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## **Celebrate! The Feasts of Yahweh** *By Richard Willets*

**Series Editor: Alcot Walker**

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.  
The Holy Bible, NIV Version 1978, 1984 by New York International Bible Society  
*Substitution of the holy Names in all quotations has been made at the discretion of the author*

### **Introduction**

***Blessed-happy, fortunate (to be envied) - are the people who know the joyful sound (who understand and appreciate the spiritual blessings symbolized by the feasts); they walk, oh [Yahweh], in the light and favour of your countenance!*<sup>1</sup>**

We are living in an exciting era where the heavenly Father is restoring truth to His Church. Over the last century we have seen the 'Pentecostal' experience with the gifts of the Spirit like tongues, prophecy and healing becoming an integral part of many Church services. We have also seen a growing recognition of the need for modern day apostles and prophets in our Churches. Yahweh has raised up anointed evangelists who are reaching millions with the power of the gospel with signs following as they did in the New Testament book of Acts. Some have explored the ideals of community as enjoyed by the early Church in Jerusalem where the disciples claimed nothing as their own but had all things common.

Such restoration of the faith that was originally entrusted to the early Church gives us great reason to rejoice. In recent years, a growing number of believers are discovering that there are other practices that were enjoyed by the Church of the early New Testament period which believers as a whole have yet to explore and embrace. A close study of the book of Acts reveals that the celebrations enjoyed by the Church at that time were not the Xmas and Easter and saints' days with which we are familiar but they were based rather on the feast days outlined in the Old Testament, such as Passover & Unleavened bread, First Fruits, Pentecost and Tabernacles, but with a New Covenant perspective.

The above scripture encourages us to know and understand the Joyful Sound. The Hebrew word for this is *teruah*. This is the word used for describing the sound made by the SHOFAR, a ram's horn that Yahweh commanded to be blown at monthly new moons and at the commencement of all the biblical feast days. It suggests that there is a peculiar blessing to be reaped by those who experience it.

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<sup>1</sup> Ps 89:15 - Amplified Bible

Our purpose is to explore some of the richness of teaching that is encapsulated in these ancient festivals and their relevance to the Church today. In these feasts we can discover more of the nature of Yahweh and His plan for mankind.

## ***Understanding the biblical calendar***

In order to calculate the times in the year when Yahweh's feasts are celebrated, we need first to have a basic understanding of the biblical calendar.

The set times of Yahweh are first mentioned in Gen 1:14. Here we see that Yahweh created the great lights in the sky (the sun and moon) to help us to mark off seasons, days and years. According to the creation account a new day begins not at sunrise or midnight as we understand but at sundown - hence the phrase "...*there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.*"<sup>1</sup> Thus all the appointed days that are mentioned in scripture actually begin at sundown the night before. These appointed days are called in Hebrew the *moedim*. This is the precise Hebrew word used in Gen 1.14 and elsewhere in the Old Testament when describing the appointed feasts.

In the western world, we are used to 12 months in the year, each with a duration of 30 or 31 days. In the bible each month of the year begins on a new moon. The period between one new moon and another is 28 - 29 days. To calculate the annual festivals one simply has to identify the first new moon of any year and then count the specific number of days and monthly lunar cycles from this beginning point. According to Exodus 12:2, the month of Aviv which occurs in March/April time, is the first month of the year. It is timed to coincide with Israel's spring barley harvest. (The meaning of the Hebrew word Aviv is "*young head of grain*".) As soon as the first few ears of barley are about to ripen an Israelite would know that the new moon nearest to this point marks the beginning of the year.

## ***What are the Feasts?***

The first *moed* or appointed feast as described in Lev 23 and Numbers 28 - 29, is the **Sabbath** day<sup>2</sup>. This is a weekly celebration that is also spoken of in the Genesis account of creation; a day to cease from normal work and hold a sacred assembly. We know from the scriptures that the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week is on a Saturday as observed by Orthodox Jews today. It begins on a Friday night at sundown and continues through to sundown on Saturday. Whilst many Christians celebrate Sunday as the Sabbath, this was not the original day on which it was observed in the scriptures. Sunday is clearly called the first day of the week in both the Old and New Testaments. (We know in Acts that believers met together on the first day of the week - possibly a Saturday night, but this does not mean that they no longer observed the seventh-day Sabbath. On the Sabbath day all the believers would have gone to the synagogues or the temple to hear a reading of the books of Moses.)

In addition to this weekly celebration there are numerous annual festivals. The first is called the **Passover** (*Pesach* in Hebrew), which takes place on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month Aviv. This is followed by a festival of 7 days duration known as

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 1:5

<sup>2</sup> Lev 23:3

**Unleavened Bread** from the 15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> of Aviv. Both the first and last days are special days of rest like a weekly Sabbath.

On the first day of the week following the weekly Sabbath (ie a Sunday) within the feast of Unleavened Bread is the day of **Firstfruits**. Count 50 days from this Sunday and you arrive at the date for the next holy day, the day of **Pentecost** (*Shavuot* in Hebrew). This day, always a Sunday, is also a day of rest, or 'Sabbath'.

The next month of significance is the 7<sup>th</sup> month, known in Hebrew as *Tishri*. This month, occurring around September/October time, is punctuated with a number of celebrations: on the first day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month a day of rest is to be observed for the **Memorial of the Blowing of Trumpets** (*Rosh Hashanah*), followed by the **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*) on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri. Yahweh's year then reaches its climax on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishri when the **Feast of Tabernacles** (*Succot*) begins. This festival lasts 7 days (15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Tishri). The Feast is climaxed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> when a sacred assembly is held. This 8<sup>th</sup> day of Tabernacles is often known as the Last Great Day of the Feast.

These festivals were closely linked to the agricultural cycle of the land of Israel as well as to specific events in Israel's history as recounted in the Bible.

## ***The Feasts under the New Covenant Era***

Many Christians are surprised that one might consider celebrating what are seen as Jewish festivals that belong to an Old Covenant and that have no place in a New Covenant Church. Surely all these laws and regulations were "nailed to the cross" and done away with by Yahshua? Many interpret Paul's teaching in Colossians 2 as implying that the Feasts have only symbolic value, being shadows of the reality that is found in Yahshua<sup>1</sup>. This verse however actually tells us something very positive about these ancient festivals; something that should be of great interest to believers: the heart and true substance of the Feasts is Yahshua Himself. Thus to know the "joyful sound" is to understand more about Yahshua and His work of salvation.

