

Teaching *from* Zion

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah,
and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem." — Isaiah 2:3



GOD'S CALENDAR

*"You shall keep the feast...
and you shall rejoice before
Adonai your God!"*

Deuteronomy 16:10-11



נתיביה Netivyah

Teaching from Zion

ISSUE 46 | NISAN 5782 | APRIL 2022

Published by Netivyah Bible Instruction
Ministry, Jerusalem, Israel

The articles printed in this issue of Teaching from Zion
are the sole responsibility of their authors.

Feel free to contact us at tfz@netivyah.org or by mail at
PO Box 8043, Jerusalem 91080, ISRAEL.

Layout & Design: itzodesign.com

About Netivyah

Netivyah in Hebrew means "the Way of the Lord." "The Way" was one of the names by which the early community of believers was known in the Brit Chadashah (New Testament). Paul says, "I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14 CJB). As followers of "the Way," we believe in the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We try to be faithful to God's law (the Torah) and to the rest of Scripture—the Prophets and the Writings. We believe that the Messiah promised in God's word is Yeshua (Jesus), the one who "saves His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

More Information: www.netivyah.org

 [netivyahisrael](https://www.instagram.com/netivyahisrael)  [netivyah](https://www.facebook.com/netivyah)



Basics of the Mo'adim

By Ariel Berkowitz. 4

God's Calendar

By Penina. 10

Holy Days in the New Testament

By Jared Abram Seltzer 14

Passover-Elhanan ben-Avraham

By Elhanan ben-Avraham. 22

Succot and Historical Context

By Ovadiah ben Avraham 24

The Biblical Holidays and Self-Development

By Tzvi ben Daniel. 28

The Holy Feasts of Israel

By Lion S. Erwtaman. 34

The Troubled Land and Purim

By Elhanan ben-Avraham. 40

Traditions, Feasts of the Lord in Israel

By Joseph Shulam 42

News from Netivyah

It seems like the harshest part of winter has passed, and spring is coming up all around. Already in February, we are seeing the almond blossoms and anemone blooming all over and the hills of the Jordan Valley are green from the rain with which God has blessed us.

We are also finally seeing most of the COVID restrictions lifted, and once again, tourists are welcome to come and visit Israel for the first time in more than two years. We are so grateful to our Heavenly Father for these blessings, and so much more!

We are also grateful to you for standing with us and all of Israel through these trying times. We cannot continue without your continued prayers and support. Thank you.

We are starting a new year for the food distribution project, Hamotzi, with some new families and some returning families. We are excited and grateful to be able to help more than 150 families and hope to help even more, as God provides, including the families fleeing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Please hold us and our brethren in prayer before God.

Our focus for the last few weeks has been preparing the Purim gifts for the believing soldiers, as we have done for more than 15 years now! This year we have prepared nearly 200 packages. We have delivered 80 of them to congregations in the north, and this week, we will finish up delivering the rest to the Tel Aviv area. Every year, we try to give them something useful to have during their service and also useful for them after their service. The gift is a "Leatherman multi-tool." We also include edible items like cakes, chocolate, coffee, and cookies as well as some personal toiletries like toothpaste, shampoo, and soaps. It is a blessing to give back to those who give so much to us. The soldiers are so grateful and appreciate our love and prayers!

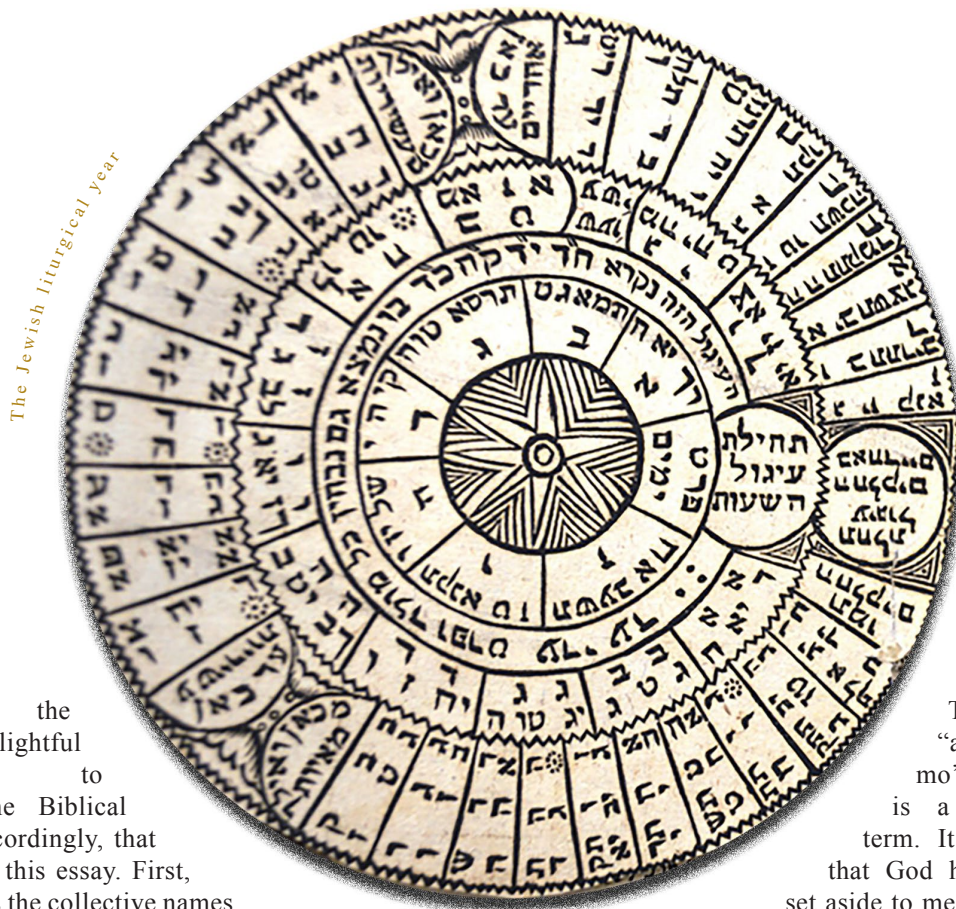
Finally, with spring, we will be celebrating God's appointed spring festivals; Passover and Shavuot/Pentecost. God commands us to remember that He brought our ancestors out of Egypt with a strong hand and also commands us to tell the children of every generation, AS IF IT HAPPENED TO US personally! Coming to Shavuot, we count forty-nine days from Passover and on the fiftieth day, we celebrate the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. There, He gave the Torah, and later, during the time of Yeshua, He gave us His Holy Spirit! We have so much to be grateful for; it is His perfect plan for all humankind!

Thank you for standing with us here at Netivyah. We ask that His blessings rain upon you and your families now and also throughout the year.

Daniel Stern and all of us at Netivyah

THE BASICS OF THE MO'ADIM

by Ariel Berkowitz
June 2021



The Jewish liturgical year

One of the most delightful subjects to explore is the Biblical holy days. Accordingly, that is the topic of this essay. First, we will discuss the collective names for these special days, then the bulk of this treatment will focus on why we are so enthusiastic about them. Let us begin.

The Collective Names

The Scriptures refer to these unique calendar days by two names. First, in Exodus 23:14, God instructs Israel to celebrate a chag (חג) three times a year. In fact, Exodus 23:15–16 speak of three

specific chaggim (plural). The word chag has to do with a festival wherein a participant makes a pilgrimage to the place where His House is. Thus, one name for at least three of these holy days is chag or chaggim (pl.) — pilgrimage festivals.

Leviticus 23:2 uses a second name for these festivals. The text says they are “The Lord’s appointed times.”

The words translated “appointed times” is mo’adim (מועדים). This is a rather picturesque term. It speaks of the fact that God has special moments set aside to meet with His people as a community. It is as if the Lord told Israel to get out their national calendar and mark the days that He will specify to them. It is true that God can and does meet with anyone on any occasion, for any reason. Yet, according to Leviticus 23, God announced to His people that He would meet with them in a very special way on the dates He was about to reveal to them.

As it happens, all three of the chaggim

Torah is the only place in the entire Word of God where God provides a calendar of times designated for His people to meet with Him as a community in a special way.

in Exodus 23 also double up as mo'adim in Leviticus 23. Because of this, for simplicity's sake, we shall refer to these festivals as mo'adim in the rest of this essay.

Notice what these special calendar days are not called. God does not call them "The Holy Days of Israel." Indeed, in Exodus 23:14, the Lord says, "Celebrate a chag to [or for] Me." They are God's idea and are celebrated unto the Lord. In like manner in Leviticus 23:2, the Lord says that mo'adim are "the Lord's mo'adim." The language God uses gives these special days a universal character to them. They are not the private property of the people of Israel. Rather, they were given to Israel for Israel to share them with all

who are in relationship with the God of Israel.

If we continue this thought, we will realize that the Torah is the only place in the entire Word of God where God provides a calendar of times designated for His people to meet with Him as a community in a special way. That would indicate that all of God's people are to meet with Him during the chaggim and mo'adim. It is fine if other holy days are created by God's people. However, the community of believers has a prime responsibility to celebrate those special festivals which the Holy One Himself created — the chaggaim and mo'adim of the Torah.

Special Days are Special!

The mo'adim are multi-faceted. Each has several purposes that complement the others very nicely. For each mo'ed it is possible to study:

- an agricultural theme
- an historical theme
- a theological theme (we call this "a vital-truths" theme!)
- a messianic theme

One theme is not more important than another; they are all important to be considered and studied. However, since this essay has a serious space crunch, we can only focus on one theme of the mo'adim. Hence, we are choosing to examine what each mo'ed has to say about the vital truths of our relationship with the Holy One. Here it goes!

Shabbat (שבת)

Shabbat is the first of the mo'adim mentioned in Leviticus (23:3). The word "shabbat" itself means "to cease." The day is a time of stopping what we normally do during the week to earn a living. Thus, Shabbat becomes an island of time set apart by the Lord for His people to explore the theme of spiritual rest found in Messiah's finished work, as expressed in Hebrews 4.

On this day, we have an opportunity to enjoy the finality of Messiah's atonement and to bask in the truths of what Yeshua, our Messiah, accomplished when He gave His life for us. When Shabbat is observed properly, all the fullness of Hebrews 4 and Isaiah 58 is reemphasized, and time is set aside to practice walking out who we are as a new-creation holy community.

Pesach (פסח)

According to Leviticus 23:5–6, the community of believers is to celebrate Pesach beginning on the 14th of the first month in the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to March/April. Pesach is a time set aside to remember how God set Israel free from slavery in Egypt. Hence, the idea of redemption is central to this mo'ed.

Yeshua is referred to as our Pesach Lamb because He set us free from slavery to sin. It is easy to see, therefore, other associated truths to explore on Pesach would include slavery to sin and why it was necessary for Yeshua to accomplish it. Moreover,

1. The term "Pesach Seder" is the traditional Jewish way of describing what it is that one does to celebrate Pesach. Although the term is not mentioned in the Bible, nevertheless it is a helpful way of referring to the meal that the Redeemed Community partakes in when it annually celebrates their redemption from slavery in Egypt. The term "seder" (סדר) means "order." It reflects the fact that this special meal has a definite order or ritual to it, both Biblically prescribed as well as including other traditional additions to enhance its Biblical instructions.

2. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 595.

When Shabbat is observed properly, all the fullness of Hebrews 4 and Isaiah 58 is reemphasized, and time is set aside to practice walking out who we are as a new-creation holy community.

it is equally important for everyone in the community to celebrate their national history of freedom. Accordingly, Jewish tradition refers to Pesach (as well as to the ensuing week of the Festival of Matzah) as z'man cheruteinu (זמן חרותנו), “the season of our freedom.” A main means of celebration is enjoying a Seder together, especially as a family.

Festival of Unleavened Bread ***(Hag haMatzot — חג המצות)***

The Festival of Unleavened Bread (Hag haMatzot) follows on the heels

of Pesach since it begins on the 15th of the first month. This special time, considered part of Pesach itself, begins as one is celebrating Pesach and continues for seven days where unleavened bread is eaten when one desires to eat bread, according to Leviticus 23:7–8.

The emphasis during this week is on the idea of salvation. The week-long celebration reflects the week-long journey of the redeemed to the sea and crossing it. It was during that experience that God provided a vivid picture of what it means to be “saved” — a rescuing from certain death (see Exodus 14:13).

In addition, we should note that according to 1 Corinthians 5:7 those of us who trust in Yeshua have been completely changed so that Paul can declare to us that we, in fact, are matzah! The Hebrew term “matzah” is associated with a verb that means “to drain out.” The picture seems to be that when Yeshua died for us, He took our sin out. We, in fact, became righteous from the inside out! A week spent eating matzah reminds us of that reality.

Waving of the First Fruits ***(Yom haBikkurim — יום הבכורים)***

Leviticus 23:10–14 says that on the day following the shabbat day of the Festival of Matzah, a first fruit celebration is in order. The First Fruits spoken of here is the first of two first fruits mo'adim. It is the first fruits of the barley harvest. On this day, the Torah instructs us to wave a sheaf of barley grain before the Lord. A sheaf

is a bunch of cut stalks of the whole barley straight from the field, with the chaff, or hard, dry outer husk covering the still intact grain. This chaff has no useful value for food and must be removed in order to access the useable grain. In the Scriptures, the chaff of the grain can picture our sinful flesh. As new creations in Messiah, we are like the pure kernel of grain covered over by the “chaff,” that is, a veil of flesh, which hinders our walk with God.

This mo'ed can remind us of God's unconditional love and acceptance. We, the pure grain with our chaff, are to know ourselves acceptable before the Lord (Leviticus 23:11). This understanding, a crucial and healthy element of our freedom, enables us to confront our sin directly and honestly. This is the time that we teach the truths of Colossians 2:11–12 and are reminded of them ourselves.


The day to celebrate this mo'ed is on the 16th of Nisan, the day after the shabbat of the Festival of Matzah (not necessarily the 7th Day Shabbat). It was most likely on this day that Yeshua rose from the dead. Remember that in Biblical reckoning, it is the date that matters, not the day of the week upon which the mo'ed falls, except the 7th day Shabbat.

Counting the Days ***(S'firat haOmer — ספירת העומר)***

Leviticus 23:15–16 mentions a time set apart to count days. We are to count 49 days, then, on the 50th day there is to be a second First Fruits celebration. According to the Biblical instruction we learn in Leviticus 23 and observe

3. Both the Jewish people and the Body of Messiah are divided on exactly which day to begin the counting. These authors for a long time believed that the counting always began on the first day of the week. However, upon further research, we are convinced that the traditional Orthodox Jewish point of view is the correct one. The date and not the day are the important factors to consider. Moreover, a study of how the first fruit of barley was done from Joshua chapter 5 is extremely important. A very helpful essay on the subject can be found from TorahResource.com by Tim Hegg called, “Counting the Omer: An Inquiry into the Divergent Methods of the 1st Century Judaism,” © 2009.

4. Traditional Judaism has virtually lost completely the happy agricultural motif of the counting period. Instead, the 49 days are used as a period of semi-mourning, remembering the persecution of Rabbi Akiva and his students by the Romans in 135 ce.



It is a good time of the year to discuss the concepts of sin, atonement, sacrifice, substitutionary atonement, forgiveness, and cleansing. It is also a time to assess the community's faithfulness to the Covenant made with the Lord at Mount Sinai.

in Joshua chapter 5, this also begins on the 16th of the first month. Let us not minimize this counting period. Modern Judaism calls it “Counting the Omer.” The word “omer” refers to a measure of grain. This reflects the fact that the counting period was originally, more or less, an agricultural celebration where the farmers would observe daily how much barley was ripening and how much the new wheat crop was growing.

The major emphasis here is on “counting” new fruit. After the Lord set Israel free from slavery in Egypt, He led them on a journey where He began to teach them how to walk in that new freedom as children of God. We are reminded of that journey from

Egypt to Mount Sinai during the counting period. We are reminded that we, too, walk a similar journey with the Holy One, one day at a time. Hence, it is during this time that we learn to follow Him one day at a time, experiencing new freedoms each day. It is also a great time to study the journey of Israel from Egypt to Mount Sinai in Exodus 14 to 18.

Weeks (Shavu'ot — שבועות)

Biblically, Shavu'ot is another First Fruits celebration, mentioned in Leviticus 23:16–22. On this day the first fruits of the new wheat harvest were brought to the Lord. Many believers in Yeshua know this special day by the Greek name, Pentecost.

According to rabbinic thinking, this is also the time of year when the Holy One gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai. Accordingly traditional Judaism calls this time z'man torateinu (זמן תורתנו), “the season of our Torah.”

It was also on the Shavu'ot following Yeshua's resurrection that the early believers were anointed and empowered with the Spirit of God so that they could take the Good News out to the entire world.

