But, the emphasis is the corporate body... ALL Israel... or the entire assembly of God worshippers... it's not about individuals. It is about the fact that we are seen by God as individuals on the one hand, as well as a member of the nation we belong to on the other. We cannot escape it. When a nation is judged, ALL who belong to that nation are affected; God worshippers are not exempted. In times past when Israel was judged, the great prophets who sent the warnings and were persecuted for their efforts were not protected. All suffered. We need to keep this in mind for the times we're in and the days of tribulation and wrath that lay ahead of us. Don't ever think God has promised to protect His own from mankind's evil (which is expressed in the word "tribulation"). In fact, we're promised we, too (even as sincere God worshippers) will be greatly afflicted.

Observant Jews believe that Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is the day that a person's fate for the coming year...the New Year that began just 10 days earlier, on Rosh Hashanah (Yom Teruah)...is decided by God. The Day of Atonement is a biblically commanded Holy day, and it was initially established in the Torah in the book of Leviticus chapter 16. Its purpose was, at that time, to cleanse the sanctuary...the Wilderness Tabernacle...the earthly dwelling place of God... and to atone for the sins of the people of Israel.

The tradition surrounding this awesome day is that it is the day that a person's fate is sealed... unchangeable... before God for the coming year. As with Yom

Teruah, Yom Kippur is a sabbath day (not the 7th day weekly Sabbath, but another day of ceasing from most normal work). Historically, and biblically, speaking Yom Kippur was the one day per year that a man...the High Priest...was allowed to stand in the Holy of Holies before the Ark of the Covenant inside the Sanctuary. There, the High Priest would sprinkle blood on the Ark, and then eventually on other furnishings inside the Sanctuary, to cleanse them from the unavoidable human contamination of sin and uncleanness from the previous year that came merely from the presence of the Priests. Later in that day, the Scapegoat ceremony occurred in which a specially selected he-goat, called the Scapegoat, was symbolically loaded up with the sins of Israel and sent out into the desert wilderness, away from God's people, never to return.

Yom Kippur is a very solemn day. It is a day for people to put themselves in proper perspective before the Lord God; to recognize our complete dependence on God not just for our physical lives but also for our spiritual standing before Him. Prophetically, Yom Kippur symbolizes the day all Israel will be saved. **After** the Messiah's return on Yom Teruah, Israel will be cleansed and saved from the onslaught of the gentile nations that have come against it. Yeshua came 2000 years ago as our Passover. He came meekly to be slaughtered as the Lamb of God in order to atone for our sins. Not only our sins of behavior and thought, but also for our inherent sin nature bequeathed to us from Adam and Eve. But, when He returns, He will come as the greatest, most ruthless warrior of all time. He comes as the Kinsman Redeemer who will take blood vengeance on a world of people that have persecuted His set-apart people, Israel, for millennia and in vengeance against those who have harmed all those joined to Israel under the ancient covenants by means of faith and trust in the God of Israel... that is, Believers in Yeshua.

Involved within all this is the end of the rule of the Anti-Christ, the end of the rule of Satan over the world, and the end of manmade systems of government and religion, as well as the end of all the people and nations who have gone against Israel. So, what we term the Battle of Armageddon also likely falls within this period of the Fall Feasts. Another pretty good reason for ALL Believers... gentile or Jew... to pay attention to these Biblical Feasts.

5 days after Yom Kippur comes the FINAL Biblical Feast...Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. This is what we'll discuss in the next segment of THE 7 BIBLICAL FEASTS AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR FOLLOWERS OF YESHUA.