Many interpret Paul's criticisms of the Galatian church in Gal 4:9-10 as being evidence of his opposition to believers getting involved with the observance of any of the Festivals to be found in the Scriptures. In following this line of reasoning, we ignore some important facts about Paul's lifestyle and teaching that contradict this. It was commonly believed by Orthodox Jews living at the time of Paul (and indeed by many today) that whilst preaching the gospel to both Jew and gentile, Paul was instructing Jewish believers to turn away from Jewish customs rooted in the teaching of Moses. (These customs included the observance of Sabbaths and Feasts)<sup>2</sup>. This was **not** the case. We read in verse 24 "...*there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.*" If we look carefully we can find a number of New Testament references to the celebration of the Feasts by both Jewish and gentile believers in the early church. There are two references, for example, which point to the fact that early believers observed Passover. The first is a passing reference to the Feast made by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 20:6 he states that Paul's church planting team, which include himself, a gentile, stayed at Philippi until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, suggesting that this was a significant date in the calendar for them. Paul further encourages the Corinthian Church to celebrate the Festival<sup>3</sup>. With references

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<sup>1</sup> Col 2:16-17

<sup>2</sup> Acts 21:20-21

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 5:8

to Yahshua being the Passover lamb and the imperative to rid oneself of the leaven of sin, the Festival spoken of can be clearly understood in the context of the passage to be the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Paul shortened one of his church planting visits because he felt the urgent need to go back to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (Acts 20:16). In considering whether we could or should observe Yahweh's Feasts, we should be careful to put this teaching into context or as Paul in his letter to Timothy phrased it: "...rightly dividing the word of truth."<sup>1</sup> First of all, no one should consider the Feasts as something essential to salvation. Paul was quick to condemn those who taught that adherence to the Law and Jewish traditions rather than faith in Yahshua was the means by which we receive the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we should make a distinction between what the Scriptures actually say and Jewish (or other) traditions and interpretations that have grown up around them. Yahshua was keen to uphold the teachings of Moses as being inspired by Yahweh and relevant to us<sup>3</sup> yet He was equally swift to vilify complex interpretations of the Law propounded by the religious community of His day which robbed the commandment of its true intent (eg. the rabbinical teaching of 'Corban' and the eating of food with ceremonially washed hands in Mark 7:1-14, and also forbidding the healing of the sick or picking ears of corn on the Sabbath day.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, we should note that under the New Covenant that was initiated by Yahshua in the upper room the night before He died, Yahweh promised through the prophet Jeremiah that He would write the Torah (the first five books of the bible) on the hearts of the people of Israel and Judah.<sup>5</sup>

Fourthly, whilst the Feasts under the Old Covenant were centered around Jerusalem and the Temple, Yahshua predicted that a time was coming when the geographical location of one's worship would become unimportant:

***"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth."<sup>6</sup>***

This truth is key to our understanding of how to interpret the Old Covenant Scriptures into a New Covenant era. The book of Hebrews provides us with a link from Old to New by pointing out that the temple that now no longer exists was just an earth-bound copy of the heavenly original.<sup>7</sup> This book further teaches us that Yahshua is our High Priest who shed His own blood **once and for all** and offered it in that temple for the forgiveness and removal of sin.<sup>8</sup> He thus made a way for us to enter the Holy of Holies. Since we are not physically present in heaven and this temple is not physically present on earth, the offerings that we now make are not bulls and goats, but spiritual offerings<sup>9</sup> ie offerings by and through the Holy Spirit. Whilst sacrifices for sin and guilt have already been made by Yahshua, we are still invited to offer to Yahweh fellowship offerings<sup>10</sup> of praise and thanksgiving. We are also invited to offer expressions of devotion,

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim 2:15

<sup>2</sup> Gal 3:1-2; 4:9-10

<sup>3</sup> Matt 5:17-18

<sup>4</sup> Matt 12:1-13

<sup>5</sup> Jer 31:31-33

<sup>6</sup> John 4:21,23

<sup>7</sup> Heb 8:5

<sup>8</sup> Heb 9:11-14

<sup>9</sup> Rom 12:1

<sup>10</sup> Lev 3:7;11-34

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commitment and complete surrender to Yahweh as represented by the burnt offerings of Leviticus<sup>1</sup>.

Paul said that he was being poured out, "...like a drink offering"<sup>2</sup> in his service to the church. (This subject is dealt with in more detail under the section "*Fellowship offerings under the New Covenant*").

Fifthly, the Jerusalem Church, which was initially comprised entirely of Jews and converts to Judaism was keen not to put burdens on new gentile converts that they would be unable to carry. There was no requirement placed on gentiles to observe any but a few of the teachings of Moses. However a door of opportunity was opened for them to go to the synagogue and hear Moses read if they desired to know more.<sup>3</sup>

It is this door of opportunity that we would like to explore. Could it be that there are great blessings to be found in a greater experience and understanding of Yahweh's Feasts? I surely believe so.

It is possible to look at these Feasts from many different angles. Let us now look at each one in detail.

## ***The Sabbath Day***

### **The Sabbath - Its historic observance**

This first appointed time occurs every week and is included among the 10 Commandments as a day to be remembered and observed through the cessation of normal work and making the day holy or set apart to Yahweh. The Hebrew word 'shabbath' actually means cessation - it commemorates the day when Yahweh rested from all His labours of creation. Even before the 10 Commandments were given at Sinai, Yahweh expected the Israelites who had been delivered from Egypt to keep the seventh day holy by collecting double their portion of manna on the sixth day of the week, so that they would not need to collect it on the seventh, breaking the Sabbath. This underlines a key to Sabbath day observance - the need for preparation. Jewish people throughout the centuries have used the sixth day as a preparation day for the Sabbath, preparing meals in advance and cleaning the house so that all is ready on a Friday evening to welcome the Sabbath day. Yahshua affirmed the Sabbath day as a day that was made for man, but criticized the legalistic observance taught by the religious leaders of His day. At the time of Yahshua's ministry a lot of man-made rules and regulations had grown up as to how the Sabbath day should be observed, to the extent that Yahshua was criticized for healing the sick on the Sabbath day and even for picking an ear of corn from the cornfield (Matt 12:1-3).<sup>4</sup>

Great blessings were promised to Israel if they continued to observe the Sabbath. In Isaiah, Yahweh said that if they were to observe the Sabbath they would find their joy in Yahweh and He would cause them to continue to have control over the land and its produce promised to Jacob their father.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24

<sup>2</sup> Phil 2:17

<sup>3</sup> Acts 15:19-21

<sup>4</sup> Matt 12:1-3

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 58:13-14

## The Sabbath - A prophetic message

As in all the Feasts of Yahweh, we can find a prophetic message conveyed in the Sabbath day; not only are we looking back to the time when Elohim created the heavens and the earth but we are also looking forward to the time when Messiah will rule and reign for 1000 years.<sup>1</sup>

***“There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of [Yahweh]; for anyone who enters [Yahweh’s] rest also rests from his own work. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest”<sup>2</sup>.***

As well as speaking to us of our final rest when Messiah returns these verses also reveal our need to rely not on our own efforts to gain salvation but on Yahshua’s finished work on the cross. In His own teaching, Yahshua put Himself squarely at the centre of this celebration by declaring that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

## The Sabbath today

The Sabbath day is more than just a teaching; Yahweh’s intention is that we should appreciate the blessing that He places in it every week. Yahshua taught that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. In this scripture He both affirms the principle of making the seventh day holy to Yahweh for our own spiritual, mental and physical benefit whilst at the same time criticizing the legalistic approach of the teachers of His day who sought to reduce Sabbath day observance to a set of complex rules.