These three concepts combine to form an exciting picture. We can see that God would have us study the nature of written revelation (the Bible). In doing so, we will learn how God equipped the earliest followers of

5. The fact that traditional Judaism declares this day to be the Jewish New Year does not mean that this is its Biblical intent. Yet, there is nothing wrong with thinking of this day as a new year, since we have good evidence that it was the beginning of the new agricultural year. However, there are theological problems associated with the traditional Jewish observance of Rosh Hashanah that are beyond the intent of this essay to discuss.

Singing and dancing inside the sukkot and seeing the glow on the children's faces as they sit cozily with those whom they love the most is an integral part of the celebration.

Yeshua with the power of the Word of God and the power of the Spirit of God to bear fruit for Him. Since it was a First Fruits mo'ed, we know historically that God indeed brought in a magnificent First Fruits "offering" of new believers in Yeshua — about three thousand (Acts 2:41).

Feast of Trumpets (Yom Tru'ah — יום תרועה)

(Commonly called "Rosh Hashanah," the Jewish New Year)

God designed the first day of the 7th month (roughly corresponding to September of the western calendar year) to be a day on which His people are to gather in a special way to hear the sound of a trumpet. This trumpet is usually a shofar, a kosher animal's horn, but traditionally not from a cow.

Without a doubt, a major theme for this day would be the Biblical uses of the shofar. It is especially appropriate to focus specifically on the Bible's first mention of the shofar, at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, and on the use of the shofar in spiritual warfare.

Leviticus 23:24 indicates that this day is also a special day of remembrance. Although the text does not specifically indicate, it strongly hints at the subject that is to be remembered: the monumental events at Mount Sinai where a shofar was sounded in conjunction with the giving of the Torah and the making of the Covenant.

Day of Atonement

(Yom Kippur — יום הכפורים)

Leviticus 23:26–32, as well as all of Leviticus 16, instructs us about the Day of Atonement, Yom HaKippurim, commonly known as "Yom Kippur." To be sure, this mo'ed is not an easy one to understand. It had special application to Israel when the tabernacle/temple was in use. However, its themes go far beyond the walls of these sacred institutions.

It is a good time of the year to discuss the concepts of sin, atonement, sacrifice, substitutionary atonement, forgiveness, and cleansing. It is also a time to assess the community's faithfulness to the Covenant made with the Lord at Mount Sinai. In addition, a study of Hebrews 7–10 is also most appropriate. The Day of Atonement also helps us address the issues of the flesh and to know ourselves separate from (Colossians 2:11–12) and free from "the sin that so easily besets us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Feast of Tabernacles

(Sukkot — חג סוכות)

This next mo'ed mentioned in Leviticus 23:33–44 begins on the 15th of the seventh month and weaves together all the themes of the entire cycle. The concepts of harvest (God's provision) as well as the study of both eschatology and the Exodus motif are particularly relevant.



Moreover, the week is specifically designated for joyous celebration as the community participates in building family booths (sukkot, סוכות), which are temporary shelters. Singing and dancing inside the sukkot and seeing the glow on the children's faces as they sit cozily with those whom they love the most is an integral part of the celebration. It is a week set aside for talking about the Lord and what He has done historically after the Exodus as we sit in our sukkot. As we do so, the Spirit of God blends the whole community into close-knit fellowship with Him and with each other. As the holy community participates in this mo'ed, it will not be difficult to follow the Lord's commandment in Leviticus 23:40, "Rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days."

The Eighth Day ***(Shemini 'Atzeret, שמני עצרת)***

According to Leviticus 23:36, Sukkot was to last for seven days. But, on the eighth day God's people were/are to have a special Shabbat-kind-of-a day. If one combines the Hebrew words translated "eighth" (shemini, שמני) and "assembly" ('atzeret, עצרת), then we see how the traditional name is derived: Shemini 'Atzeret. That part was easy. However, it is not so clear what the thrust of this final mo'ed is to be and how to celebrate it.

The text says that it is a Shabbat-kind-of-a-day. Thus, we have time to be together and to discuss Biblical matters with each other. Since the time of the year is at the beginning

***Like
a circle, the
cycle of mo'adim has
no beginning and no end;
the mo'adim are always with
us, year in and year out.
And what do we do in
circles? We dance!***

of the rainy season in Israel, then praying for a good winter rain would be appropriate. Moreover, since it is the final mo'ed, it is suggestive that God's people spend time remembering the past cycle of mo'adim and some of the things we learned both individually and corporately.

In Summary

Are these appointed times for the people of Israel alone? Without a doubt, they have special relevance to

the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are unique reminders of their historical relationship with God. As such, their observance could mean very little to those who are non-Jews.

However, through the cycle of mo'adim, we believe that God issues a call to all non-Jewish believers and encourages them to take hold of their divine inheritance with Israel and to participate fully with their fellow Jewish believers in one unified and blessed celebration of His mighty acts of history and the Biblical truths relevant to each mo'ed.

Come and Dance!

As we have been saying all along, the special days in Leviticus 23 form a cycle. If we were to draw this on a piece of paper, we would first draw a circle. Like a circle, the cycle of mo'adim has no beginning and no end; the mo'adim are always with us, year in and year out. And what do we do in circles? We dance! The cycle of mo'adim is like a dance circle. If we have never participated, the best place to begin is — anywhere! Come experience the joy of the mo'adim with us. You can join the circle anywhere you like. What we know about the dance, we can share with you. In fact, we will all learn to dance better together — the way it was meant to be. Come, dance with us!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ariel received a B.S. from West Chester State University and Philadelphia Biblical University, and he received his M. Div. from Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, PA, USA. He also attended Rodef Torah School of Jewish Studies and was an instructor at Israel College of Bible, Jerusalem. Presently, he is an adjunct Professor with the "IBEX" program of The Master's University. He is also an instructor with Torah Resource Institute and with Torah Resource International.

GOD'S BIBLICAL CALENDAR

By Pnina

All of us have calendars. Maybe it is on our phone. A calendar to remind us of the family birthdays and anniversaries might also be found on the walls of bathrooms or on our refrigerators with our plans for the coming weeks. On many of those calendars, we might find the dates of the Biblical holidays during that year. Those holidays are not mere dates; they represent a connection between the heavens and earth, between history and future.

In the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:14, before man was even created, God already took care of the calendar, as we read, "And God said: let there be lights in the firmament of heaven, to distinguish between day and

night; let them be signs and appointed times, days and years." Those lights in the firmament are not only crucial for all the natural processes on earth, like the coming and going of seasons, but they also show us where we are on His calendar. So, the heavens are intricately connected to that calendar. Besides that, the Feasts and Holy Days of Israel are related to the agricultural processes in the land, and thus, there is also an earthly aspect to the calendar that exists. Not only are those two aspects found in the calendar, but it is also a reminder of historic events and a hope for the future. The holy days remind us of the great miracles God did for His people in the past on their way out of Egypt as well as the events in the life of Yeshua. They, especially the feast of Tabernacles, give

The Hebrew word in the Bible used for the most holy days, is mo'ed (מוֹעֵד), meaning, 'appointed time, appointed place or meeting'.

The Jewish calendar as we know it today is lunisolar, based on both the moon and the sun, as opposed to the Christian calendar which is based on the sun-cycle only, and the Islamic calendar which is based on the moon-cycle only.

us hope for the future when it will come to pass what John heard, “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle [Sukkah; סוכה] of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’” (Rev. 21:3).

The Hebrew word in the Bible used for the most holy days, is mo’ed (מוֹעֵד), meaning, ‘appointed time, appointed place or meeting’. It is thus not a mere moment in time; it is a moment of meeting with the Creator. This reminds us of the Biblical term for tabernacle, called the ‘Ohel Mo’ed’, the tent of meeting.

The three pilgrimage holidays are a clear manifestation of a meeting, “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed” (Deut. 16:16). During those mo’edim (appointed times), the men ascending to Jerusalem would bring to the Lord some of their agricultural production.

To learn more about the connection between agriculture and the Biblical calendar, we need to take a step back and look at the structure of God’s calendar.

The Jewish calendar as we know it today is lunisolar, based on both the moon and the sun, as opposed to the Christian calendar which is based on the sun-cycle only, and the Islamic calendar which is based on the moon-cycle only. A lunar calendar has 12 months of 29 or 30 days for a total of 354 days, so to be reconciled with the solar calendar, 7 intercalary months are added over a 19-year cycle. Therefore, in the Hebrew calendar today there are years which occasionally, like the current year, have a second month of Adar.

The Jewish calendar we know today however, is not entirely found in the Bible. In the earlier books of the Bible, we find only four names of months (or literally ‘moons’ יָרֵחַ in Hebrew): Aviv, Ziv, Ethanim, and Bul. The month of Aviv meaning ‘spring’ is the first month, the month of Ziv meaning ‘light’ is the second month, the month of Ethanim meaning ‘permanent’ (in the plural form) or ‘ever-flowing’ refers to the seventh month, and Bul the meaning of which is a little more obscure is the eighth month. The first month of Aviv corresponds to March-April in the Gregorian calendar (which is used in most parts of the world today), and the seventh month corresponds to September-October.

However, as you might know, nowadays the Jewish calendar starts with the month of Tishrei in September-October.

The names Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, and Elul are taken from the Babylonian month-names and only some of them are found in the Biblical books from time of the Babylonian exile onwards. The month of Tishrei got its name from the Akkadian word tašrītu, “beginning”. It is generally accepted that this change in the Hebrew calendar happened somewhere in the first centuries AD, and various reasons for this change might be thought of.

However, there is an earlier example of the same pattern of months found in a 10th century BC text from Israel. One of the oldest known Hebrew writings, the so-called Gezer Calendar, shows us the division of the months. The inscription, found near Gezer about 30 km west of Jerusalem, might be translated as follows:

1. Two months of ingathering (olives)/ Two months
2. of sowing (cereals)/ Two months of late sowing (legumes and vegetables)
3. A month of hoeing weeds (for hay)
4. A month of harvesting barley
5. A month of harvesting (wheat) and measuring (grain)

6. Two months of grape harvesting
7. A month of ingathering summer fruit
8. Avi....[Broken]

If we read the text as a calendar, we interestingly see that the first months mentioned here are the months of gathering (יִרְחוֹ אֲסִיף). In Exodus 23:15-16, we read, “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the first fruits of your labor which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labor from the field.”

Here, the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) is named Chag ha-Asif (חַג הָאֲסִיף), the Holy Day of Ingathering. Living in Israel, one might see around the month of October the olives that are picked and gathered. In ancient times the grape harvest might also have been around that time of the year. Though we see that the Biblical calendar places the Ingathering in the seventh month, the Gezer text places it as first.

Various interpretations of the text exist. Some claim it is a school-text written by a pupil, others interpret it as a song, or as a document used for gathering taxes. One of the interpretations that stood out to me looked at a different aspect of the text, which might teach us something today. The explanation assumes that most farmers were likely analphabetic in the 10th century BC. But even if they couldn't read or write, they would learn the agricultural activities from observing, practicing, and experiencing, rather than from reading texts. A farmer would know when to sow or harvest

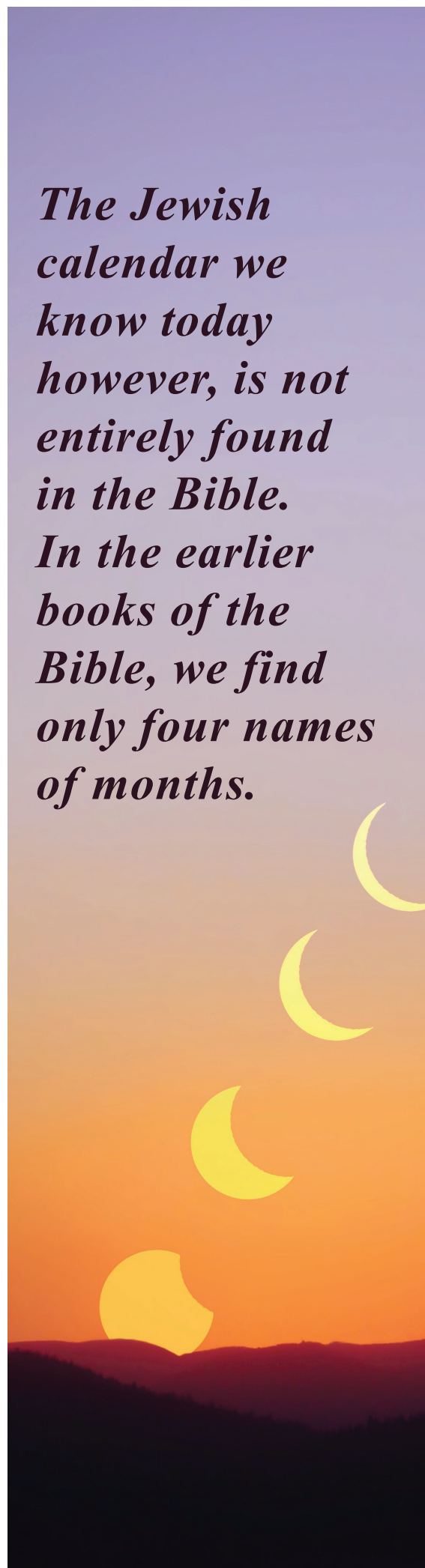
and did not need a written document to remind him. Thus, another purpose of the text should be thought of.

Texts of a similar genre are known from other places in the Ancient Near East, where the most important source of life, water, was not always abundant. Not having the rainfall needed in the right time of the year was one of the main concerns of any farmer. Since almost every natural phenomenon was believed to be the act of a deity with his own will, the farmer should please the sun and the moon, the god of the river, and the god of the winds, as well as many others in order to have a good harvest. The farmer was responsible to sow and harvest at the right time to keep up the cosmic order. A wise farmer would know the patterns of wind and rain and would understand the way of nature from his own experience and tradition.

However, in a sharp contrast, the Bible tells us that real wisdom cannot be gained by our experience, but rather, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). God gave us understanding of the natural world to a certain level, but the sustenance of life is not based upon our understanding. Deuteronomy 11: 13-15 reminds us, “And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.”

A wise farmer is a farmer who fears the Lord and keeps His commandments. Then he will be blessed, and after he gathers in his grain, wine, and oil, he brings part of it as an offering to the Lord

The Jewish calendar we know today however, is not entirely found in the Bible. In the earlier books of the Bible, we find only four names of months.



at His appointed times.

Some lessons might be learned from those texts, even for us who are not farmers in the land of Israel, living in a reality without a Temple in Jerusalem. The first and most obvious lesson is, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). We should not rely on our experience, our ability to predict the weather, or our advanced technologies. All our livelihood is provided by God.

A second lesson might be to give back to the Lord part of what He has blessed us with. The ancient Israelites brought their first fruits to the temple. We can bring our offerings in many ways, whether material or not. The Biblical calendar reminds us of God’s provision for our lives, and though it is always good to bring our offerings to God, during the holidays we are especially reminded of our blessings and our obligation to give thanks.

A third lesson, on which I will elaborate a little, is the importance of the awareness of the times. As mentioned above, the first month of the Biblical year is Aviv or Nisan in the spring. In the modern calendar, Tishrei is the first month in the fall. The first holiday of that month, the Day of Trumpets, is mostly called Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. This shift in understanding has an impact on our understanding of the future-aspect of the holy days. As mentioned above, the days have historical reasons, starting with Passover and the story of the Exodus. Then, according to tradition, the Torah was given at mount Sinai at the time of the Feast of Weeks. The freedom from

slavery and the giving of the Torah are reflected in the gospels, in Yeshua’s death and resurrection at Passover, and in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on His followers during the Feast of Weeks. The Feast of Tabernacles, the third major holiday, has a future promise, as we saw in Revelation 21:3.

But before that moment, there will be judgement, which we are reminded of during the day of Trumpets when we hear the calling to repent and also during the Day of Atonement. The order of the

***We do not only
need awareness
of what time of
the year it is,
but also what
year in time it is.***

months and holy days is thus crucial to understand the order of the timeline of world history. If the focus on (the meaning of) the holy days is not right, we might spiritually fall asleep and be unaware of the times we live in.

We do not only need awareness of what time of the year it is, but also what year in time it is. Yeshua taught about the end of the age and amongst other things mentions the luminaries as a major sign: “Immediately after the tribulation of

those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt. 24:29). Those signs, amongst others, are a clear indication that the day is near. Therefore, Yeshua said, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So, you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matt. 24: 33).

Our consciousness of God’s calendar, visible in the luminaries, the agricultural cycle of the land of Israel, and in the historical events is crucial. In Numbers 10:10, God says: “And on your joyous occasions, your appointed feasts, and the beginning of each month, you are to blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to serve as a reminder for you before your God. I am the LORD your God”.