## The Passover and Unleavened Bread

### Its historic observance

The significance of Passover to Jewish people has its roots in the deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery through the hand of Moses. It commemorates the series of miraculous interventions that finally convinced Pharaoh to allow the Israelite slaves their freedom. Of the 10 plagues sent on Egypt, it is the final plague that highlights the true significance of Passover to Israel. They were instructed to take a 1-year-old male lamb without blemish and slaughter it on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Aviv (March/April). The blood from the lamb was to be painted onto the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite houses and the lamb itself eaten within the house that night. At midnight, Yahweh sent the angel of death over the whole land of Egypt. In any house where the blood was not applied every man and boy who was a first-born son would die. For those with blood on their doorposts the angel of death would **pass over** leaving all within that house unharmed. The result of this final devastating plague was that Israel was not only allowed but compelled to leave by the Egyptians who offered them silver, gold and clothing to make sure they never came back. Such was the haste at which they left, the bread they had baked for their journey did not have time to rise so they left Egypt with unleavened bread.

Yahweh commanded them to commemorate this deliverance every year on the 14<sup>th</sup> Aviv through the eating of a Passover lamb complete with bitter herbs and bread

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<sup>1</sup> Rev 20:4

<sup>2</sup> Heb 4:9-11

made without yeast. The bitter herbs were to remind them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Even today Jewish households celebrate a Passover meal where lamb is eaten along with bitter herbs dipped in salt water to remind them of the tears shed in the slavery of Egypt. Other Passover recipes apart from those mentioned in scripture have been developed over the centuries, which are most interesting to look into and to eat!

Subsequent to the Passover celebration was 7 days of unleavened bread. The first and seventh day (15<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Aviv) are High Sabbaths, (ie not necessarily the seventh day). During this time nothing leavened (ie containing yeast) was to be found in any Israelite house and they were commanded to eat only unleavened bread. A sacred assembly was held on the first and last day with an offering of fire on each of the 7 days.

### The prophetic message of Passover

As with all the Feasts, the message it conveys is not only commemorative of the great works of Yahweh in Israel's history but it also speaks prophetically of Messiah who was to come. John the Baptist declared Yahshua to be "...the lamb of [Yahweh] who takes away the sins of the world".<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that he understood the full implication of this revelation in terms of the death that Yahshua would die in order to fulfill its promise, but with the benefit of hindsight we can read the gospel accounts and see how Yahshua has indeed become our Passover lamb.<sup>2</sup>

Here is a table, which shows us some of the parallels:

History	Prophetic fulfilment
Lamb was sacrificed in the temple on 14 <sup>th</sup> Aviv	Yahshua was nailed to the cross on the 14 <sup>th</sup> Aviv, the day before the first Sabbath of Unleavened Bread*
All the blood was removed from the lamb	All Yahshua's blood was shed on the stake
It was the blood of the lamb that saved Israel from death	Through the blood of Yahshua we are redeemed from eternal death
When Israel left Egypt, not one of them was sick	Through the stripes that Yahshua bore when He was whipped, we are healed
Not one of the lamb's bones was to be broken	Not a bone of Yahshua's body was broken (when the Roman soldiers came to break His legs in order to remove the bodies from the stakes before the Sabbath came in, He was already dead)
The 7 day celebration of Unleavened Bread occurs straight after Passover	Paul likens leaven to sin and encourages us to live lives not with the yeast of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. This is only possible because Yahshua our Passover lamb has been sacrificed on our behalf

\* This fact is not immediately apparent if we take a cursory glance at the gospel accounts since Yahshua, the day before He died, instructed the disciples to make preparations for the Passover. It is traditionally thought that the last supper was the Passover meal that would have been celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> Aviv. Yahshua would therefore have died on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which was a High Sabbath. This very fact should cause us to ask ourselves some important questions: if Yahshua died on a High Sabbath, why were there not objections from the Jews who were adamant that the crucifixion should be completed before the Sabbath? The logical answer is that the Sabbath that was approaching was the first day of Unleavened Bread and Yahshua did indeed die at the same time as the Passover lambs were being ceremonially slaughtered in the temple. What, then was the meal that Yahshua ate the night before? The first clue we have is in John 13:1,

<sup>1</sup> John 1:29

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 5:7

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where John described the time of the last supper as being “just before the Passover feast”. At that time it was customary to bring an offering to Jerusalem that would be eaten as part of the pilgrims’ celebration in accordance with Yahweh’s command that “no one should appear before [Yahweh] empty handed” at “the place that He shall choose” ie Jerusalem (Deut 16:16-17). This meal was called the Chagigah meal - it was a festival offering. With Passover still a day away, this was the meal that was eaten in the upper room that night. Luke calls it “the Passover” (Lk 22:8,14). This was true in the sense that it was Passover Chagigah. To help us understand why Yahshua would call the meal ‘the Passover’ when strictly the Passover meal was not to be eaten until the following evening, it is helpful to draw a parallel with our own customs here in the UK. Many companies and institutions put on Christmas meals in the time running up to Christmas. These meals are not eaten on the 25<sup>th</sup> December, nevertheless they are called Christmas dinners because they are a celebration of the season. The meal that Yahshua ate was a Passover meal in the sense that it was a celebration of the season. In the same way, the seven day festival of Unleavened Bread is often called Passover, even though strictly speaking, the Passover is only one day.

## **Passover today**

Once we appreciate the connection between Yahshua’s sacrifice and Passover it becomes easy to see that this Feast also represents the beginnings of salvation in the life of a believer. We repent of sin, represented by the ridding of leaven from the home and we put our faith in the power of Yahshua’s blood to cleanse us from sin. This enables us to walk the pathway of holiness, having been delivered from the power of sin as represented by the 7 days of Unleavened Bread. A large portion of the Church today celebrates these great events at a time called Easter. The original celebration of the Church, however was Passover. When the Roman church sought in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century to change the dates of the Passover celebrations to the Good Friday and Easter Sunday we know today, there was a group of believers called the Quarto-Decimans (Latin for 14) who, taking their lead from Polycarp who himself came under the ministry of the apostle John, opposed the change, arguing that the correct time for celebrating the death and resurrection of Yahshua was the 14<sup>th</sup> Aviv. Reclaiming this celebration as part of our heritage as New Covenant believers therefore puts us in good company.

## **Firstfruits**

### **Historic observance**

The day of Firstfruits or early fruits marks a key point in the agricultural year of Israel as it marks the earliest harvest of the year; the barley harvest. On this day the first few ears of barley were presented as an offering and waved before Yahweh in the temple. The implication of this was that if Yahweh had blessed them with an early harvest, He would certainly bless them with the latter harvest of late summer.

Like the weekly Sabbath this is a Feast that always occurs on the same day of the week i.e. the day after the Sabbath<sup>1</sup>, - a Sunday. It is celebrated on the first Sunday\* to occur in (or immediately after in the event of the 15<sup>th</sup> Aviv itself being a Sunday) the 7 day Feast of Unleavened Bread. As well as the grain offering a burnt offering of a 1-year-old lamb was also made on this day.<sup>2</sup>

\*In the event of the 15<sup>th</sup> Aviv falling on a Sunday, the Day of Firstfruits is to be celebrated on the following Sunday – ie the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread ends

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<sup>1</sup> Lev 23:11

<sup>2</sup> Lev 23:12

## Prophetic fulfilment

This day, although not a Sabbath, is of immense importance to believers in Yahshua, since it completes the prophetic picture of Messiah painted for us by Passover and Unleavened Bread. Yahshua declared that "...unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds".<sup>1</sup>

Just as Passover speaks to us of Yahshua's suffering and death, the day of First Fruits was fulfilled by Yahshua when having risen from the grave, He then ascended into the presence of His Father. From the gospel accounts we know that this ascension occurred on the first Sunday after Passover ie the day of Firstfruits.

Paul speaks of the resurrected Messiah as being the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

***"But [Yahshua] has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through one man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in [Yahshua] all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Messiah, the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him."***<sup>2</sup>

Paul here shows us that Yahshua the Messiah fulfilled the day of Firstfruits by being the first to rise from the dead to an indestructible existence. The implication here is that if He is the first, He will not be the last, for the bodies of believers who have fallen asleep in Messiah will be resurrected for eternity when He returns.<sup>3</sup> Thus in fulfilling the First Fruits through His resurrection, Yahshua guarantees a further harvest of resurrected believers - just as Yahshua was raised, so shall those who are dead in Messiah also be raised on that day. Yahshua was thus the first of a whole new breed of human beings - beings who will put on immortality, even as Yahshua did and so live forever with Him.<sup>4</sup>

It should be emphasized that the true significance of this day is not just that Yahshua rose from the grave and came back to earth, but that He further ascended into the heavenly realm. It is interesting to note that when He had risen from the dead He commanded Miriam not to touch Him, "...for I have not yet returned to the Father" (Jn 20:17). This offering had to be perfect. Later, however, having completed His work in the Holy of Holies in heaven, He allowed Thomas to put his hands into the holes in His hands and side.

It was in the heavenly sanctuary (of which the earthly temple was just an imperfect copy<sup>5</sup>) that Yahshua offered His own self to cleanse our consciences. This once for all sacrifice guarantees our redemption from sin and death. This is the true and complete prophetic fulfilment of the day of Firstfruits.

Traditionally Yahshua is said to have been crucified on a Friday and raised from the tomb on a Sunday. If we look at the scriptures however, we see that Yahshua prophesied that as the prophet Jonah was in the belly of the whale for 3 days and 3 nights, so He would be in the belly of the earth for 3 days and 3 nights.<sup>6</sup> Friday to Sunday is only two days. The mistaken notion of assuming that the crucifixion was on a Friday was due to the gospel accounts placing the crucifixion on the day before the Sabbath. It

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<sup>1</sup> John 12:23-24

<sup>2</sup> 1Cor 15:20-23

<sup>3</sup> 1 Thess 4:16

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 15:50-54

<sup>5</sup> Heb 9:11

<sup>6</sup> Matt 12:39

has long been assumed that since the Sabbath falls on a Friday evening then Friday must be the day of Yahshua's death. The Sabbath in question however was not the weekly Sabbath, but the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Unleavened Bread which is a special High Sabbath. This would mean that Yahshua was being crucified on the 14<sup>th</sup> Aviv at the exact same time as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple. If Yahshua rose before sunrise on a Sunday, then the day of His crucifixion must have been a Wednesday as only this would ensure that He remained in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights.

Jews at the time of Yahshua counted part days as whole days eg in John 20:26 a period from Sunday to Sunday is described as 8 days. Some argue therefore that 3 days and 3 nights is idiomatic and can be interpreted as being only two days with the last part of Friday counted as one day, Friday night and Saturday as day two and Saturday night and Sunday as day three. Paul claimed that Yahshua was raised the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. This would seem to confirm His death as being a Friday and His resurrection 2 days later. This argument, however does not really explain Yahshua's clear reference to the prophet Jonah who was in the belly of the whale for 3 days and 3 nights. For Him to have been in the grave for 3 complete nights, He would have had to have breathed His last breath on a Wednesday before sundown. It should also be noted that when they arrived at the tomb before dawn on the first day of the week, Yahshua had already risen. It is therefore possible that He rose late on Saturday, just before the sun had gone down.

### **Firstfruits: Its personal significance**

It should become clear that in the light of all that it represents this day is one of great personal significance to the believer, for just as Yahshua went from the cross to the grave, so we are called to follow Him down this path. He is like a 'trailblazer' going ahead, making the way of salvation clear. We are called to live and walk in the same resurrection power that raised Yahshua from the dead.<sup>1</sup> How then should we celebrate this day? First of all it is a time to count our blessings. We can rejoice not only in Yahshua's resurrection and all that this means but also in the first fruits of our own harvest. This is a time to wave the produce of our Yah-given harvest before Him. Perhaps we have been instrumental in winning people to Yahshua, or Yahweh has blessed us financially. Perhaps we have received healing or victory over the evil one in some area of our life. Perhaps Yahweh has blessed us with new spiritual gifts in our own life or in our church. Whatever it is that Yahweh has done, this is the day to wave it before Him in thanksgiving and praise. In doing so we should realize that there is a peculiar blessing attached to this day, for within this day is the promise of greater things. Israel offered the first fruits in the sure knowledge that this was only a foretaste of the greater harvest yet to come. In the same way, if we give thanks for what Yahweh has done for us this day, we can be sure of greater blessings in the future; in the words of Yahshua "Whoever has will be given more and he will have an abundance".<sup>2</sup> The greatest of all the promises of Yahweh for the believer however must surely be the promise of the resurrection. When we first come to Yahshua and are born again, we receive what Paul called the **firstfruits** of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> This gift of the Holy Spirit is like a deposit guaranteeing us a part in the first resurrection when our bodies will be redeemed and we will be raised to be with Yahshua FOREVER. Halleluyah! - what a hope; "*...no eye has seen no ear has heard, no mind has conceived the things what [Yahweh] has prepared for those who love Him*".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 6:8

<sup>2</sup> Matt 13:12

<sup>3</sup> Rom 8:23

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 2:9

## ***Festival of Weeks (Pentecost)***

### **Historic observance**

The Festival of Weeks (or *Shavuot* in Hebrew), like Firstfruits, always occurs on a Sunday. It is observed precisely 50 days or 7 weeks from the day of First Fruits, hence the word Pentecost meaning 50. Israel was commanded to count off seven Sabbaths and to observe this festival on the following day.

The significance of this Feast to Israel is closely tied to the harvests. Firstfruits is the time of the barley harvest when the first few ears of barley are waved before Yahweh. At Shavuot the climax to the early harvest is celebrated. It is at this time that the wheat in Israel is ready to be harvested, and the grain is ground into fine flour to make bread. Two loaves are waved before Yahweh.

There are three elements to this celebration according to Lev 23:15-22: first there is **thanksgiving** to Yahweh for the harvest, then there is **expectation** for a future harvest of ingathering later in the year. Thirdly, the theme of **atonement** from sin is also emphasized by the prescribed sin offering.

In traditional Jewish observance of this day, it is believed that this was the day that Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. From the scriptures, we know that this event occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, however we cannot be sure of the precise day.