As a farmer gets ready for the harvest, we need to be ready for Yeshua’s return. The future Day of Judgement, followed by a period wherein He will ‘tabernacle’ amongst us might be very near. Are we like the ancient farmer, ready for the right task at the right time? Do we, like the ancient farmer, rely on our own understanding and wisdom gained by experience, or do we have real wisdom which is fear of the Lord? Do we have first (spiritual) fruits to offer the Lord, so that we might not appear before Him empty-handed? God reminds us during the year, through His Feasts and Holy Days, of His plan with the world. May we be prepared for the next ‘meeting’!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pnina has been living in Israel for the past five years while also studying Biblical archaeology. She likes to explore the land of Israel, uncover its past, and enjoy the variety in nature, people, and stories that the land is blessed with.

HOLY DAYS

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

By Jared Abram Seltzer

“**T**he Jewish holidays are obsolete because Jesus fulfilled the law,” or at least this is the popular, traditional handling of the Tanakh. Many friends and family members remain perplexed that any believer should desire to interact with those antiquated commandments. Alas, this picture succinctly sums up the chasm separating mainstream Christendom from the praxis of the Messiah and of the first believers in Him. This essay will serve as a treatise attesting to the enduring nature of Torah and will enumerate examples of how the Apostolic authors both observed and encouraged observance of the holy days.

Two Views

In brief, there are two diametrically opposed approaches concerning the Biblical holidays which are also approaches to the “Old Testament” in general, and they amount to theological worldviews—frameworks which govern interpretation of every topic, injunction, or nuance of the Bible. The one posits that Jesus’ ministry somehow nullifies obligation to accomplish commandments of the Old Testament, whereas the other

says that Jesus’ ministry is precisely what encourages and enfranchises His followers to follow whatever possible from Tanakh. Fortunately, the chasm between these two positions can be bridged via two techniques: defining the terms and remaining objective.

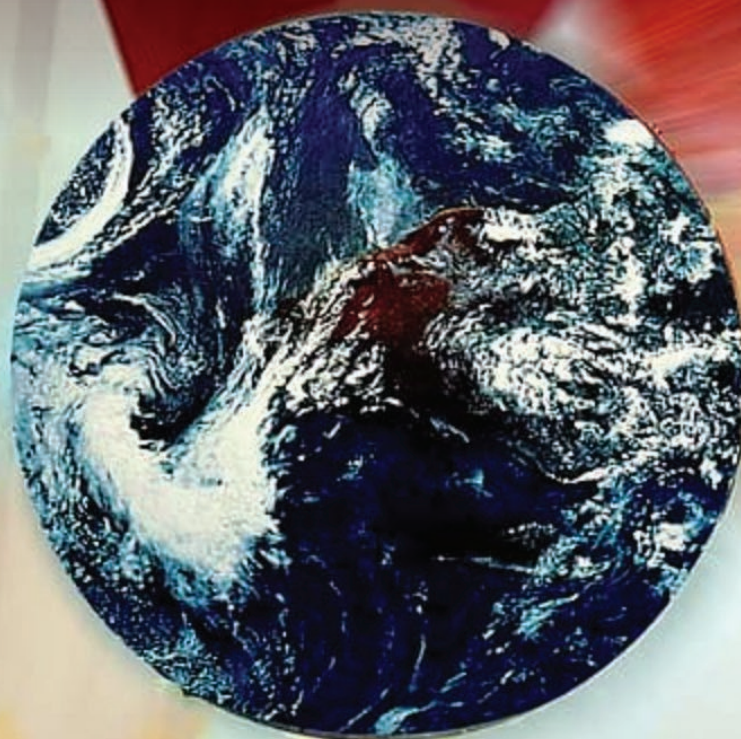
While it is tempting for a pro-Torah adherent to brush off the more popular view as uncritically simplistic, this would not be objective, and furthermore, the popular view is actually not for naïve people. Indeed, plenty of learned theologians bolster the traditional view with a complex labyrinth of prooftexts which aim to rebut pronomial dissenters but might just be overwhelming them. Its advocates are anything but simplistic, and the view is anything but simple for that matter. But it is precisely the complexity that shrouds its core flaw, making the popular view both plausible and credible. What is that core flaw? It says, “God changed.”

Did God Change?

The way this tenet is usually phrased makes it sound rather palatable, that

To focus on the heart of the matter, it must be clarified exactly what about God changes and what about God doesn’t change? More precisely, what did God mean when He said, “I change not”.

Another thing that does not change is God's value set: those things that are pleasing to God and those things which are displeasing to God.



God deals with His people in a dynamic way just as parents' interactions with their child change as the child matures. Dispensational theology timelines attempt to illustrate this evolution of divine interaction. When worded this way, anyone would be hard-pressed to disagree, but there is an unwarranted change in definition happening here. To focus on the heart of the matter, it must be clarified exactly what about God changes and what about God doesn't change? More precisely, what did God mean when He said, "I change not" (Mal. 3:6, cf. Num 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29, Heb. 6:18, 13:8, Jam. 1:17b).

There is one (perhaps counterintuitive) thing that does not change, and that is how God interacts with people.

He invariably interacts with people based on "where they are"—on their experiences, situation, motivations, and responsibilities—which necessarily means that His interactions with people will vary as vastly as people vary. Granted, this varying might be identified as change, yet it is change due to human variation and not divine wavering. Another thing that does not change is God's value set: those things that are pleasing to God and those things which are displeasing to God. This is the axiom that the antinomial stance must reject. Instead, it claims that what God once called futile or abominable before Christ's ministry, He now allows or even encourages after Christ. Stated in other terms: God changed.

Defining Terms

The best place to start in unravelling an enigma is with definitions. First and foremost, calling the holy days "Jewish" is a misnomer which a priori relegates them to Jews only. But not only has the meaning of the word "Jewish" changed over time from Judahite to Judean to those ethnically Israelite or adherents to the religious philosophies of Judaism, but also, God calls the holy days His own, not "Jewish". He shared them with His people as a blessing and invited His people to observe them as a means of coming near to Him. (To be clear, in the New Testament several holidays are indeed called "of the Judeans/Jews", but this occurs in the Gospel of John who was an Israelite maybe even from the



Were it true that Messiah abrogated Torah, it would be another example of a house divided against itself. Messiah even says to the unbelievers of His day, that if they do not believe Moses' writings, how could they believe Yeshua's words?

tribe of Judah but certainly whose Master was of Judah albeit from the country of Galilee, therefore John must be referring to customs of the people of the land of Judea and not referring to all people of Judahite or Israelite descent in general.)

Secondly, making the issue of holidays about ultimate "salvation" is usually given unbalanced emphasis in a discussion like this one. That is a strawman argument. The antinomial position holds that the law was and is inadequate to effect or maintain ultimate

salvation, and therefore any attempt to keep Biblical law is either of no ultimate benefit or is a distraction/detriment to God's plan of salvation. It is perfectly agreeable that the laws' purpose was never to secure ultimate salvation from the coming judgement. Indeed, the express and Biblically defined purpose of the law is (1) to identify sin, (2) promise blessing to the one keeping it, and (3) curses to the one shirking it (1 John 3:4, Deut. 11:26-28, Deut. 28-32). But to conclude that the God-given law is an impediment to God's cosmic plan

rings of jarring dissonance. Indeed, Messiah's adage was that "a kingdom divided against itself will fall." Did God sabotage Himself by giving Israel His commands, decrees, ordinances, and judgments? Or worse, are pious believers violating God's will by upholding what He personally told Moses to teach to His people to do, keep, and guard throughout their generations?

One solution to this conundrum is to appropriate Torah pursuance to ethnically Israelite/Jewish people only and to

If the Sabbath was to pass away, then what is the meaning of this prophecy, the fulfillment of which would take place decades after the crucifixion?

exempt all others. This shortsighted suggestion fails to recognize several important Biblical truths: (1) non-Israelites joined the “ethnic Israelites” in the Exodus journey including the Mt. Sinai covenant experience; (2) there are many examples of non-Israelites joining Israel in their worship and obedience of the true God, the prototype of whom would be father Abraham himself; and (3) the Apostolic epistles indicate that Gentiles who are faithful to God through Israel’s Messiah are grafted into Israel, they are adopted as the children of God, and although they were once alienated from Israel, yet they have been drawn near to become fellow citizens with the holy ones in the family of God (Eph. 2:11-22). If God separated the enmity that was between Jews and Gentiles in order to make them one (v.16), then it becomes convoluted to argue that Torah is obligatory for Israel if they are Jewish and Torah is discouraged for Israel if they are not Jewish.

The debate about observing holidays does not explicitly arise from the Scriptures; it arises from conflicting interpretational paradigms of those Scriptures. The debate, when distilled to its simplest form is over whether or not believers should strive to obey whatever God has revealed in Scripture. Surely an antinomian would scoff at such a dilemma because he would actually agree that believers should obey what has been revealed, providing the caveat that God has revealed that the ancient law necessarily became defunct in the wake of Messiah’s fulfillment of the

law. Worded differently, the person and ministry of Messiah was so superior to the law that the law dims into obscurity from His radiance.

Actually, what happens by such a fantastic explanation is the conception of a new God! See, if the law should be equated with the Old Testament methods of God, and the ministry of Jesus fundamentally and objectively supersedes those former ways, then the God of the Old Testament is intrinsically different and also inferior to the God of the New Testament—ergo, two Gods with differing sets of values. But doesn’t Hebrews speak of the superseding nature of Messiah over the Old Testament practices? Actually, Hebrews 8:6 speaks of a better ministry than the previous one, that is to say, the high priesthood of Messiah supersedes the high priesthood of Aaron. The book of Hebrews does not afford a carte blanche for Christians to abrogate the Mosaic scriptures. No, rather, the person of Messiah is the physical embodiment of the divinely given law. God’s values were and still are enumerated by the revelation that He gave to Moses and the Prophets, and they are embodied in the exemplar life of Yeshua the Messiah. God is not inferior, His Torah is not inferior, and Yeshua is not inferior; they are three forms of the same divine and unchanging standard—one spiritual, one written, and one made flesh.

A Self-Defeating Position

It is possible that some antinomians

simply do not realize how they are pulling the carpet from beneath their own feet. Surely by the first century, every Messianic expectation that led up to and pointed to Yeshua originated in the Law, Prophets, and Writings. Indeed, after Yeshua’s resurrection and even long after His ascension, those scriptures continued to prove His Messiahship as they poured from the mouths of the disciples and of Paul; to be clear, there was no New Testament for the first several decades of the Jesus movement. So, a claim that the One called Christ could have come to contradict or nullify Moses—the scriptures that He and his witnesses cited as proof of His Messiahship—per the Mosaic revelation itself (Deut. 13), would categorically disqualify Him from any chance of being the Messiah! Were it true that Messiah abrogated Torah, it would be another example of a house divided against itself. Messiah even says to the unbelievers of His day, that if they do not believe Moses’ writings, how could they believe Yeshua’s words (John 5:47)? Furthermore, this self-defeating position cannot expect any future fulfillments of the prophecies of Tanakh, something that should be possible until the heaven and earth pass away (Mat. 5:18).

The implication seems to be that the new Gentile believers would be learning little by little as they heard Moses every Sabbath.

It is not only possible, but also probable, that the believers were being judged and condemned for following the scriptures; much like has happened throughout history.

Instead, far from declaring the law or the Biblical Holidays defunct, post-Messiah, the Apostolic Writings uphold (both in word and deed) the same instructions given to the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai. Even though most of the New Testament was certainly written several decades after the crucifixion, alas there is no poignant indication to the reader within its pages that the Torah had fallen into obscurity by the time of their penning.

Sabbath

Few topics are as well documented as Israel's observance of Sabbath. Part of the Ten Commandments (which nearly all Christians believe to continue to be binding) is the Sabbath commandment to work six days and cease from work on the seventh day. Throughout recorded history, the Sabbath has been a day of

rest that begins Friday evening and ends Saturday evening. The eventual transference of Sabbath's sanctity to Sunday is nowhere endorsed by holy writ (and instead prophecy indicates that Sabbath will continue to be observed into the new age by all flesh, Isa. 66:23), but the sanctification of Sunday lies outside the scope of this article. Indeed, every mention of Sabbath in the Bible is a day of rest, occasionally referring to certain annual holidays but predominantly referring to the weekly day of rest on the seventh day.

Over three-quarters of New Testament occurrences of "Sabbath" appear in the Gospels pertaining to Yeshua's ministry and passion week. It was His custom to attend and sometimes also teach in synagogues on Sabbath (Luke 4:16). But He also did a few controversial things on Sabbath that get interpreted as abolishing Sabbath. He healed on Sabbath citing that if it is fine for people to loosen and lead their animal to water on Sabbath (which the pious did), then it must be permitted to free a child of Abraham from her infirmities on Sabbath, too (Luke 13:15-16). Yeshua also defended the actions of His hungry disciples when they plucked, tritured, and consumed grain from a field on Sabbath. He did not defend working on Sabbath, which harvesting and threshing are forms of work, but He noted that if the temple ministry is permitted on Sabbath and also feeding the hungry takes priority over the temple ministry (as represented by David and his men), then it follows logically that feeding the hungry must take priority over Sabbath (Mat. 12:3-5). Further, a prophecy in the Gospels shows compassion for the pregnant or nursing if they must flee in winter or on the Sabbath (24:20). If the Sabbath was to pass away, then what is the meaning of this prophecy, the fulfillment of which would take place decades after the crucifixion?

Just after Messiah's burial, His followers rested on Sabbath (Luke 23:56), and after the ascension there is mention of a "Sabbath-day's rest" (Acts 1:12) which should have been meaningless to the believers if the Sabbath had become defunct to them, yet the text makes no mention of its passing in those books which were written decades later. However, the value of Sabbath on which day Moses is read in synagogues around the world is upheld in the context of what new Gentile believers ought to do as they turn to God (Acts 15:21). Peter, James, and Paul agreed that it is not right to load new Gentile believers with such a yoke as they themselves struggled to bear, and so James reasoned that only four injunctions be assigned to them since Moses is taught in every city in the synagogues on Sabbath. The implication seems to be that the new Gentile believers would be learning little by little as they heard Moses every Sabbath.

Like Messiah's, it was also Paul's custom to attend synagogue, or if unavailable, a nice quiet place on Sabbath (Acts 13:14-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). There are a few passages used to bolster Biblical support for Sunday rest, for instance Acts 20:7. However, the passive participle "having assembled" indicates that the disciples had already gathered together when this story takes place. This story takes place on the "first-day" but before midnight. Since a day begins at sundown in Hebrew reckoning, it means that they had gathered on Sabbath and continued in fellowship that evening into the first day until midnight. The reason they did so is because Paul was slated to depart on the morrow (sunup) which is Sunday morning. But if work is not permitted on the Sabbath, and Sunday was the new Sabbath, then Paul would be travelling on it and approving of the sailors of the ship working on it. No, rather, Sabbath was still the seventh day on which no work is to be done, and the passage in

Passover is a picture of Messiah. God told the Israelites in the book of Exodus to put the blood of a lamb on their door and they would be saved from the judgement of death, and this indeed parallels what Messiah accomplished in His ministry.

Acts 20 records something of a going-away party for Paul on a Saturday night.

A few other oft cited prooftexts come from other New Testament books. One comes from Revelation where the text quotes John as saying, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Somehow, this "Lord's day" was assumed to be related to a later Greek expression referring to Sunday, and this became another proof text. However, a cursory word study of which day is the Lord's reveals that either Sabbath or, more likely, the final "Day of the Lord" spoken of by the prophets is a much more likely candidate.

Another passage is when Paul tells believers to make a collection on the first day for the holy ones of Jerusalem, and some think this is referring to an offering plate in church. But the context is that each person should set aside a contribution and store it up at their own place every first day (1 Cor. 16:2). That way when Paul and his friends come, people will not be scrambling to collect everything; the contributions will have been stored up and ready to go.

When Paul writes to the Colossians, he tells them to not let anyone judge them "in... a feast or... new moon or Sabbath" (Col 2:16). It is often assumed that Paul is speaking to believers who refuse to do these things and that they are judged by legalistic Jews. But Paul takes about eight verses of Colossians 2 to describe the puffed-up and worldly group that appears to be at odds with the believers

there. It is against these people that Paul writes that the believers should not be judged or condemned (v.8). This group is called beguilers with enticing words, having humility for show, worshipping angels, following rudiments of the world, having vain deceit—these do not describe Torah keeping Jews. It is not only possible, but also probable, that the believers were being judged and condemned for following the scriptures; much like has happened throughout history.