### **Prophetic fulfilment**

At the time of Yahshua's resurrection, shortly before His ascension, the disciples asked Him if He was "...at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel".<sup>1</sup> Yahshua replied by saying that it was not for them to know the times or dates that the Father has set for such events. We learn two things from this: the first is that there will indeed be a time when the Kingdom will be restored to Israel and Messiah will rule and reign from Jerusalem, ushering in a new era of peace and righteousness for the world. The second is that the disciples were not correctly reading the signs of the times - at this stage in Yahweh's plan for the ages He had other events planned. They were urged by Yahshua not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the gift promised by the Father - the Holy Spirit! (Acts 1:4,8). It is this event that marks the prophetic fulfilment of Pentecost, as we read in Acts 2:

***"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."***<sup>2</sup>

This day Yahweh fulfilled the promise made through John the Baptist who declared that whilst he baptized in water there was coming one after him (Yahshua the Messiah) who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and Fire (Matt 3:11). It was also the fulfilment of the prophecy made by Yahshua that anyone who believed on Him, streams of living waters would flow from within.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:6

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:1-4

<sup>3</sup> John 7:38

This promise according to John could only be fulfilled once Yahshua had been glorified ie had left earth to sit down at the Father's right hand in heaven. We can see from this the importance of the sequence of events - Yahshua had to go in order to be in a position to baptize the disciples in the Holy Spirit. "Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you".<sup>1</sup>

In short the fulfilment of Shavuot (Weeks) was dependent upon the fulfilment of Passover and Firstfruits. All these Feasts represent the work of Yahshua.

The result of this outpouring of Yahweh's power was that the disciples were completely transformed: before they were afraid, now they were bold in their proclamation of Yahshua as Messiah. Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the Apostles. Whereas their authority to do such things was temporarily imparted to them by Yahshua in person while He was with them on earth, now in His absence they had received the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. 3000 souls were swept into the Kingdom that day in response to Peter's preaching - the New Covenant Church was born.

Prophetically then, this Feast represents a culmination of Yahshua's work in ascending to His Father on the day of Firstfruits. On this day, precisely 50 days from Yahshua's offering of His own blood in the heavenly temple, He poured out His Spirit and the full impact of the work of salvation was seen and heard - a covenant people redeemed from sin, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the first few sheaves that were waved before Yahweh from Firstfruits were now two full loaves of bread - a finished article. Yahshua had succeeded in creating a people worthy of His name, walking in resurrection life, possessing the indwelling Spirit of the Almighty. The 3000 that were added that day (and others subsequently) represented a harvest of souls, a harvest which James later called a **kind of firstfruits** of all that Yahweh had made.<sup>2</sup>

There is a fact about this group that many overlook but it is deeply significant to our understanding of the prophetic fulfilment of Pentecost. All those recipients of the Spirit that day were either Jews or converts to Judaism. This day was a part of Yahweh's plan of restoration for His chosen people Israel; those to whom the Feasts were first entrusted are the first recipients of their full blessings. This fact is made all the more significant in that those who were called a *firstfruits of [Yahweh's] creation* by James were identified by him as the 12 tribes of Israel scattered abroad.<sup>3</sup> The wonderful truth here is that the first fruits is Yahweh's guarantee of a greater harvest later on. Just as Yahweh redeemed these Israelites, so at the end time there will be a harvest from among the descendants of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

A second important fact about this Feast is that its fulfilment took place in the city of Jerusalem, the city where Yahweh chose to place His Name. The upper room in fact was very likely an upper room in the temple area, since we are told at the end of Luke that after Yahshua's ascension, the disciples were continually in the temple, praising Yahweh.<sup>5</sup> (We know from archaeological history that Herod's temple possessed a number of rooms that could be rented out to worshippers - *NIV Study Bible – Hodder & Stoughton ref Lk 24:53; Acts 2:1*).

The common themes of the Feasts that we have examined so far are therefore clear: They are about the land of Israel, the people of Israel and the Messiah of Israel with their prophetic fulfilment centred always around the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> John 16:7

<sup>2</sup> Jas 1:18

<sup>3</sup> Jas 1:1

<sup>4</sup> Rom 11:25-31; Rev 7:4-8

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:53

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### Quest for Truth: Celebrate! The Feasts of Yahweh

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## Personal application

The day of Pentecost is one biblical celebration that is still observed in one way or another by the vast majority of Christians and rightly so for it contains a relevant and powerful message for believers today, in addition to being the historic birth of the early Church. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost to the astonished crowd of Jewish worshippers in Jerusalem encapsulates much of what is important about this day to us.

In the first part of his address, Peter explains the nature of the phenomenon that they are witnessing:

***“...let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last day, [Yahweh] says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of [Yahweh]. And everyone who calls on the name of [Yahweh] will be saved’.”<sup>1</sup>***

What is interesting about Peter's quote from Joel is that all aspects of it were not fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Specifically, the wonders and signs that would be seen in the heavens and on the earth would not be seen until the end of the age, a time yet to come. Thus this outpouring of Yahweh's Holy Spirit was just a beginning and a foretaste of an even greater outpouring to be seen at the time of the end.

Peter then uses the opening provided for him by these remarkable phenomenon, to explain to the crowds the full gospel story of Yahshua's life, death and resurrection. This is consistent with the theme of **atonement** from sin of which this Festival speaks. The effect on the crowds to this message was dramatic:

***“Brothers what shall we do?”***

Peter replies: ***“Repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of [Yahshua] for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”***.<sup>2</sup>

In these words, Peter outlines the pathway of initiation into the new covenant. This is the gospel that we preach. It is also a summary of the message of salvation revealed in the feasts of Passover, Firstfruits, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. This promise of the Holy Spirit is not just for Israel but for all who are far off - all whom Yahweh shall call (Acts 2:39). This means gentiles as well as Jews. We who are recipients of this great salvation have great reason to celebrate on this day in Yahweh's calendar.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:15-21

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:39

## **The Day of Trumpets**

### **Historic fulfilment**

Apart from being a High Sabbath, the key activity of this day is the blowing of trumpets (Heb: *shofar*). Whilst the shofar was blown at every new moon, this new month was particularly significant as it heralded Tishri, the 7<sup>th</sup> and holiest month of the year and the most important for the community of Israel.

***“[Yahweh] said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: On the first day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to [Yahweh] by fire.’”<sup>1</sup>***  
(Lev 23:23-25).

Jewish tradition considers this day as the new year or *Rosh Hashanah* (the head of the year), probably because of the significance to them of the day of atonement on the 10<sup>th</sup> Tishri as an opportunity for a spiritual new beginning. Biblically it is known as *Yom Teruah* (the day of sounding/festival of trumpets).

The purpose of this holy day is summed up in one word ‘re-gathering’. Since these autumn holidays called Israel to re-gather to a pure faith in Yahweh, Trumpets came to represent the day of repentance. It is the day when the people of Israel took stock of their spiritual condition and made the necessary changes so that the upcoming ‘new year’ would be pleasing to Yahweh. So important did this day become to Jewish people that the whole preceding month of Elul was used as a time of special spiritual preparation. During this period many Orthodox Jews take a special water immersion (Hebrew: *tevilah mikveh*) to symbolize cleansing their ways.