Passover

Passover (Pesach) is a picture of Messiah. God told the Israelites in the book of Exodus to put the blood of a lamb on their door and they would be saved from the judgement of death, and this indeed parallels what Messiah accomplished in His ministry. While, in the Gospels, we see Yeshua and His disciples celebrating Passover at the Last Supper, pre-resurrection (Mat. 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13), yet Paul wrote much later on to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:7-8), asserting that "Messiah our Passover was sacrificed for us, so we [both Paul and the Corinthians?] ought to keep the feast...with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Granted his point was to make a word picture about evil versus truth, yet the apostolic command to keep Passover is there, post-resurrection. Even though Passover was a foreshadow of Messiah's earthly ministry, yet it continues to serve as a reminder of His love for us and continues to point forward to the

ultimate salvation that He will effect for His people at the last day.

Unleavened Bread

The festival of Unleavened Bread (Matzot) is seven days long starting Passover night. The passages that speak of Passover usually have the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the context, too, since the two were adjacent on the calendar. It commemorates the hurried departure of the Hebrews from Egypt such that there was no time to make leavened bread. This feast is mentioned in the synoptic Gospels only just before the passion week. As mentioned earlier, Paul alluded to it, too, when he wrote about unleavened bread of truth. Lastly, it shows up two times in Acts. When Peter was in prison awaiting execution and God sent an angel to miraculously free him, it was the week of Unleavened Bread (12:3). And lastly, just before Paul and his group left from Philippi, it was Unleavened Bread (20:6).

First Sheaf of Barley

The first sheafs of barley ('Omer) were collected and brought to the temple on this holiday as an offering. There were two different reckonings of when this holiday should occur, but in the year Yeshua was crucified, it appears that both interpretations fell on the same day—the day of Yeshua's resurrection. This imagery is why Paul points to Yeshua as being the first fruit of those who sleep (1 Cor. 15:20).

Feast of Weeks, Pentecost

Fifty days later, the wheat crop would ripen, and the first fruits of wheat were to be brought to Jerusalem's temple. Just like Passover, the Feast of Weeks (Shavu'ot) was a pilgrimage festival which brought people (primarily Jews) from all over the world to Jerusalem. Many people better know this holiday by its New-Testament Greek name Pentecost. Pentecost appears three times in the apostolic writings. In one of them, we see Paul wanting to remain in Ephesus until Shavu'ot (1 Cor. 16:8), and in another we see Paul rushing to get

is important. There are parallels to the disciples' Pentecost experience, but it must first be clarified that it probably did not happen in the "upper room" where a chapter earlier the new twelfth disciple was chosen by lots. The text says that on Pentecost, "they were all with one mind in the same place" sitting in or at a house (Acts 2:1-2). On Pentecost, the Bible commands that Israel be at the place where God would choose (the Jerusalem Temple), and the temple was regularly called "the House", so it is probable that the believers were actually congregated at the Temple where other Jews from around the world would also

of recipients of the Holy Spirit increased 3000 on that day (v. 41).

Trumpets

For modern Israel, the Feast of Trumpets is the beginning of the civil new year. But Biblically, it was a day of trumpeting (of trumpets or shofars) as a memorial (Lev. 23:24). What is to be remembered is not explicitly in the text, but since trumpets are used for convening the people or calling the people to arms, it is reasonable to conclude that the holiday was to memorialize God's military salvation. The Jewish sages compiled a list of ten things that they thought the trumpet blasts ought to recall on this day: coronation of the king, repentance, the voice at Mount Sinai, warning of danger from guards on the city walls, coming war to the Jerusalem Temple, the binding of Isaac (because of the substitutionary horned ram), fear or awe, judgment, the ingathering at the final redemption, and resurrection.

In the New Testament, we see the theme of trumpet blasts three times paralleling these ideas. In Yeshua's apocalyptic prophecy, the sign of the Son of Man coming in power and glory is accompanied by His angels going out with a trumpet blast to gather the elect (Mat. 24: 30-31). This imagery paints a picture of a mighty military hero going out against all the tribes of the earth (later likened to a wicked servant who is destroyed, v. 51) taking some people and leaving others on the holy day of trumpeting. The same theme is spoken of by Paul (1 Th. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:52). There, the trumpeting is a shout, the voice of an archangel and trump of God. His return brings the resurrection of the faithful; those resurrected and those who remain alive will be caught into the air, He will lead them to the Mount of Olives, and they will forever be with the Lord.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a picture of God dwelling with His people, first in the wilderness, then in the Temple, then in the ministry of Yeshua who is the visible image of the invisible God.

to Jerusalem in time for Shavu'ot (Acts 20:16). But by far, the most well-known verse about Shavu'ot is in Acts 2.

Jewish tradition claims that it was during the Shavu'ot season that God gave the Torah (instructions) of God to Moses on Mount Sinai during the Exodus journey. Further, it uses homiletical extrapolation to assert that at that time, the Torah was spoken in 70 languages so that all of the nations of the world should understand, and that as God spoke, there was a great noise from heaven as God descended in fire (b.Shabbat 88b, Exodus Rabbah V:9, cf. Exo. 19:18-19). While this conjecture cannot be proved, it was certainly a common tradition contemporary to Christ, and that is what

be gathered. What ensued was a great sound from heaven like a rushing wind, fires that descended upon the believers, and the believers began speaking in other languages which the pilgrims understood. Remember, this was the same day of the year that God gave Israel divine revelation millennia prior amid great sounds, fire, and (traditionally) all the languages of the world, and now the pilgrims at the temple witnessed a great sound, fire descending, and they heard all the different languages. The parallels are undeniable, and that is the point. God wanted to be clear that what was happening was of importance comparable to that of the original giving of the Torah. And just as Shavu'ot was a first-fruits festival, so also the first fruits

***So He could not
have nullified
the observance
of the holidays.
Rather than
nullifying
anything from
Scripture,
Messiah upholds
and lives out
Torah and tells
His disciples
to follow His
example.***

Day of Atonement

Ten days after the holy day of Trumpets came the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On this day, the High priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement or covering for the sins of the nation. There is one narrative mention of this holy day in Acts 27:9, but the most well-known New Testament reference to the Day of Atonement is from the letter to the Hebrews. There, Yeshua is reckoned a priest in the heavenly tabernacle, not of the order of Aaron whose ministry was in the Earthly tabernacle which was a shadow of the heavenly, but of the order of Melchizedek, whereby he made atonement once and for all by his own blood and not by that of goats and calves (9:7-12).

Moreover, it was not the bull or first goat offering that carried the sin burden of the people. It was the scapegoat on which the priests would confer the sins of the nation that they would drive into the wilderness, and to prevent it from returning someone would follow it and ensure its death there. Although the crucifixion did not occur during the Day of Atonement season, yet like the scapegoat, Yeshua was condemned in Jerusalem and then driven out of the city to die. Maybe it was with this imagery in mind that John wrote, “He is the propitiation/atonement for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world...whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:1, 6).

Finally, it is the Day of Atonement that reckons the final judgement. Those who are atoned are written into the Book of Life, but whoever is not will be cast into

the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

Tabernacles

Five days after the Day of Atonement is the greatest celebration—the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). In the wilderness, Israel dwelt in temporary structures, and this festival commemorates that journey by commanding Israel to live in booths for seven days. This was the third and final pilgrimage festival, and as such, Yeshua went to Jerusalem for it (John 7). The word tabernacle is Latin for a dwelling canopy, and it translates the Hebrew word mishkan, “dwelling place.” The Feast of Tabernacles is a picture of God dwelling with His people, first in

the wilderness (Exo. 25:8), then in the Temple (1Ki. 8:13), then in the ministry of Yeshua (John 1:14; 14:9-10) who is the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and finally when Messiah returns to rule the Earth from Jerusalem and will forever dwell among His people (Zec. 2:10-11/14-15, Rev. 21:3).

There is one more holiday which is actually part of Sukkot. The eighth day (the day after Sukkot ends) is called the Last Great Day (Sh’mini ‘atzeret). On this day there was a traditional, joyful water drawing ceremony in Jerusalem, when water drawn from the Gihon spring was taken up to the Temple to praise God for providing rain and to pray for adequate rain in the season to come. It was on this day that Yeshua called to the people, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37).

Conclusion

Indisputably, the holy days did or will point to aspects of Messiah who is the source of human salvation and redemption. But the question about whether these festivals should still be kept by believers is answered in two ways. There is a logical argument that if Messiah abrogated anything of the Torah received by Moses, the holidays or otherwise, then He would disqualify Himself from being Messiah, so He could not have nullified the observance of the holidays. Rather than nullifying anything from Scripture, Messiah upholds and lives out Torah and tells His disciples to follow His example—and we see that they do, post-resurrection, and this is the second way to answer. See what Messiah, the apostles, and the early congregation did, and do likewise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jared Seltzer is a content writer and editor for Netivyah, holds degrees in biblical history, culture, and languages, and loves both to learn and to teach especially about the intersection of nascent Christianity with Second Temple Judaism.

THE PASSOVER

By Elhanan ben-Avraham

We stand this day at Passover in the promised land of Israel with our children and our children's children. We live in the new/old land among the ancient Hebrew people, restored after two thousand years of dispersion among the nations. Unique and without precedent in human history, this people has returned to its Biblical homeland to repair and restore a land that lay desolate for many generations to all who passed by. The Greeks and the Romans, the Nazis and the Soviets arose and fell in that time, but Israel has again risen upon the modern stage of the human drama, resurrecting the ancient tongue of the prophets, of Moses and Jesus: Hebrew. It has all occurred in the twinkling of an eye, as I was born three years before the rebirth of this nation in 1948, as was foretold by the prophets of Israel. Arriving here in 1979 by the directive of the Almighty, I have lived to witness more than half of the history of this re-born nation, in the face of constant opposition and threat of destruction, wars, terrorism, hatred, and the curses of our intractable enemies. And yet we have seen the promises of the Creator manifest before our eyes and in our lives, and we are witnesses to his great faithfulness, provision and protection. We have beheld the barren land become renewed from a third-world frontier to a powerful and fruitful nation despite all opposition.

Like the children of Israel who left the slavery of Egypt in the Exodus, we have come now from all the nations in fulfilling the promises of God. And like the Hebrews of that first Passover, we are pursued by the armies of hatred, the pharaohs of the world who would erase this long history from the



We are witnesses to his great faithfulness, provision and protection. We have beheld the barren land become renewed from a third-world frontier to a powerful and fruitful nation despite all opposition.

annals of time. And like those early Hebrews, we trust in YHVH, the eternal God of Israel, whose ways defy the logic and reason of human genius. The smearing of a lamb's blood on the doorposts would bring deliverance to a people against overwhelming odds, just as we today begin to recognize the blood of the Lamb of God who would deliver us at the Passover, the one who would lay down his life for this nation, as told by the high priest Caiaphas in the first century CE.

We have committed our lives and the lives of our offspring to the trust of YHVH, and our very lives, like Moses', stand as an offering and an intercession before God for this yet stiff-necked people who has been gathered back from dispersion. Daily, the ancient artifacts, long buried in this land and city of Jerusalem, are brought to light, confirming the history of the Jewish people here going back three thousand years. Even the "new" walls of Jerusalem are more than two centuries older than the founding of the USA. And we are a living people in this tiny land who are witnesses of YHVH before the eyes of all nations and peoples.

As a darkness begins to cover the nations as in the days of Noah, the Menorah, which is the symbol of this nation of Israel and the Light of the world, is re-kindled, and it shall not be extinguished by the grace of YHVH. In God we trust.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elhanan ben-Avraham, born in 1945, is a professional artist, poet, writer, father of two, and grandfather of four, and he has been living in Israel since 1979. He has served in the IDF, taught the Bible internationally, published five illustrated books of poetry, painted two large Biblical murals in public buildings in Jerusalem, and most recently produced THE JERUSALEM ILLUSTRATED BIBLE, among many other works. He and his wife live in a quiet village in the Mountains of Judah.



SUCCOT & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By Ovadiah ben Avraham



As for Chag ha-matsot, chag ha-katsir and chag ha-asif, the first mention of these Feasts of YHWH appears in the book of Exodus. In the book of Exodus, we do not get specific dates for the holiday (in contrast to the book of Leviticus: 15th day, 7th month, etc.). Already in Exodus 12, the year seems to start in the springtime: rosh chodashim – chodesh ha-rishon, the head and first month. In chapter 23, the Feasts are described in an agricultural manner. No dates are given there, and the reason is individual or collective

celebration of harvest-seasons. This start of the year, at the season of the barley in Aviv, nowadays called Nisan, corresponds to the new year of the kings (at least of Judah according to Chayim Tadmor). However, in chapter 34, the Feast of the final harvest is at the turn of the year; betzet (tkufat) ha-shanah. This could indicate a year which starts – at least agriculturally – in Tishrei (September/October), which seems also plausible. This Babylonian name is Akkadian (tašrītu) and means something like ‘beginning’ and became the name

for the 1st (truly 7th) month in the Jewish calendar. Succot in Exodus thus only is described as “collecting your seeds from the field” and a feast of “the collection”, that is, the harvest. Already the notion of all males appearing three times before YHWH is also given in Exodus.

In the book of Leviticus, chapter 23, we read a fuller description of the Appointed Times. It is much more detailed, even with dates and sacrifices specified. The ‘shabbaton’, a new word, appears with Yom Terua, and it starts off with the 15th



*As for Succot,
the instruction
has been
observed as we
know since the
time of Ezra/
Nehemiah. Ezra
had the five
scrolls combined
into one Torah
(of Moses) so as
to teach it!*

day of the month (with a lunar month this means at the full moon). Succot is seven days, with a holy convocation on the first day (that's new information), and one – surprisingly – on the 8th day. A concluding remark is given in Leviticus 23:37, 38. But then another paragraph is written about Succot, wherein both the first day and the eighth are a shabbaton. On the first day, they take for themselves species, which creates for the sages an issue (whether “you shall to take” is the mitsva?). Also, to be seven days joyful before YHWH is spoken about, together with seven days of dwelling in booths (verse 42).

Leviticus points back to the memory of the Exodus, and as the Israelites were camping in tents, so the name could refer to the first station (Succot-city) on the journey or even allude to Jacob (building) in Genesis 33:17. It could refer also to the hospitality for any of the

pilgrims, opening a ‘covering’ for those flocking into the city.

In the book of Numbers (29) the sacrifices are listed. Significant are the 70 bulls understood as for the 70 nations. And there is also a list – the significance of which is not well understood – which diminished each day the number of bullocks offered. Yet this total (13 + 12 + 11 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7) does add up to the number 70.

As for Deuteronomy, with a central place of worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, Succot isn't yet a universal holiday. This ascent to Jerusalem isn't just for the males. The rejoicing is with the residents, sons, daughters, and the widows. Only seven days are stated to be at the place, ‘He will choose,’ to which the people shouldn't come empty-handed.

These differences have practical impact.

Scholars report that they had a 364-day calendar which started on Wednesday and thus had no holiday that conflicted with Sabbath, and they had their own community in the desert away from the lawless ‘sons of darkness’.

It makes a big difference whether to cook the Pesach-lamb on fire or boil it in water, though the book of Chronicles combines these descriptions. As for Succot, the instruction has been observed as we know since the time of Ezra/Nehemiah. Ezra had the five scrolls combined into one Torah (of Moses) so as to teach it! Here though we read about five sorts of plants, and about how the people go out to collect and build succa's, every man on his roof and even in the courts of the House. They dwellt in them and had a great time. They also practiced the reading of Torah (as commanded in Deuteronomy) and shemeni atseret (the eight day).



Yet in later times, the Feast becomes more universal and gets an eschatological flavor to it. This is seen in the book of Zachariah. As with Isaiah 2, these (later) prophets count on the nations to come to the mountain of God, to Jerusalem, in order to be taught His ways (= Torah). Chapter 14 of Zacheriah talks about a time of distress (with the feet of YHWH on the mount of Olives and the earthquake making a divide – see Acts 1:11, 12 for a parallel-text) followed by a time wherein the nations (e.g., Egypt) will come up. The punishment for not coming has to do with rain. This theme is further known in both the Bible (Joel 4:18, Isaiah 33, Psalm 36, Ezekiel 40, etc.) and within Chazal – rabbinic sources. In the second Temple period, the highest of joy was at the ceremony of the drawing of the water-libation from the spring of Shiloach. The other mentioning is the combination of Yom Terua, Yom ha-Kippurim and Shemeni Atseret in the book of Joel (2:15) which talks about the shofar, the fast, and an assembly (עצרה).

As we have seen, four single scrolls—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—mention the Harvest Feast of Succot with different nuances and from different points of view: sacrifices, number of days, what is commanded, etc. In later times, this celebration becomes a world-wide aliyah (to those remaining) to come year by year, to bow down before the King and to celebrate, beseeching His blessing.

With regards to the priestly service, this was done by many families (as the Scriptures give a full list, year-round) and was not taken lightly. Yet there are accounts of wrong practices, even going back to the time of Hofni and Pinchas. When the Maccabees fought the Greeks and took over the Temple, the priesthood and afterward a ruling (Hellenistic) elite took over. Around the turn of the Era, the Pharisees were in favour with the people, but the Sadducees had the (ruling) authority in the Temple, and another group, the Essenes, even decided to leave the scene for reasons described below.

Basically, it came to a point where the common people, during the holiday of Succot, could enter the Temple court with the altar. They would do a procession with willows around the altar, even on Shabbat (indeed this is not from Torah but an invention/tradition). These practices caused tensions to rise. When a Tzadoki-Butsini folk spilled water, the people threw their etrogs at them, and when some Butsians/Essenes hid the willows under a stone in order not to desecrate Shabbat, the people found them and proceeded anyways. The common people would even walk between the altar and the temple which was usually not even allowed to some of the priest. They would (according to Alon), speak the ineffable name of God (השם המפורש) while singing from Psalm 118, Hodu l'YHWH ki tov, as they chanted or repeated after leaders 'hoshia-

as written in the Temple Scroll, likewise they thought the Pharisees profaned the Shabbat with circumcision on that day. Scholars report that they had a 364-day calendar which started on Wednesday and thus had no holiday that conflicted with Sabbath, and they had their own community in the desert away from the lawless 'sons of darkness'.

Why did all this happen? Basically, the Pharisees elevated the status of the common folks, whose favour they enjoyed. These commoners were impure because they were from the countryside, and they would eat non-sacred food as the priests would. The justification was that at this time 'all of Israel were friends' just as the Psalm says: 'Jerusalem is (built) compacted together,' meaning built in unity, and thus the barriers between the priests and the people were lifted.

were becoming less of an authority, together with the disappearance of the Sadducees and the Qumranites, the tradition passed from teacher to talmid was firmly established and prevailed in what ultimately became rabbinic Judaism.

The one school was strongly opposed to any interference of the people to the service of the God of Israel, which has a good basis of reasoning from the Hebrew Bible. What is holy ought not to be desecrated! The priests were set-apart for this duty, and the barriers between them were there for a reason. Whereas the other school, again, was more popular with the people and more simplistic to support their wishes to plea for rain (with willows and libation) and had given them an even closer look towards (and even inside of) the Temple. The seven

The seven days of the water-libation celebration (as well as the pouring of wine) was another part of tradition that resonated well with the people (especially farmers), and the great eight day truly became a theme of water and salvation through time.

na'. Ordinarily, the Father's name would only have been uttered by the high-priest on Yom ha-Kippoorim (some 10 times), but later it was completely forbidden to pronounce. The rabbinical sources also speak about the vessels like the Table of Showbread and the Menorah (to the dislike of some Pharisees) being shown to the people. These practices were a desecration in the eyes of the Essenes

Professor Knohl identified two schools of Priests. The School of Holiness (H) and Priestly (P), likened to the two schools of Rabbinic thought, Hillel and Shammai. One is the much more critical and aggressive, whereas the other was more lenient to outsiders, converts, and also fellow Jews. At the end of the day, one side was favoured over the other. While the books (including The Book)

days of the water-libation celebration (as well as the pouring of wine) was another part of tradition that resonated well with the people (especially farmers), and the great eight day truly became a theme of water and salvation through time, even connecting back the primordial water into the abyss, which God would have conquered by His saving act.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ovadia has a degree in the Bible from Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is on staff at Netivyah.

A man in a dark suit and white shirt is shown from the chest up, holding a thick book to his face. He is looking down at the book. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves. The title is overlaid on the image in a dark blue box.

THE BIBLICAL HOLIDAYS & SELF DEVELOPMENT

By Tzvi ben Daniel

I was listening to the latest episode of Joe Rogan's podcast (one of the most popular podcasts in the world) where he had Jordan Peterson as a guest. Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist and a world-renowned author, and he is also very interested in the Bible and the deep archetypal meaning of the stories contained therein.

Given the secular background of the host, I was chuckling at the fact that I couldn't imagine any other guest straight out preaching to Rogan about the Bible and its lessons. And the way he was able to do it was by way of explaining certain references on a deeper level—a more personably relatable one.

I know Peterson thought out his ideas well. In fact, he gave a series of several-hours-long conferences a few years ago about all the Biblical stories in Genesis, associating the characters and the narratives with deeper psychological meanings to which each person could relate at his core. This astonished me since I assume he arrived at most of his

ideas through deep thinking and analysis, dissecting the stories in the light of their psychological nature, without any background in Jewish thought.

For those of us who grew up within Judaism or at least had a good dose of exposure to it, we already know that the Biblical stories are but the outer shell of deeper truths that we must crave to uncover. The Torah at its face value is fitting for a child to understand at

of interpretation of the Torah, more precisely, at least four different levels, that comprise the acronym PaRDeS. The P'shat is the plain, literal meaning; Remez is the hinted meaning; Drash is the homiletical meaning; and Sod is the secret or mystical meaning.

Even though most of these ideas became popular during the middle ages in Europe (particularly in S'farad, Spain), we can find clear connections shooting straight back to the first century. I cited Paul above, but Yeshua himself told his disciples, in response to why he talked to the people in parables, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."

People from different times and backgrounds understood that the text in the Torah can go as deep as one's mind, intellect, understanding, and revelation may take him. And that's precisely why the Torah is so loved and revered.

In the rest of this article, we will explore a deeper meaning regarding some ideas in the Bible, and the Biblical Feasts in particular.

The Purpose of the Bible as a Whole

My understanding of the Holy Book is not a static one but a dynamic one. I believe we should delve deeper, year after year, as we grow in maturity and go through life's experiences.

Just as our perception and understanding of the world around us is influenced and shaped by our history, knowledge, and wisdom gleaned from it, we utilize that growth and those new perspectives to apply it to the Bible in order to get a clearer understanding of what in the world God requires from us today in light of who we are today, and not last year or 20 years ago. Following up on

the analogy cited above, we should not continue to be on the baby bottle when we are grown adults and have children of our own.

Although there are hundreds of commandments in the Bible, many of which apply to us today, most people agree with the classical idea that "it all hangs on the big two". The "big two" being to love the Creator and to love our neighbor. The idea of loving the Creator may be somewhat abstract and can be arguably fulfilled through the observance of His commandments, at least from a Jewish standpoint. On the other hand, loving our neighbor is a more tangible premise, since, unlike God, anyone can see and interact with their neighbor.

Through loving our neighbor and our Creator, we become better people, and the converse may be true as well, that, through becoming better people, we can then love our neighbor and God.

I will never put the Bible in a box and say that there is only one way to understand it (and it is MY way!), for that would be putting God in a box. But following this line of understanding, and for the sake of further developing this idea, let's agree here that the Torah is a book that can and will help us improve at a personal level. Its commandments are there to bring us closer to the Creator through our observance, and ultimately, by modeling a life of holiness (to stick to the Biblical language), to become better people. In other words, and in the modern worldview, we can say that the Bible is a book for personal development.

What can the Biblical Feasts Teach us about Ourselves?

According to Jewish tradition the year starts on Tishrei 1, in the fall. However, according to the written Torah, it's abundantly clear that God wanted to

People from different times and backgrounds understood that the text in the Torah can go as deep as one's mind, intellect, understanding, and revelation may take him.

Shabbat (or Sunday) school, but it (the story at its face value) will not provide the same level of nourishment for those who are not children. Shaul (Paul), in the first-century writings, would make the distinction between milk and meat.

Within Jewish exegesis, we are taught that there are different levels

We have been telling the story over and over, but have we come out of Egypt ourselves yet? That is the whole point of the rehearsal. Personal redemption from personal slavery.

mark a beginning for his people at the time of their deliverance from Egypt:

“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Exodus 12:3)

We know that this lines up with the agricultural year, and since all the Biblical Feasts are tied to agriculture, it only makes sense to commence the year at that time. But digging into another layer beneath that literal meaning, why would it make sense to start counting from that point on?

The answer is that it is the time of our deliverance. Life (or the new life anyway) did not really begin, so to speak, until we were delivered from Egypt. And what does that mean—what does Egypt mean? To the Israelites of old, it meant physical slavery. But what does it mean for us today? It is what keeps us enslaved.

So, we are going to see a pattern set forth in the Torah that goes from the slavery/deliverance in/from Egypt to the ultimate redemption in the Promise Land after passing through the wilderness and meeting with the Almighty on the mountain. At the same time, the stories that we tell and retell on the Biblical Holy Days are going to overlay this most basic pattern of redemption and remind us of basic human truths that we are to be made aware of. Let’s take a closer look at each of the main Holy Days.

Passover

Talking about the commemoration of the

redemption experienced at the time of the first Passover in Egypt, we find this passage:

“So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand YHVH brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.’” (Exodus 13:14)

We see here how WE are to tell our children how WE were slaves and the Almighty delivered US. It is from here that the Jewish sages determined that “in every generation a person must regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt” (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5).

If it is so—if we are to consider ourselves as if we came out of Egypt—this would mean that we have come from slavery and into freedom. Coming out of Egypt could be understood as an idiom meaning abandoning your past in the sense of overcoming our limitations and breaking free from the yoke of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh can be understood to represent our lower nature (i.e., the flesh). This includes, in general categories: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and slothfulness.

When we can overcome this and break this yoke, then we are ‘crossing over’. We effectively become Hebrews; one who has crossed over. Abraham was the first one to be called a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). In these two verses, notice the parallel in his revelation of the Creator to the one that his descendants had at Mount Sinai:


“I am YHVH that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it.” (Genesis 15:7)

“I am YHVH your Elohim, who brought you out of Mitzraim, out of the land of slavery.” (Exodus 20:2)

Whether it is Abraham or the children of Israel, they are coming out of their place of origin, their “comfort zone” if you will, and going “to the land”: coming from a place of bondage and crossing over to a place which they will possess, or coming from a place that possessed them, leaving everything behind, and going to a place where their highest aspirations would be fulfilled, but they would have to fight in order to overcome.

Egypt in Hebrew is Mitzraim (מצרים), which means “a narrow place” or simply “straits” (as in narrow). The root of this word is tzar (צר), which means “trouble”, “tribulation” or “narrow”. Jeremiah uses this word in Lamentations 1:3 where it is translated as “dire straits” (מַצָּרִים, pronounced metzarim here). Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt. He was the face or the representation of the place that kept us slaves.

In a spiritual sense, Pharaoh represents all that keeps us captive from realizing our true potential: our ‘lower nature’, or ‘yetzer haRa’, the ‘evil inclination’. Are you a slave to lust? There is your Pharaoh. Are you a slave to alcohol? There is your Pharaoh. Are you a slave to anger, drugs, food, lying, gambling, self-pity, anxiety, pornography, money, external approval, or—fill in the blank? There is your Pharaoh.



A ritual is essentially a physical action that helps us connect with the spiritual—transcending the physical by means of focused attention and concentration or contemplation.

That's right. We can rehearse every year about the children of Israel coming out of slavery. For what it matters, we could've been the real Israelites that left Egypt. However, we are never going to be free until we stand up to our personal Pharaoh. We have been telling the story over and over, but have we come out of Egypt ourselves yet? That is the whole point of the rehearsal. Personal redemption from personal slavery.

And I will not have the arrogance to pretend that once we have come out there is no going back, nor the possibility that Egypt lingers through the years, post deliverance from Egypt. Maybe the fact that we are commanded to rehearse year after year was ordained because we have the tendency as humans to draw back

to our own personal Egypt. To revert to the easiest path of least resistance. After all, having to leave what we've always known to go to a place that we do not know is not the easiest thing to do.

Concerning the spiritual application of the Feast of Matzot, Paul exhorted the Corinthians:

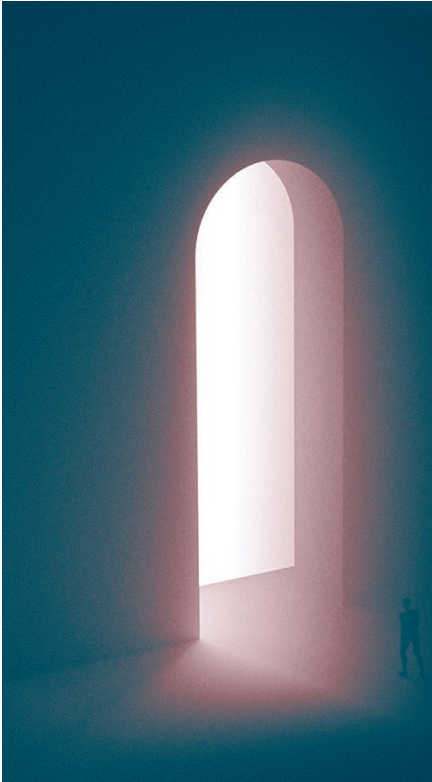
"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor. 5:8)

Notice how he is expanding beyond searching for the last crumb of leavened bread in the house (the physical), to the loftier psycho-spiritual meaning of it: letting evil out of our hearts. Only then

will we be able to tell our children in all confidence, "By strength of hand YHVH brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Shavuot

This is the next "appointed time" and the second occasion in the year when every male was required to ascend to Jerusalem to see the King. There was a caveat as well, to bring the first fruits of the produce of the land, meaning, the physical would be elevated or transmuted, if you will. This pilgrimage and offering, as well as with Passover and the other Holy Days, were deeply ritualistic experiences. The ritual has a central part in Biblical observance as well as in all ancient religions, and it



*There was a process, or a purge,
that was to take place within
Israel, that would get them
ready to inherit the land.
We must also go through
a similar process on our
personal journey towards
the Promised Land.*

is something that it is largely missing in Protestant Christianity. On the other hand, modern Judaism still preserves many rituals, such as Kiddush, Havdalah, Tefillin, Prayer, Talit, etc. Despite the fear, estrangement, or disdain that many in Christianity have for rituals, a ritual is essentially a physical action that helps us connect with the spiritual—transcending the physical by means of focused attention and concentration or contemplation.

The interesting characteristic about Shavuot is that it does not appear to have a fixed day on which it is to be celebrated, but rather we are to “count the days” from Passover to the end of the seventh week, establishing a direct tie between these two appointed times.

Let’s think this through. Pesach is the commemoration of our delivery from slavery, and Shavuot is considered to be the day when the Almighty spoke to the people of Israel from Mount Sinai—the day they met Him.

If we are to consider it as if we left Egypt (our personal Egypt) at Passover, then our personal celebration of Shavuot could be understood as our personal encounter with the Creator. This is why it is no coincidence that the disciples had their “Mount Sinai experience” at the time of Shavuot in the upper room, after Yeshua’s death, resurrection, and ascension.

To bring the attention back to the sequential connection between these two days, we must highlight that there is no mountain top experience without first leaving Egypt. This is an extremely important point since, in our own personal walk towards redemption, our progress through the pilgrim’s road, we must actually walk in order to get there.

At this point, I want to preemptively speak regarding the “salvation through grace” (and not through works) that many times is misunderstood in Christianity. Grace was displayed to the Israelites when they were delivered from Egypt. They had to pay no price and do no work,

in order for them to be delivered from Egypt. What they did have though, was a deep yearning. They cried out to YHVH to be delivered. But then, we see a series of supernatural events that allow them to simply walk out of Egypt. At that point they were free agents. They could do with their freedom as they saw fit. They were delivered or saved through grace, but from that point on, and especially after the experience at Mount Sinai, they were responsible to put in the work and were held liable if they didn’t.

Mount Sinai was the point where each person said to the Creator, “Na’aseh veNishma—we will do and obey.” No one had gotten into a covenantal relationship with the Creator until the Book of the Covenant was presented and read, and the blood of bulls was sprinkled upon them and the book.

A certain commitment is established at that point, where each person will take responsibility to aim to behave in a certain kind of way, seeking what is good and opposing that which is not. We

committed to also walk towards a certain goal, represented as the Land of Canaan, where the wisdom of the path we follow would shine forth to become a light unto the nations.

We know that didn't happen quite that way in history, but that is precisely why and how the Messianic pattern of redemption arose within Jewish thought—in order to set forth an ideal of how things would be or could be in a perfect world. That is one of the reasons why we got the person of Yeshua who lived a life as an example, or a prototype, in order to display that even without having yet the ultimate grand fulfillment of the redemptive pattern in Torah on the macro level (i.e. establishing the Kingdom on earth), man should strive to fulfill that pattern of redemption on a personal (micro) level.

Sukkot

For brevity's sake, I am writing in this article about the main three so-called pilgrimage Feasts. There is a special importance ascribed to these three appointed times. A great mobilization was to happen at these times, and even today. Believers in Israel and around the world go to great lengths to make these opportunities meaningful.

Sukkot parallels Passover in its seven-day duration and mirrors it on the calendar, being on opposite points on Earth's journey around the sun. Pesach is celebrated around the time of the spring equinox, at the beginning of the agricultural cycle, while Sukkot is

commemorated around the autumnal equinox, at the end of the agricultural cycle. Hence it is called the Feast of Ingathering.