### **Prophetic fulfilment**

There is a rich prophetic truth revealed in this day, some of which can be seen in Jewish teaching. Here is a quote from some rabbinical 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D work which demonstrates the link that they saw between the coming of Messiah, the day of Trumpets and the re-gathering of Israel.

***“Messiah ben David (son of David), Elijah and Zerubbabel, peace be upon him, will ascend the Mount of Olives. And Messiah will command Elijah to blow the shofar. The light of six days of Creation will return and will be seen, the light of the moon will be the light of the sun, and God will send full healing to all the sick in Israel. The second blast which Elijah will blow will make the dead rise. They will rise from the dust and each man will recognize his fellow man, and so will husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother. All will come to the Messiah from the four corners of the earth, from east to west, from north and from south. The children of Israel will fly on the wings of eagles and come to the Messiah.”<sup>2</sup>***

While the historical emphasis of the holy day is repentance, the prophetic theme looks to the future day when the full spiritual re-gathering will occur under the Messiah. We see this alluded to in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians:

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<sup>1</sup> Lev 23:23-25

<sup>2</sup> Ma’ase Daniel as quoted in The Messiah texts by Patai, Raphael, p143

***“For [Yahshua] himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of [Yahweh], and the dead in Messiah will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet [Yahshua] in the air. And so we will be with [Yahshua] forever.”<sup>1</sup>***

Here we see the sounding of the shofar heralding the gathering (Latin - *rapture*) of the saints. It is interesting to note that the particular sound referred to here is one of the specific trumpet calls of Rosh Hashanah. The word translated ‘shout’ in verse 16 comes from the Hebrew ‘*teruah*’ better translated in this context as the ‘alarm’ blast of the shofar.<sup>2</sup> Similar references to the shofar as the signal of the Rapture can be found elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

Another important fulfilment of Rosh Hashanah is the re-gathering of Israel at the second coming of Messiah. As far back as the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

***“In that day [Yahweh] will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, oh Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship [Yahweh] on the holy mountain in Jerusalem”.<sup>4</sup>***

It is clear that this passage is referring to a latter day re-gathering of the whole house of Israel. This event, like the others of which Yom Teruah speaks has yet to see its full prophetic fulfilment. This Feast speaks to us in part of great events yet to come. In Yahweh’s prophetic timetable for the ages we are therefore somewhere between Pentecost and the Day of Trumpets - a time known in the scriptures as the last days. Although we cannot be dogmatic as to how and when these great events will take place, we can be assured that Yahweh is on time and will do all that is spoken of by the prophets.

### **Personal Application**

On a personal level, this is a good time in the year to examine oneself as Paul urges us to do:

***“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”<sup>5</sup>***

This is a good time to consider the return of Yahshua and whether we will be prepared to meet Him at that time when the final trumpet sounds. It is good if possible to take the day off work or school and attend a gathering of other believers on this High Sabbath. During this service it would be appropriate to blow a shofar or any other kind of trumpet as the scriptures encourage us to do. The sounding of the shofar has a dual meaning; not only is it the sound of jubilee and celebration but it is also a sound of alarm

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<sup>1</sup> 1Thess 4:16-17

<sup>2</sup> God’s appointed times p67 by Barney Kasdan

<sup>3</sup> see 1 Cor 15:50-58 and Rev 4:1

<sup>4</sup> Isa 27:12-13

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 13:5

and a call to repentance.<sup>1</sup> This can be a joyful and exciting event as well as a time to search one's heart and seek Yahweh. There are many instances when trumpets have been sounded in the scriptures and it is good to consider on this day what we can learn from these events.

## ***The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)***

### **Historic fulfilment**

***"[Yahweh] said to Moses, 'The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to [Yahweh] by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before [Yahweh] your God. Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath.'"***<sup>1,2</sup>

Yom Kippur has long been considered the most holy day in the Jewish biblical calendar. The name itself describes the history of the holy day for it was on this very day, once a year, that the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and later the temple, to make atonement for the nation. In a word, Yom Kippur illustrates **regeneration** (new life) for those who follow Yahweh's way of atonement.

Leviticus 16 goes into great detail about the ceremony centered on the sacrifice of two goats. One goat called *Chatat* was to be slain as a blood sacrifice to symbolically cover the sins of Israel. The other goat called *Azazel* or Scapegoat, would be brought before the priest. The priest would lay his hands on the head of the goat as he confessed the sins of the people. But instead of slaying this animal in the traditional fashion, the goat would be set free in the wilderness symbolically taking the sins of the nation out from their midst.

What a picture this must have been of Yahweh's gracious provision. Atonement and forgiveness by way of vicarious sacrifice! This theme of Yom Kippur made it the preeminent holy day in ancient Israel. Likewise, because of its proximity to Rosh Hashanah 10 days earlier, Yom Kippur's theme was all the more important. What started on the first day of Tishri, namely repentance and self-evaluation, was completed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month with atonement and re-generation.

Included in the observance of this Sabbath is the command to *deny yourself*. The original Hebrew word used here, *oni*, implies that the command is to fast. In the context of Isaiah 58:5, this word is used specifically for going without food. Observers of Yom Kippur therefore would go without food from sundown on the 9<sup>th</sup> Tishri to sundown on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

This festival used to centre around the special sacrifices made at the temple right up until 70AD when the temple was destroyed. The destruction of the temple created a dilemma for Orthodox Jews who did not recognise Messiah Yahshua as the one who would make atonement permanently for their sins - without the work of the high priest

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<sup>1</sup> Joel 2:15-17

<sup>2</sup> Lev 23:26-32

making atonement for them, how could their relationship with the Almighty be maintained?

With no sacrifices able to be made, the Jewish rabbis of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century decided to make substitutions to fill the gap. *Tefilah* (prayer), *Teshuvah* (repentance) and *Tzedakah* (charity) have replaced sacrifice in the modern observance of Yom Kippur.<sup>1</sup>

### **Prophetic fulfilment**

Like the Day of Trumpets the ultimate prophetic fulfilment of this Feast is yet to take place. The prophet Zechariah spoke of a future day of repentance when Yahweh will pour out His spirit in the latter days and Israel will look on the one who was pierced.<sup>2</sup> This fits the period of Rosh Hashanah in the prophetic sense, as a time of repentance. What follows in chapter 13 is quite relevant. Zechariah says:

***“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity”***<sup>3</sup>

We see from this that just as the Day of Atonement follows Trumpets, so repentance by the people of Israel will be followed by regeneration. This prophetic truth is confirmed in the writings of Paul

***“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”***<sup>4</sup>

What a day it will be when all Israel will look upon Yahshua, Him whom they have pierced (Zech 12:10) and receive cleansing and full restoration. May Yahweh hasten this day for the sake of His ancient chosen ones!