As far as what we are told to remember during this Feast, there is the dwelling in booths (sukkot) at the time of our wanderings through the wilderness. In order to shift our attention to the personal level of this rehearsal, we need to think what the time in the wilderness can possibly represent in our life.

The 40 years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness create a gap between the time when we were delivered from slavery and the time of our redemptive goal of reaching the Promised Land. This period contained tests, trials, and tribulations that cost all but two Israelites to perish in the wilderness. On the other hand, this time in the wilderness had a purpose from YHVH's perspective:

“And you shall remember that the YHVH your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” (Deut. 8:2)

Yeshua said, quoting the Psalm (37:11), “Blessed are the meek (humble) for they shall inherit the earth.” There was a process, or a purge, that was to take place within Israel, that would get them ready to inherit the land. We must also go through a similar process on our personal journey towards the Promised Land. The narrative of Deuteronomy continues:

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the YHVH.” (Deut. 8:3)

A Sukkah is a physical structure to protect us from the elements. But we can also understand the Sukkah as a symbol of supernatural protection on our journey through the wilderness. In other words, we will go through trials and tribulations, and we will be tested, but through it all we must be aware that there is a deeper purpose for our experiences. We are not simply going around the mountain in circles, but there is a point of departure and a destination.

We know where we are coming from, and we know to where we are going, and while what happens in between can be confusing, troublesome, terrifying, or challenging, we are reminded that we are being watched and cared for.

There is much left to cover and much more to be uncovered, including the Eighth Day (after Sukkot), Yom Kippur, Rosh haShana/Yom T'ruah, and others. But it was not my intention in this article to expound on everything that there is to be interpreted, but rather to lay out a pattern—a system, a complementary understanding—and to allow the reader to continue to seek out wisdom and receive it from the only Giver, through His Spirit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tzvi is an Argentinian-Israeli Jew who currently lives in North Carolina, USA. During his time in Israel, Tzvi worked in archaeology in the City of David and the Ophel area with Eilat Mazar. There, he developed a special interest in Biblical history and the Hebrew language. He currently teaches Biblical Hebrew to Spanish speakers online and co-hosts a successful radio show on a US based Messianic Ministry, speaking and writing articles on a variety of topics, ranging from the Hebrew language and Biblical history to current events in Israel and the world.

THE HOLY FEASTS OF ISRAEL AS THE MEANS OF LIBERATION

By Lion S. Erwtaman

Individual and People's Liberation

In a cycle of five main feasts, the G-d of Israel laid down the five steps of the liberation of a human soul. Our soul is bound by several factors including genetic, cultural, religious, physical (mental health), psychological, and parental. And because the Torah is about each individual as well as about the entire nation of Israel, there is also the aspect of the liberation of the people's soul of Israel. The two later festivals, Hanukkah and Purim, have been added to describe that liberation both on foreign soil – Purim – and on home soil – Hanukkah. As said, the soul of every human being is the product of many factors, each pushing or pulling in a certain direction. Then there is also the effect of a hardening of someone's heart, something that takes place in special circumstances. Liberation from

hardening takes extra effort. The Pharaoh of Egypt in the Exodus period never got around to that liberation. This article traces the five feasts as described in the Torah plus Hanukkah and Purim. We examine the similarities and differences of these feasts, which, as celestial means, exert their annual influence on a human being's soul.

Shabbat as a Weekly Feast

The fact that these are the Jewish holidays has to do with the delivery address, Mount Sinai, and the addressee, Moses. From that moment on, it was Israel that started to celebrate these festivals. It is important to realize that the Jewish crowd around Mount Sinai also included people from other

*Awareness of
G-d and Messiah
is the call the
Bible wants us
to hear, again
and again. Every
feast does that in
its own way.*

nations. That means that the feasts are given and intended for Jews and non-Jews. The list of the five feasts in the Torah, found in Leviticus 23, begins with the Sabbath. The feasts are annual events, whereas Shabbat is weekly, beginning on Friday at sunset and ending on Saturday after sunset. The Sabbath comes at the end of the six days of the week and confirms the resting which the Eternal enjoyed and which He grants us. It is also a confirmation of the earthly chronology, whereby our lives are divided into weeks, each lasting seven days. Where the number seven is transcended by a dedicated day afterward, as with circumcision on the eighth day and the Feast of Weeks with seven times seven days plus one, our attention is directed to the world to come, the *olam haba*. Shabbat also recalls the Exodus from Egypt, the first of the five Torah feasts, because of the rest Israel was allowed to enjoy after slavery.

Liberation from Sensory Pollution

Each holy feast has been given its own book (for instance Esther) or texts in Torah. The liberation of a person covers not only the spiritual realm, but also the physical. We must learn and control our reactions and impulses. The eye of the beholder plays an important role: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light" (Matthew 6:22). Our ears play an important role in serving our G-d. As a servant, we serve the Lord, and when we choose this serving role

consciously, our "master will pierce our ear with his awl and the servant will serve him for life" (Exodus 21:6). We are limited by our perception; we serve our perception in what we see and hear, but also in our communication by what we say and how we listen, innovate, and improve. So, we need to be aware of how fragile our communication systems are.

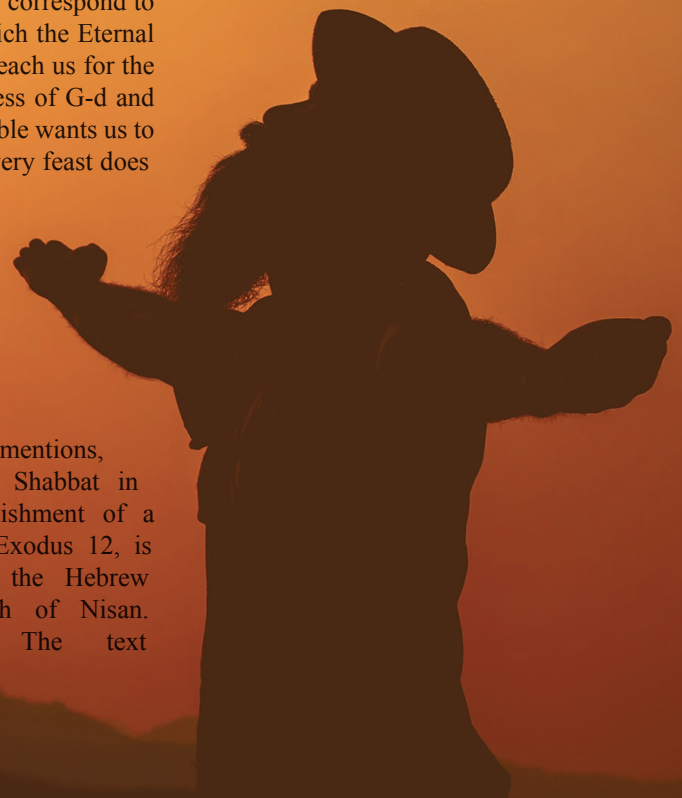
Feasts and Senses

Our senses must be inspected annually. We have seven senses, namely: taste, smell, hearing, touch, sight, sense of balance, and proprioception (control of muscle tension). Each of our senses is recognizable in the celebrations of our holy feasts—each celebration with its own sense. Sense of time is a Biblical command associated with the feasts because each feast should be celebrated on a prescribed date. And the place is often mentioned or referred to; see for example Deuteronomy 12:5 (a total of seven times in Deuteronomy) and also Nehemiah 1:9. The times correspond to the best moments on which the Eternal can be reached and can reach us for the respective feast. Awareness of G-d and Messiah is the call the Bible wants us to hear, again and again. Every feast does that in its own way. And the liberation with the accompanying reason of celebrating provides rich insight.

Passover

The first festival the Torah mentions, after the institution of Shabbat in Genesis and the establishment of a new calendar in Exodus 12, is Passover in the Hebrew month of Nisan.
The text

***Our awareness
of Adonai at
this feast is His
forgiveness,
approval, and
restoration of
our souls. We are
being prepared
for that delivery
by our growing
awareness of
the broken
relationship with
the Eternal One.***



This feast is connected with our sense of taste, which is located in the tongue. And thus, the tongue together with its cursing and beneficent action is also in need of the liberating effect of this festival.

is found in Leviticus 23:4-8. The celebration is prescribed in the Haggadah shel Pesach. Pesach is associated with the number seven, because of the seven days that the festival lasts, and with the number four, because of the four steps of liberation associated with this festival. There are special regulations for the food on the night of the Exodus: "They must eat the meat the same night. They shall roast the food on the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8). This means that this feast is connected with our sense of taste, which is located in the tongue. And thus, the tongue together with its cursing and beneficent action is also in need of the liberating effect of this festival. The circumstance which made liberation so desired was slavery—awareness of the need for external help and the stripping of all comfort by traveling in the desert. The deliverance takes place in four steps, expressed in four cups, based on the text in Exodus 6:6-7, with the key words being: lead out, saved, liberated, redeemed (paying the debt for you), and accepted.

Cleansing

The Exodus ended with the trip through the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba). The New Testament presents this Exodus as a baptism in 1 Corinthians 10:2. The ancient life in Egypt was washed off in the same way the mikveh works, namely, not as a physical cleansing, but as a spiritual one. The water of the sea closed behind Israel like a water seal in a sink drain's stench trap does. The awareness of Messiah was there through

the Passover lamb at the first celebration. The blood on the doors was a sign to Israel of G-d's intervention (Exodus 12:13). Realization of Adonai grew with the assurance that He would spare anyone who had smeared the blood of the lambs on the door from a deadly tenth and final plague. And the sense of time came from the time of night (Exodus 12:8), from the haste that was commanded, and from the unleavened bread. The sense of place came through forced relocation of Israel and journey to the Promised Land. It sounds easy, but completely changing your thinking, your environment, your expectations, and your character traits is extremely difficult. Our free will is affected by it and liberation is necessary.

Time is such an important factor, it is specifically indicated. This shows us that the Eternal values it. That means that we cannot change anything about it.

Feast of Weeks (Shavuot)

Fifty days after the second day of Passover, according to Leviticus 23:15-16, it is time for the Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, in the Hebrew month of Sivan. As mentioned above, this specifically indicated number 50 indicates the heavenly, spiritual component that has been added to the liberation process. This festival celebrates the giving of the law (Matan Torah) to Moses on Mount Sinai. And because the Law, the Torah, is a spiritual document according to the New Testament ("For we know that the law is spiritual"; Romans 7:14), the spirit of Adonai is necessary to appreciate its value. The book, rather the scroll (megillah), read at this feast is Ruth. In addition to the date of the grain harvest, the rehabilitation of the destitute Gentile widow Ruth is a beautiful picture involving the Gentiles in the heavenly liberation process and binding them with Israel. Because of the grain harvest, the mowing, the threshing, the grinding, and the smells that are spread in the process, the nose is the sense associated with this. Through our noses we come back into contact with the origin of bread-making, as can be read in Genesis 3:19, "with the sweat on your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the face of the earth, because from it you were taken."

The Smell of Life

Awareness of the G-d of Israel is aided by His coming on Mount Sinai. It also gives a sense of place. And we continue to be reminded of that place as the service in the Tent of Meeting, later in

the Temple, and in our time in the Jewish congregations permanently recalls the event on and around Sinai. Sense of time comes from counting days and weeks as instructed in Leviticus 23:15-16. Time is such an important factor, it is specifically indicated. This shows us that the Eternal values it. That means that we cannot change anything about it. We recognize the preparation for deliverance through circumstances in the unity that Israel showed at that time: "All the people answered with one accord, 'All that Adonai has said we will do'" (Exodus 19:8, read also 24:7). The miraculous escape from the Egyptian army with the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire also contributed to this. And the liberation at this feast is learning to smell the smell of Life as opposed to the scent of death (see II Corinthians 2:15-16).

Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)

After the spring and summer, the three autumn festivals come into view. The Hebrew month of Tishri contains all three. Psalm 27 is read from the second day. According to a midrash, the words, "The Eternal One is my light" (verse 1) refers to Rosh Hashanah. "And my redemption" (verse 1) refers to the Day of Atonement. In the Hebrew word for salvation, *ישועה*, the name of Yeshua is recognizable: *ישוע*. And "For He will hide me in His hut" (verse 5) points to the Feast of Tabernacles. In the Hebrew word for hut, the word *thicket* is present, the place where Adam and Eve were hiding once. The number of this festival is one, because of the annually recurring Hebrew date of 1 Tishri. This number is a major feature of the G-d of Israel: He is one, even when He says, "Let us make man in our image and according to Our likeness." The person who is whole, or aiming at it, can worship the Eternal with her or his whole heart, as we say in Shema. It expresses recovery from a mixture of good and evil to unity.

The festival is also about the coming judgment of the Eternal on mankind.

Shofar

Hearing is the sense of this festival, partly because of listening to the sound of the shofar, the trumpet. That is the instrument of spiritual warfare and victory. It is the instrument of the Eternal who assists us, as it happened in the near sacrifice of Isaac. And the shofar heralds the coming of Messiah. Hearing on an earthly level is in one way or another connected with hearing on a spiritual level. It is opening our spiritual ears, another focus of this holy feast as described in the sod (mystical mystery level of interpretation) of Exodus 21:1-6. The sense of time at this feast comes from counting the Shmita and Yovel Years (Leviticus 25:4 and 8-9) and also the Orla (Leviticus 19:23, 'forbidden') which is reckoned from Rosh Hashanah. This feast also marks the beginning of the counting of years, currently 5782. Rosh Hashanah has a sense of place by the actions of Abraham and the Akedat Yitzchak, the almost sacrifice of his son Isaac at the site where the Temple later stood. Consciousness and awe of G-d's existence can be enhanced by the fact that the Lord is our Judge on the Day of the Lord. Preparation for liberation begins in realizing our shortcomings in serving the Eternal One and in respecting our neighbor. Liberation comes when we learn to see again the value of obedience, an art we lost in Gan Eden, in Paradise.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

After the memory of the Day of the Lord comes the restoration of our relationship with Him on the Day of Atonement. The reading associated with this feast is the book of Jonah because of the atonement that came about when the idolatrous Nineveh allowed itself to be corrected, something from which we can learn. The

***Sense of time:
Autumn begins,
and nature is
beginning to
return to colder
temperatures
and less daylight,
a reminder
of dying. The
awareness of
place at this
feast, which
has to do with
emotion and
feelings related
to restoring
relationships, is
our soul.***

number of this feast is also one, like that of the Feast of Trumpets ten days earlier. Yom Kippur is on 10 Tishri, and $10 + 0 = 1$, our restoration to unity and focus on reconciliation. The sense belonging to this festival is our feeling, the skin, with a sense of taste, warmth, and pain. Through the feasts we have learned to feel our own pain (Pesach) and the pain of our Messiah. Sense of time: Autumn

begins, and nature is beginning to return to colder temperatures and less daylight, a reminder of dying. The awareness of place at this feast, which has to do with emotion and feelings related to restoring relationships, is our soul. It is mentioned often in Tanakh, namely 174 times, compared to 33 in the New Testament, for a total of 207 times. Our awareness of Adonai at this feast is His forgiveness, approval, and restoration of our souls. We are being prepared for that delivery by our growing awareness of the broken relationship with the Eternal One. He is one, we are lonely, and our liberation consists of learning to feel, to be sensitive, emphatic, and sensible. We will experience emotional healing when we see that intellectual reasoning is on a different level than emotional responding is. Experience and emotion get their place.

Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)

The fifth and final festival mentioned in the Torah is the Feast of Tabernacles. We build huts and make a special bouquet, the lulav, consisting of a palm branch, myrtle branches, willow branches, and a citrus fruit, the etrog, to wave with each day and to be merry, according to Biblical text in Leviticus 23:40. The book from which we read during the feast is Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, with the last verse as the theme, "The conclusion of the whole matter is: fear and be in awe of the Eternal One and keep His commandments. For this is the whole person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The number associated with this festival is 15 because of the date of Tishri 15. 15 is $1+5 = 6$, the number of the weak man who was created on the sixth day. The sense in this feast is our eyesight, of which the eyes are best known.

Seduction by our Eyes

As with hearing, taste, smell, and feeling,

this also includes those parts of our brain in which our memory of these senses is stored. Our eyes also need to be reset. There it went wrong when Eve, in the garden with the beautiful trees, allowed herself to be seduced by her eyes. Sense of time: nature dies, the plants go to sleep, and rise again in the spring. Sense of place: our relationship with the family line and with Moses and Elijah. To understand this, we read Matthew 17:1-4, "Six days later Yeshua took Peter, Jacob, and his brother Yochanan with him. He led them up a high mountain, in solitude. His form was changed before their eyes and his face shone like the sun. His clothes became white as the light [sense: the eyes!]. Moses and Elijah appeared before them; they spoke with Him. Peter said to Yeshua, 'Master, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will build three tabernacles here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'"

Visible Kingdom of G-d

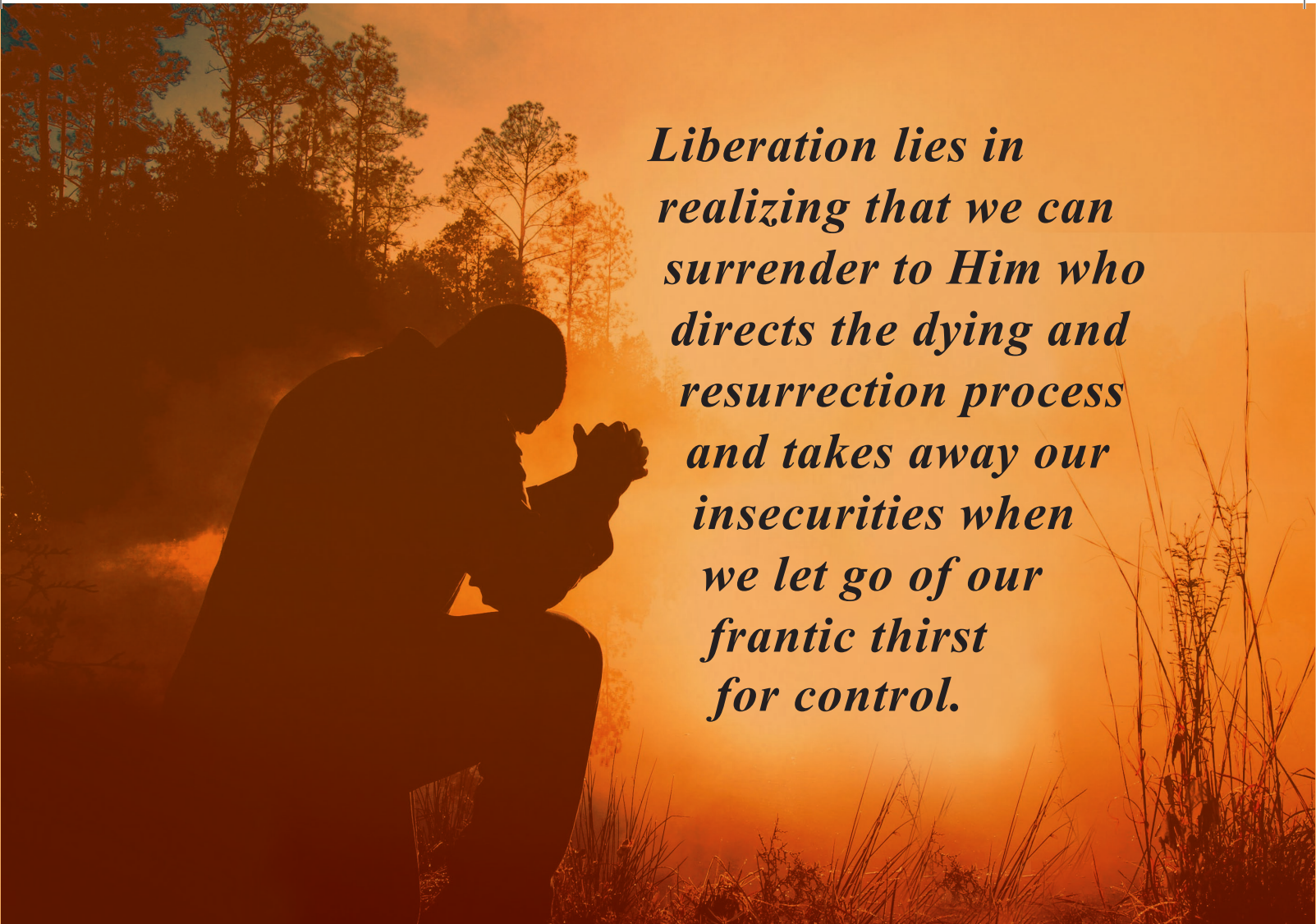
Why three booths? Because the prophet Zechariah says (14:16) that this festival will be celebrated with the visible coming of the Kingdom of G-d. Awareness of G-d is, that in the dying process of a believer, He will show His power in our resurrection, our eternal life, and His Kingdom. Preparation for liberation comes through the realization of our fragility and weakness in the fragile man-made tabernacle. The true protection comes from our Lord. Liberation lies in realizing that we can surrender to Him who directs the dying and resurrection process and takes away our insecurities when we let go of our frantic thirst for control.

Hanukkah

In 167 BC, the war on Israel's own soil took place with our Maccabees in charge. Read First and Second Maccabees, part of the history of Israel. The command

***There it went
wrong when
Eve, in the
garden with the
beautiful trees,
allowed herself
to be seduced by
her eyes. Sense
of time: nature
dies, the plants
go to sleep, and
rise again in the
spring. Sense
of place: our
relationship with
the family line
and with Moses
and Elijah.***

to observe this festival is derived from the words in I Maccabees 4:56-59, "For eight days they kept the festival of the dedication of the altar... Yehuda determined in agreement with his brothers and all the assembly of Israel that they, as long as they lived, would celebrate the festival of the dedication of the altar every year for eight days in joy and gladness, beginning on the twenty-



Liberation lies in realizing that we can surrender to Him who directs the dying and resurrection process and takes away our insecurities when we let go of our frantic thirst for control.

fifth of the month of Kislev.” Hence, we also read about this feast in the New Testament in John 10:22, “Then came the Feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter”. The celebration marks a recovery from humiliation, oppression, and traumas like the murder of our newly born, circumcised boys and their mothers who were pushed off the city walls. The sense of this feast is the sense of balance. Not being allowed to walk upright but having to bend for dictators called for healing in the vertical direction. At the Exodus, the healing had

been and is in traveling in the horizontal direction. That comfort and healing to walk upright are still needed.

Purim

A war fought against Israel on foreign soil is the one in which the Persians, led by its chief minister Haman under king Xerxes (Ahashverosh, Ahasuerus), intended to carry out genocide against Israelites who had been deported there in exile. The book (megillah) that is read is Esther. The Biblical call to continuing to

celebrate this feast is in Esther 9:22 and 27. The sense associated with this feast is our proprioception, which, among other things, enables us to control our horizontal movement by continuously measured muscle tension and stretch in tendons. This horizontal movement is necessary to flee from danger and, in this case, to return to your own territory, just like with the first Passover. And the liberation lies in learning to recognize G-d’s intervention. His name and presence are omitted in this text, but for the knowers He is present.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lion Erwtman, together with his wife Elze, is the cofounder, leader, and teacher of Beth Yeshua, a Messianic Jewish congregation located in Amsterdam. Nearing 30 years, they have been ministering to the congregation through teachings, worship, music, and dance, and Lion’s organization is a long-standing partner of Netivyah in Jerusalem which is led by his son-in-law Yuda Bachana. Originally a biologist and viola player, Lion also completed studies related to Tanakh, Talmud, and New Testament. Lion and Elze are blessed with three children and five grandchildren. www.beth-yeshua.nl/en/

THE TROUBLE LAND & PURIM

By Elhanan ben-Avraham



Trouble is nothing new to the Holy Land. Jerusalem itself is the epicenter of trouble historically, being invaded, then razed, and then rebuilt countless times in its long history. Jerusalem is not on any major trade route, has little water to speak of, and contains no great natural resources worth fighting over, but it is the place where all the major irreconcilable ideological ends of the universe meet in conflict, seeking a Solution.

Though holiday cards tend to show sweet and peaceful images of the birth of Jesus, he was born into a troubled time under a brutal Roman military occupation when crucifixions were common Roman displays on the roads leading to the Holy City. Before him was the merciless invasion by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar which the Bible describes, after him was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and in the seventh century was the invasion of the Muslims. The Middle Ages saw the

incursion of the Crusaders attempting to take the Holy Land back from the Muslim invaders. In the 20th century, the Land was captured in war by the British under General Allenby. The new Jewish state was met with war at its inception in 1948, then Jerusalem was captured by the Jews in a defensive war in 1967, and since then, there have been several wars. It is a troubled land.

Today the Land of Israel is surrounded by trouble. There are daily and incessant threats from those who want to destroy the one Jewish state on the planet which was founded as a result of the destruction of a third of the Jews of Europe in the Holocaust. The very unhappy Muslim world, spread vast around the region, is in turmoil and revolution, to what end nobody can predict. The immediate neighbors, the Palestinians, are unable to accept any compromise for peace with Israel, and half of its population supports the terrorist organization Hamas, whose only *raison d'être* is the destruction of

Israel as stated in their covenant. But the real concern for Israel today is Iran, ancient Persia.

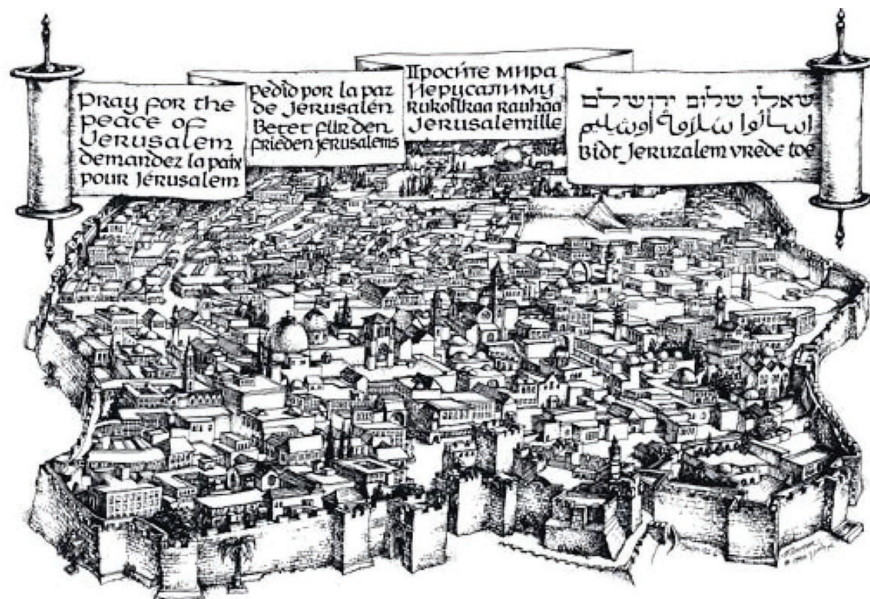
*Since long ago,
the Prophet
Daniel wrote
the vision given
him predicting
the central role
of Persia in the
scenario of the
final events of
the latter days.*

But even that is nothing new to Israel's Jews. Israel is about to celebrate the festival of Purim, which is the memory of the planned annihilation of the Jewish people by the machinations of Haman, the Agagite and descendant of Amalek. It is by the courage of two Jews, Esther and Mordechai, that the plan was defeated,

and then hanged on his own gallows in Babylon.

As we celebrate, we realize that a new Haman has arisen in Persia today, again breathing destruction to the Jews in his fathomless hatred, as if there really is something new under the sun. But this

*As we celebrate,
we realize that
a new Haman
has arisen in
Persia today,
again breathing
destruction to
the Jews in
his fathomless
hatred, as if
there really is
something new
under the sun.*



and the wicked Haman was hanged on his own gallows which he had prepared for Mordechai. The relieved Jewish people rejoiced at their deliverance, and Israel will now rejoice as well as we celebrate that festival and read the scroll of Esther once again. The same attempt by Saddam Hussein to destroy Israel with his scud missiles in 1991 ended on the day of Purim by some divine coincidence. Saddam himself, thinking himself a new Nebuchadnezzar, ended as that king did, captured as a wild man in a field with long hair and fingernails

new Haman is attempting to gird himself with nuclear weapons to accomplish his desired deed. And his stated desire is not new to Iran, as he is but carrying forth the plan of the Ayatollah Khomeini whose Islamic government has many times stated the annihilation of Israel as one of its central goals. But that too is nothing new, since long ago, the Prophet Daniel wrote the vision given him predicting the central role of Persia in the scenario of the final events of the latter days.

The Jews of the troubled land again

prepare in the face of our vast array of enemies. As we do, we behold the abundant rains and snows blessing the land and making it fertile, and we watch as the Holy Land is being restored to its former glory and strength. We turn to the pages of our ancient scriptures for understanding, and we lift our faces to the heavens and its King for comfort, strength, and deliverance, realizing that the author of Life is also the author of drama, leaving not a dull moment in His amazing universe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elhanan ben-Avraham, born in 1945, is a professional artist, poet, writer, father of two, and grandfather of four, and he has been living in Israel since 1979. He has served in the IDF, taught the Bible internationally, published five illustrated books of poetry, painted two large Biblical murals in public buildings in Jerusalem, and most recently produced THE JERUSALEM ILLUSTRATED BIBLE, among many other works. He and his wife live in a quiet village in the Mountains of Judah.

ISRAEL DURING THE JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS:

TRADITIONS & THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

By Joseph Shulam

Everything in Israel is unique when it comes to the celebration of the Jewish holidays. Religious traditions are mixed with the habits and traditions of each community according to the lifestyles formed through hundreds of years, each from its own diaspora experience. The vast immigration into this very small country created cohabitation of diverse populations and a mosaic of foods, prayer styles, and religious practices that are different and unique from the more monochromatic practices in each diaspora community.

Israel can be a fascinating place to visit throughout the year, but the Jewish High Holiday season provides a glance at the complex tapestry of life here. The holidays in Israel see religious traditions mix with habits and lifestyles formed through eight decades of cohabitation by the country's secular majority, its devout communities of mostly religious Zionists and ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews, and its non-Jewish communities.

Below are five unique traditions you may witness while strolling the streets of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other Israeli

cities during Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year celebration.

Tashlikh

On the first day of the Jewish New Year, after the big meals and rich food that people eat on every feast, but especially on Rosh-Hashanah, you will find Orthodox Jews walking with their bellies full of rich holiday delicacies to a place of water: a river, a natural pool, the beach, or a spring of water. These Jews are taking pieces of bread throwing them into the water mumbling prayers. If you don't know what these Jewish people are doing, you might think that they are there with the bread pieces to feed the fish, but no, they are by these bodies of water to fulfill the following text from the prophet Micah (7:19-20), "He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to



Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.”

The word Tashlikh in Hebrew means, “You will cast out!” The meaning is taken from the Hebrew Text of Micah 7:19, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea!” The idea is that we will start our New Year with God casting out our sins into the water, be it

a river, an ocean, a well, or just a big puddle of water. This is a custom that is done by both Ashkenazi Jews and Sephardic Jews.

The adaptation of the custom from the text of Micah the prophet, to be honest, is a little surrealistic, but very interesting. Here is my understanding of the reality and importance of this custom.

Jews lived in the diaspora, far from Jerusalem, and even if they lived in Jerusalem since the year 70 C.E. (A.D.), Jerusalem was not occupied or governed by Jews. The temple was destroyed, and there were periods when, in its place, pagan worship was established and even for a period, a temple to Greco-Roman gods was built on the temple platform. There were no sacrifices for the atonement of sins, there

were no Levites or priests, and there was no tangible way to have even a statement of our sins being forgiven or atoned for. In this condition, the verse of Micah 7:19-20 opened a door for a service or a ceremony that has something to do with atonement of sins. The logic was, we will cast our sins into the water as Micah the prophet says, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea!”