### **Personal application**

The holy day Yom Kippur contains important truth for the believer in Yahshua. In the well known passage in Romans, Paul explains the significance of our atonement in the context of Yom Kippur:

***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of [Yahweh], and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by [Messiah, Yahshua]. [Yahweh] presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in [Yahshua]”***<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> God's appointed times p78 by Barney Kasdan

<sup>2</sup> Zec 12:10

<sup>3</sup> Zech 13:1

<sup>4</sup> Rom 11:25-27

<sup>5</sup> Rom 3:23-26

This argument is built upon in the book of Hebrews:

*“When [Messiah] came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of [Yahshua], who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to [Yahweh], cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”<sup>1</sup>*

This day is a day to consider the wonderful work of Yahshua on our behalf in the heavenly tabernacle. In observing this day, the question might be asked: why should believers in Yahshua fast? Whilst we of course do not need to fast in order to obtain forgiveness, there is nevertheless great spiritual benefit to be derived from holding a fast day, particularly if we treat this day as a day of prayer and intercession. This is a good day to pray for the restoration of Israel and the peace of Jerusalem as well as for the spiritual transformation in our own countries and communities.

## **The Feast of Tabernacles**

### **Historic fulfilment**

The Feast of Tabernacles brings to a climax all the celebrations of the seventh month of Yahweh's year. It coincides with Israel's final or latter harvest of the year. Its key tone is one of thanksgiving to Yahweh. Unlike Unleavened Bread that lasts for 7 days, this Festival lasts for 8 days, from 15<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> Tishri, although some consider the eighth and Last Great Day of the Feast as almost a separate Festival in itself.

*“[Yahweh] said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: On the fifteenth day of the seventh month [Yahweh's] Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present offerings made to [Yahweh] by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to [Yahweh] by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work. These are [Yahweh's] appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to [Yahweh] by fire - the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. These offerings are in addition to those for [Yahweh's] Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to [Yahweh]. So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to [Yahweh] for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before [Yahweh] your [EI] for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to [Yahweh] for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so that your descendants will know*

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<sup>1</sup> Heb 9:11-14

*that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am [Yahweh] your [El].”<sup>1</sup>*

In addition to the theme of thanksgiving for the harvest is Yahweh's command to make booths or tabernacles to commemorate the 40 year wanderings in the desert when both Israel and Yahweh Himself lived in tents. As part of their celebrations, the Israelites were to take fruit (*etrog*) and leafy boughs (*lulav*) and wave them before Yahweh in thanksgiving.

As well as thanking Yahweh for the autumn harvest, it became customary to include prayers of thanksgiving in faith for the upcoming winter rains. During the time of the second temple this aspect of thanksgiving was built upon. On the first day of the Feast a priest would take a water pitcher down to the pool of *Shiloach* (Siloam), dip it into the water and carry it back to the temple. Crowds of people would form a huge procession behind the priest, dancing, singing and chanting the ‘Hallel’ psalms<sup>2</sup> as they entered the temple mount. For each of the first 6 days of Sukkot, the processional would circle the Temple altar one time, and on the seventh day there would be seven processions to magnify the joy. The highlight of the ceremony came when the priest dramatically poured the water out, at the altar of the temple. The response of the people was so immense that the Talmud says whoever has not been in Jerusalem for this ceremony has not experienced real joy (Sukkah 5)! Hence, it became known as *Simcha Bet Ha-sho-evah* (the rejoicing of the House of Drawing Water).

The full significance of this celebration went beyond the expectation of winter rains. In the minds of the worshipper were many Messianic promises given to Israel through the prophets, like the one found in Isaiah 12:3 *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”*<sup>\*</sup>

<p><sup>*</sup>Salvation in Hebrew is Yahshua, [Yah-saves] the name of the Messiah.</p>
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The Simcha Bet Ha-sho-evah also pointed to the days of Messianic redemption when the water of the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all Israel Sukkot 55.<sup>3</sup> Yahweh will ultimately build His habitation with His people when the kingdom is fully established on earth under Messiah's rule. What joy this thought would have brought to the people's hearts!

It was against this backdrop that on the Last Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem that Yahshua Himself got up and declared:

***“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive”<sup>4</sup>***

On hearing these words on this day many people declared Him to be “the prophet” and even “the Messiah”<sup>5</sup> for whom they longed. (There were equally those among the crowd who were sceptical of His promises.)

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<sup>1</sup> The New International Version – Anglicised, (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd) 1984

<sup>2</sup> Ps 113-118

<sup>3</sup> Sukkot 55

<sup>4</sup> John 7:37-39

<sup>5</sup> John 7:40-41

## Prophetic fulfilment

One of the great themes of the Feast for Israeli worshippers is the idea of Elohim dwelling or 'tabernacling' among His people. John uses this concept to expound on the birth of Yahshua in his gospel:

***“The Word (Yahshua) became flesh and made his dwelling (tabernacle) among us”<sup>1</sup>***

Yahshua took on the body of a man like a temporary tabernacle and actually came amongst us: Emmanuel<sup>2</sup> - El with us. What a wonder!

**Note:** It is very possible that Yahshua was actually born around this time of the year. This would explain why Bethlehem's guest houses were full - people who had travelled up to the feast in Jerusalem would have been residing there. We know that He was certainly not born in the winter months, not least because as the Mishna points out from November to February sheep are brought down from the hills into corrals or sheepfolds. Chronologists of the New Testament note that the birth of Yahshua can be placed in the late autumn. We know further that Yahshua's ministry lasted 3½ years which means that with His death at Passover, it must have begun around the month of Tishri. Yahshua being about 30 at the start of His ministry would point to His birthday being at or around Tabernacles.

Like other Feasts at this time of year, the prophetic events that they depict are not fulfilled by Messiah's first coming to earth as a man, but rather His future 2<sup>nd</sup> advent.

The apostle John describes to us his vision of future things, which clearly fits the prophetic message of this Feast.

***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from [Yahweh], prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of [Yahweh] is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and [Yahweh] himself will be with them and be their [Elohim]’.”<sup>3</sup>***

We see in this scripture that the tabernacle or dwelling of Yahweh Himself will be amongst men on earth. Prophecy tells us that Yahshua will dwell amongst us for a second time to rule and reign on earth for a thousand years. This will be the prophetic fulfilment of the first 7 days of Tabernacles - Yahshua will once again be personally present on earth, dwelling amongst us. At this time all the nations of the world will be expected to send representation to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The penalty according to Zechariah for not doing so will be no rain on their land.<sup>4</sup> The above scripture from the book of Revelation, however speaks about a new heaven and a new earth, which will come into existence after the Messiah's millennial reign and after Satan is let loose for a time and there is a final and last rebellion against Yahweh.<sup>5</sup> It is this new heaven and new earth which is prophetically spoken of by the eighth and Last Great Day of the Feast. Then it will not be Messiah alone who is present among His people, but Yahweh Himself. It is no wonder that for this to take place a new

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:14

<sup>2</sup> Is 7:14

<sup>3</sup> Rev 21:1-3

<sup>4</sup> Zech 14:16-19

<sup>5</sup> Rev 20:1-10

heaven and new earth will be required to contain the wonder of it. As with all the Feasts, the backdrop of the events of which they speak will be Jerusalem - the New Jerusalem .<sup>1</sup>

### **Personal fulfilment**

The Feast of Tabernacles represents the fulfilment of Yahweh's plans in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. As well as looking forward to all that Yahweh will do we can also consider the fact that as believers in Yahshua our bodies are a temple in which He dwells by the Holy Spirit. More than any other Feast of Yahweh, this Feast is a time of great rejoicing and expectancy. How, then, might the Feast of Tabernacles be celebrated by believers today? Building and actually living in a booth made from tree branches might be possible in a warmer climate. In colder climates it can be done in a more symbolic way such as building a booth inside one's church building or else decorating one's house or meeting place with branches, fruit and the like. The waving of a lulav in worshipping Yahweh is a wonderful way of expressing the joy of Yahweh in this Feast; indeed the scriptures encourage us to worship Yahweh in this way on each of the Festival days. Just as Yahweh instructed Israel to make offerings on each of the eight days of Tabernacles, so we can take some time to make an offering of corporate worship and praise. Processionals (Heb: *hakafof*) form an important part of Jewish celebrations at this time. It is possible to incorporate all these elements into our worship during this Festival.