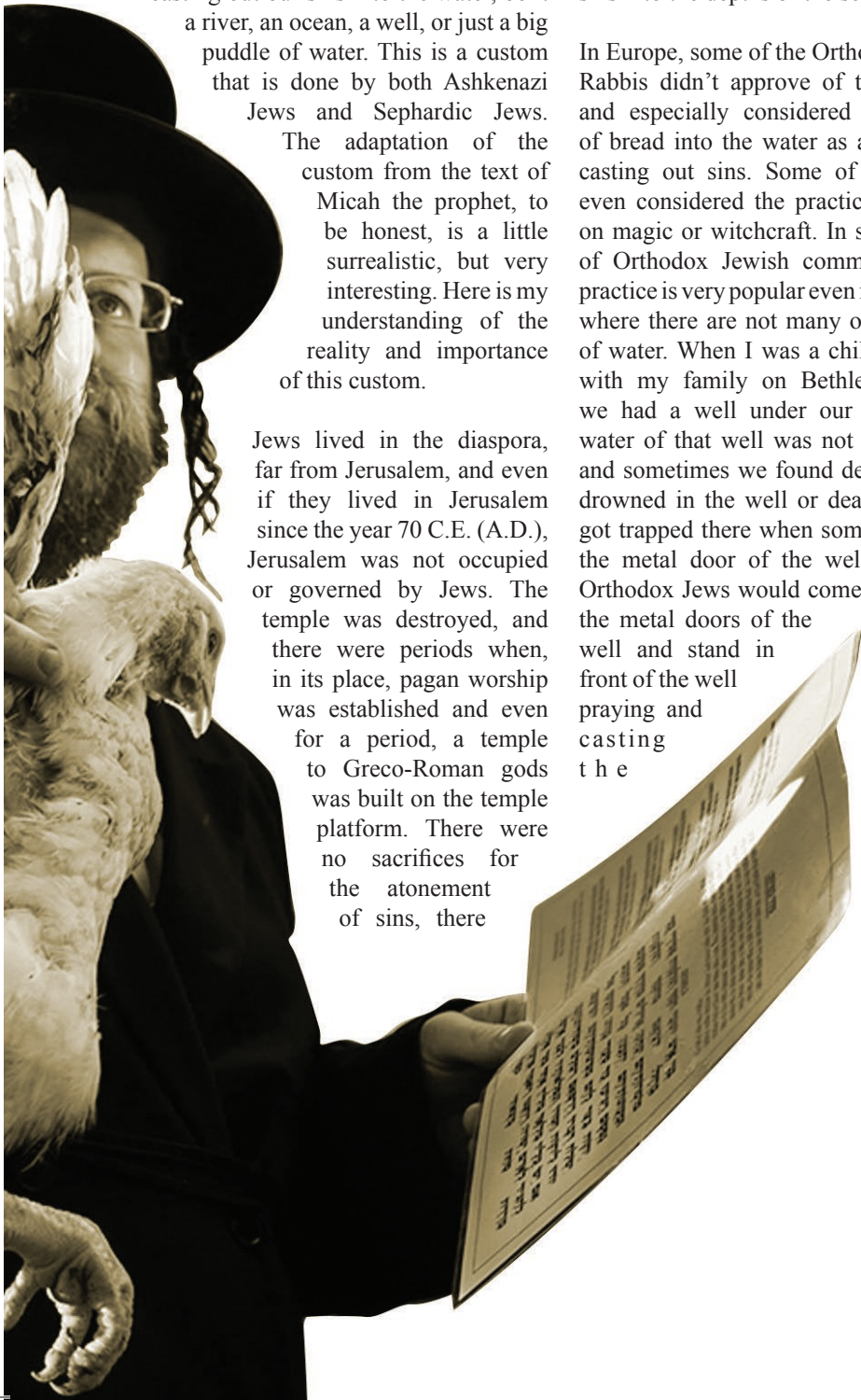
In Europe, some of the Orthodox Jewish Rabbis didn’t approve of this practice and especially considered the casting of bread into the water as a symbol of casting out sins. Some of the Rabbis even considered the practice bordering on magic or witchcraft. In some circles of Orthodox Jewish communities, the practice is very popular even in Jerusalem where there are not many open sources of water. When I was a child and lived with my family on Bethlehem Road, we had a well under our house. The water of that well was not fit to drink, and sometimes we found dead cats that drowned in the well or dead birds that got trapped there when someone closed the metal door of the well. But some Orthodox Jews would come and open the metal doors of the well and stand in front of the well praying and casting

the

If this custom would be done in the marketplace in Jerusalem or anywhere else in Israel on any regular day, the police would give a ticket to the Rabbi who is swinging the chicken over the people’s heads and charging them money for doing it.

pieces of bread into the well. This is not based on exegesis, but rather eisegesis (to insert, draw into the text your own meaning), but as they say, “necessity is the mother of all inventions!”

The Tashlikh is not the only tradition that was developed in the diaspora for the so-called atonement of sins. Another one of these traditions in Orthodox Judaism is called Kapparot. It is the same root as in the Holiday “Yom Kippur.” Yom Kippur comes ten days after Rosh HaShanah, and it is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) comes on the 10th day of Tishrei, the seventh month.



The Pilgrimage holidays are Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkoth. There is a Torah obligation for all Jews to come to Jerusalem for these three feasts or, as they are called in the Hebrew Bible, “The Seasons of the Lord!”

Our Rosh Hashanah is actually dated on the first day of the seventh month. In the Old Testament, the new year was celebrated on the first of the month of Aviv/Nissan; that is called the first of the months. There are a few texts that state this as clear as in Esther 3:7, “In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.” The order of the Hebrew months is Adar (the last month) which is followed by Nisan (the first month).

Kapparot

In the days before Yom Kippur, there is a tradition and custom called Kapparot, or atonements. This custom, as strange as it is, is also done totally outside of any scriptures in the Torah or anywhere in the Bible. This is what happens in the few days before Yom Kippur. A rabbi or any adult man, takes a live chicken and spins it over the heads of young children or even some adults. The chicken is killed with a sharp knife that cuts the throat of the chicken, and it is supposedly given to the poor people to eat. If this custom would be done in the marketplace in Jerusalem or anywhere else in Israel on any regular day, the police would give a ticket to the Rabbi who is swinging the chicken over the people’s heads and charging them money for doing it. Another strange custom connected to the above is that if it is a female that has the chicken swinging over her head or the head of her girl, it has to be a hen. If it is a male or a boy that wants the chicken to be swinging over his head, it has to be a rooster. Now, in our day, there could be a big problem because Israel has not a small number of men and women who don’t know what gender they are, and if they would come to the Machane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem and find a Rabbi that is practicing this custom of Kapparot, there could develop a legal (Halacha question) of when to use a rooster or a hen for the atonement of the sins of the customer who is not sure if he/she is a male or a female!

The most important point of these two customs is that Orthodox Jews are looking for something that can give them the feeling or the experience of receiving forgiveness of sins. The idea is clear, that we, as Jews, don’t have a temple, and don’t have an altar, and don’t have sacrifices for sins, and don’t have any clear Torah possibility or practice that can be practiced today that

will give a person assurance that his sins are forgiven. Transgressions are atoned for by a visible and sensory ceremony or practice that is based on the Torah or the Prophets, and these practices are serving to give some kind of unsubstantiated “man-invented practices.” The only Biblical atonement that is post-sacrificial or uses blood is found in Isaiah chapter 53, and it is talking of a person, not the swinging of a chicken over your head.

“Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4–6)

Today, more modern religious Jews have developed a different way of performing the Kapparot custom. In place of having a chicken swinging over your head, you can give the Rabbi a wad of money and save the trauma of the poor chicken. This development is more humane to the chicken, but also much more lucrative for the Rabbi. The modern Jew, and especially the Orthodox Jew who is a vegan, will now have an alternative for the reported virtual atonement of his sins while also making the Rabbi happy!

The other unique practice during Yom Kippur is the bike riding during the time of the 25 hours of fasting. During Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, all businesses and services other than emergency medical and security services are stopped by law. There is no public transportation, not even private cars are on the roads and streets of Jerusalem. There is no television or radio available, and people



walk in the middle of the streets with their children, and the little children often ride their small bicycles and tricycles in the middle of the streets.

The interesting part of Yom Kippur is that even the non-Jewish citizens of Israel honor the day and keep the law and abstain from driving their cars or motorbikes in the streets of the city. The only vehicle that you might see on rare occasions is an ambulance that is taking someone to the emergency room in the hospital or a woman who is giving birth to the hospital to deliver her baby.

Some people have called Yom Kippur in Israel as the bicycle feast of Jerusalem. The truth is that Jerusalem is more conservative and more respectful of the holiness of this very special feast of the Lord than other cities in Israel are. The other cities are also observant of the fast and of the no traffic and no transportation, but many places are more tolerant of those who decided to drive their cars or motorbikes on this solemn day.

Inside the synagogues, including in our synagogue, the prayers follow the traditional prayer book. We use the

normal Israeli prayer books for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These prayer books, or I should call these books prayer guides, have rich traditions that could be as old as the time of the Temple in Jerusalem or as old as the Jewish citizens of Moorish Spain in the 12th to 15th centuries. Both in the prayer book of Rosh Hashanah and in the Yom Kippur prayer book, there are rich allusions to the Messiah and wonderful, rich traditional prayers. As disciples of Yeshua, we feel enriched by the celebration of these ancient Biblical holidays and also inspired by the prayers and the Messianic allusions. The most significant prayers to recite in the Yom Kippur service are the four readings of the big confession during the evening and the daytime of this holy day. The big confession is a list of nearly 150 sins that are read in public. Second, there is not a single human being that this list is not going to remind and encourage to recognize his sinful deeds and actions. Third, the list is so powerful that it reminds us that we truly need God's grace and forgiveness. It is and ought to be a total encouragement to confess our sins and also a clear indication to everyone who participates and prays or thinks about the content of this list to repent and

The feast of Sukkoth is a feast that equalizes the community. It is a feast where the rich and the poor are in a tabernacle that is open to the rain and the wind. During the year, each is different, and one might live in a palace and the other might be homeless.

do his best to change and next year not to repeat the same confession of the same sins that you confessed last year. This is something that I personally read with great emotional concentration and deep feeling for the need to do better, and the confession leads to repentance and to a sincere desire to correct and abstain from repeating last year's mistakes and sins. I wish my Christian brothers and sisters would have at least one time per year with such a concentrated consideration of the private and public sins that we could have and might have consciously

or unconsciously committed and repent of our sins.

Sukkoth – Feast of Booths

The feast of Sukkot starts four days after Yom Kippur. The dates are from the Torah—from Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. We don't invent our own holidays. All these holidays are right from the Bible. Sukkoth – or as it is called in English the 'Feast of Booths'—is one of the more colorful and interesting feasts in the Bible, and it is clear that Yeshua and His disciples considered it a very important feast. In the Gospel of John, chapter 7, the whole chapter starts and ends with the events that are connected with this feast of seven days and a special one on the eighth day. So, here is the big thing that is commanded for us to do on this great feast, and the last of the pilgrimage holidays. The Pilgrimage holidays are Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkoth. There is a Torah obligation for all Jews to come to Jerusalem for these three feasts or, as they are called in the Hebrew Bible, "The Seasons of the Lord!"

Sukkoth starts four days after Yom Kippur. Driving through the religious neighborhoods of Jerusalem, you can see on balconies, in parking lots, by restaurants, in front yards and in back yards, like mushrooms popping up, temporary structures made from plywood or cloth and metal poles, with rooves made from palm branches or thatched bamboo. Inside there are paper decorations of all colors and pomegranates hanging from the roof. Inside, there are also usually a table and chairs. It looks shabby, but it is a happy place. It is a tabernacle, a sukkah in Hebrew, a structure that from inside when you look up at night you will see the stars. If there is rain (and normally during the feast of Sukkot there could be rain), the rain will come inside and get

you wet. If there is wind you will feel it just about like you would if you were outside the Sukkah. The feast is seven nights, and each night you invite other honored guests: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, King David, and the Messiah. You could rightfully ask how you could invite these honored guests into your temporary shaky structure called in Hebrew Sukkah. The answer is rather simple: every evening with the fine food on the table and a definite holiday atmosphere, your honored guest sets the tone of your conversation around the table.

On the first evening you talk to your family and your guests about Abraham. You describe the character, you mention his hospitality, you speak about his faith and patience. You ask your family members and your guests to add their ideas and impressions of Abraham. The next evening you talk about Isaac, and in this way, every evening you have an honored guest that inspires you and your guests with his life and his contribution to the formation of the nation of Israel and the spiritual fiber that holds us together in difficult times and challenging situations. In the daytime, you unite in your hands the four elements—the palm branch, willow branches, the myrtle branches, and the citron (ancient father of the lemon and orange and other citrus fruit).

These four elements each have a different characteristic. The Palm has a sweet taste but no smell. The Myrtle has a smell and no taste. The willow has no taste and no smell. The Citron has both taste and smell. When you bind these four elements together and hold them in your hands and shake them together and pray and thank the Lord for all four together, you are uniting the name of God. You are uniting the name that is made from four Hebrew letters and you unite yourself and the family with all the

different types of people, like the four sons that start the Passover Seder (meal and ceremony) and like the four soils in Yeshua's parable. These four elements teach the same, but uniting them in your hands and blessing the Lord for all four of these elements is the greatest lesson of our unity and of our oneness as a nation, as a community, as a people.

Yes, in every community you will find those that have everything good in their life and character. You will also find that the majority of the people might have one of the good elements and not the other. You will also find people that don't have any of the good and desirable elements. The feast of Sukkoth is a feast that equalizes the community. It is a feast where the rich and the poor are in a tabernacle that is open to the rain and the wind. During the year, each is different, and one might live in a palace and the

***We cannot ever
be fulfilled
alone and by
ourselves. We
are a community
that is united,
and that
one brother
fulfills the
shortcomings
of his fellow
brother and
neighbor.***

The Christianity that you see today is no more than 30% from the Bible and 70% from the Church fathers in the second through sixth centuries after Christ. This includes the Christian holidays and the replacement theology that rejected Israel and the Jewish people.

other might be homeless. During the feast of Sukkot, everyone is equal, and everyone is vulnerable to the elements of nature, and everyone needs his human neighbor and brother in the faith. The feast of Sukkot is actually celebrated just as the rainy season starts, and the weather changes. It is also a time when your harvest is finished, and your store houses are full of grain, wine, oil, and the wealth of your harvest of fruit and bread. It is exactly this which Sukkot celebrates, and it teaches us the most important lesson in life. We need our brothers and sisters. We cannot ever be fulfilled alone and by ourselves. We are a community that is united, and that one brother fulfills the shortcomings of his fellow brother and neighbor.

Yes, the feasts of the Lord are even more important today than they were in the time when we did have, in Jerusalem, a temple, priests, and sacrifices, and we could come from the Galilee and from the Negev Desert to Jerusalem and join the crowded streets with the hundreds of pilgrims from all around the country and also from Syria, Egypt, the Transjordan, and even from Arabia, Greece, and Rome. As you read in Acts chapter 2, there were pilgrims that came to celebrate the feast of Pentecost in

Jerusalem from 18 different countries and speaking 18 different languages.

Today, dear brothers and sisters, the majority of our brothers and sisters prefer celebrating the pagan holidays that are not in the Bible and are not commanded upon us like those that Yeshua, the Apostles, and the early disciples of Yeshua celebrated—even the feasts and holidays that are commanded for the churches, like the Passover that was commanded to be celebrated to the church in Corinth (in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

My formula is simple. If you want to see the same results, you have to use the same ingredients when you bake your cake. You can't have the power, the gifts, and the success of the early church without faithfully doing what they did and following Yeshua's instructions and celebrating the same thing that He and his disciples celebrated. Yes, it is this simple! If you want to see the same deeds and power demonstrated in your life and in your community (church), then you have to have the same ingredients. The Christianity that you see today is no more than 30% from the Bible and 70% from the Church fathers in the second through sixth centuries after Christ. This

includes the Christian holidays and the replacement theology that rejected Israel and the Jewish people. It includes the Christmas Tree that was a part of the pagan worship as Jeremiah had already pointed out in chapter 10:1-4. I will bring this text here now as a conclusion, enlightenment, and inspiration to work harder on the restoration of the New Testament Church, in order to see and have the same message and the same power of the Holy Spirit and the same success in bringing the pagans to the knowledge of God and to Yeshua the Messiah!

“Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: ‘Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good.’” (Jeremiah 10:1-5 NKJV)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Shulam was born in Sofia, Bulgaria on March 24, 1946 to a Sephardic Jewish Family. In 1948, his family immigrated to Israel just before the establishment of the State. While in high school, he was introduced to the New Testament and immediately identified with the person of Yeshua. In 1981, Joseph and the small fellowship that was started in his house established one of the first official non-profit organizations of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua in Israel – Netivayah Bible Instruction Ministry. Joseph has lectured extensively and has assisted in encouraging disciples around the world. He and his wife Marcia have two children and two grandchildren.

There's a lot more to Netivyah than meets the eye; the Teaching From Zion magazine is only one of our outreach and humanitarian ministries. We invite you to connect with the other branches of our ministry.

Publications

Publishing is one of Netivyah's top priorities, as we see education as being central to our existence. Visit our website for previous issues of Teaching from Zion, as well as a selection of our books.



Congregation

Roeh Israel, "Shepherd of Israel," is a Messianic Jewish Congregation in Jerusalem. The Congregation is made up of followers of Yeshua, both Jews and non-Jews, who worship together in a traditional synagogue environment.



Humanitarian Aid

There are many families in Israel, even entire sections of the population, who fall between the cracks. Hamotzi Food Distribution Center is a place that literally brings forth food for local needy families in Jerusalem. Without charities and organizations like Netivyah, they would not be able to put food on the table.



Video Teachings

The world is watching videos online, so we are producing high quality teaching videos in English and Hebrew and publishing them on the internet to continue to present the Good News to the world in its original Jewish and Hebrew culture.

netivyah.org
tfz@netivyah.org



NETIVYAH BIBLE INSTRUCTION MINISTRY

Tel. 972-2-6231019 | www.netivyah.org | PO BOX 8043, JERUSALEM 91080, ISRAEL