### **Conclusion - Celebrate!**

Having come to the end of the writing of this booklet, I feel that we have only scratched the surface of the truth that is hidden in these ancient feasts. As with so much of Yahweh's character and work there is always so much to explore, discuss and experience. As the Psalmist wrote: "*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law*"<sup>2</sup> (Ps 119:18).

I hope that you can appreciate that whilst not essential to our salvation, understanding and observing the Feasts today is a source of rich blessing to believers, both Jew and Gentile. In doing so we are walking in some of the ancient paths (Jer 6:16) trodden by the saints of old, and availing ourselves of some of the 'old treasures' of the Law of which Yahshua spoke in Matt 13:52. We know through the prophet Zechariah that the day will come when all the nations of the world will be required to observe the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>3</sup> Yahweh has an agenda to bring all of His word to pass on the world's stage. There is coming a day when: "*The law will go out from Zion, the word of [Yahweh] from Jerusalem*"<sup>4</sup> and "*...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of [Yahweh] as the waters cover the sea*"<sup>5</sup>.

But why wait till then to "*know the joyful sound*"?<sup>6</sup>

**Let's celebrate!**

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<sup>1</sup> Rev 21:12

<sup>2</sup> Ps 119:18

<sup>3</sup> Zech 14:16

<sup>4</sup> Mic 4:2

<sup>5</sup> Hab 2:14

<sup>6</sup> Ps 89:15

## **APPENDIX**

### **Fellowship offerings under the New Covenant**

An example of taking the principle of the Old Covenant offerings into a New Covenant era is the taking of bread and wine (Matt 26:26-27; Mark 14:22-24; Acts 2:42). This has its roots not only in Yahshua's actions at the last supper but also in the Torah principle of a fellowship offering, where the worshipper participated in a meal, part of which is offered to Yahweh on the altar. (Old Testament offerings could be of grain, fine flour, olive oil, baked bread and wine as well as animals.) Paul pointed out that those who take the bread and wine are participating in the altar (1 Cor 10:14-18) ie the same altar upon which Yahshua offered His own body and blood. It is for this reason that a man should examine himself carefully before taking the bread and wine lest he bring judgement on himself (1 Cor 11:27-32). A second example of this is one that relates particularly to the Feasts. It was customary (and indeed mandatory) for the Feast pilgrim coming to Jerusalem to bring (or buy when he got there) a thanksgiving offering known as the Chagigah (Deut 16:16-17). This fellowship offering was eaten by the worshipper and his family in the presence of Yahweh at Jerusalem, in or around the temple area, soon after he arrived at Jerusalem. It was this meal that Yahshua ate with His disciples at the time of the last supper. The sharing of a communal Festival meal is a key component of Feast observance. In Orthodox Jewish homes today all the major Feasts are commemorated from the outset with a special family meal. This practice has its roots in the original temple worship. Paul was alluding to just such a meal held by the Corinthian Church in 1 Cor 11:17-30. It appears that this fellowship meal was eaten in conjunction with the bread and wine. It is possible that this meal was eaten by the Church at other times, beside Feast times. It nevertheless upholds the on-going principle of fellowshiping with Yahweh as well as with other believers in the eating of a communal meal.

### **Purim & Hannukah**

Hannukah and Purim are additional celebrations enjoyed by the Jewish community today which have their roots both in the scriptures and Jewish history. Purim, a two day celebration in February/March commemorates the time when, as recounted in the book of Esther, Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai were able to thwart the plans of the evil Haman when he tried to trick the King of Persia into murdering all the Jews in the realm. Hannukah, an eight day celebration in December, commemorates a revolt by the Jews in the inter-testamental period against the rule of the evil Syrian tyrant Antiochus IV. Whilst these celebrations are of historical importance to Israel, the celebration of them appears not to carry the same Divine command and revelation as the Feasts in the Torah. It is for this reason that we have not discussed them in this booklet.

### **Why not Christmas?**

It is commonly known today that many of the customs that surround Christmas have their roots not in the scriptures but in pagan practices and beliefs that pre-date the birth of Yahshua. Christmas itself, whilst celebrated by a large proportion of the Christian Church today was entirely unknown to the early Church. December was most certainly not the month in which Yahshua was born. It was adopted as the official birthday of Yahshua by the Roman Catholic Church in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. This day, a celebration of the winter solstice, has been observed as a time for festivity by pagan civilizations for thousands of years, from Osiris of Egypt and Tammuz of the Babylonians, right up to the Roman God Mithra. Mithraism was the largest pagan religious cult to foster December 25<sup>th</sup> as a holiday. This winter festival was known as 'The Nativity' where the sun god was purportedly born. It made sense to the politically motivated Roman Church of that time to include the pagans and unite the old Roman Empire by instituting a celebration that would cater for everyone. The characteristics of the festival were much as they are today - feasting, drunkenness and loose moral behaviour; the giving of presents and goodwill to all men. As one writer puts it:

"It is a matter of common knowledge that much of our association with the Christmas season - the holidays, the giving of presents and the general feeling of geniality - is but the inheritance of the Roman winter festival of the Saturnalia." (The legacy of Rome p242- by Cyril Bailey)

It is true that there have been a few excellent spiritual songs that have been written commemorating the birth of Yahshua in celebration of this day and it can be a good way for the church to engage the 'un-churched' community and present the good news of Yahshua. The leading question however that we should ask ourselves is: should a Church that seeks to walk in all aspects of the original faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3) really be basing its main celebrations on such clearly unbiblical and erroneous teachings? For any serious student of the word, the answer has to be no.

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### **Easter and the Quarto Decimans**

The celebration of the death and resurrection of Yahshua at a time called Easter is yet another invention of the politically motivated Roman Church of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Ishtar or Semiramis was the Mother Goddess of the Babylonians who purportedly fell from heaven onto the Euphrates River in an egg (hence the custom of Easter eggs). Like Easter eggs, Easter rabbits are also associated with this pagan festival as signs of fertility; fertility being a main theme of the pagan spring festivals.

We have already seen that the Roman calendar's assumptions of Good Friday as the day of crucifixion and Easter Sunday as resurrection day are not supported in the Scriptures. When Rome introduced this interpretation of the New Testament Passover, there was a group of believers called the 'Quarto-Decimans' (Roman for the number 14) who opposed it, taking their cue from Polycarp who was himself a personal disciple of the apostle John, arguing that the correct time to celebrate the death and resurrection should be based on the biblical calendar's 14<sup>th</sup> Aviv as originally instructed by John.

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