

Understanding the Feasts

The festivals of the L-rd found in Leviticus (*Vayikra*) 23 were given to us by G-d so His people could understand the coining of the Messiah (*Mashiach*) and the role that the Messiah (*Mashiach*) would play in redeeming and restoring both man and the earth back to G-d following the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (*Gan Eden*). Although most non-Jewish Bible believers have heard of the feasts, the deep meaning and the importance of these feasts are almost universally not understood.

The apostle Paul (*Rav Sha'ul*) wrote to the Gentile believers in Colossae that the feasts of the L-rd, the new moon, and the Sabbath (*shabbat*) days were a *shadow of things to come* to teach us about the Messiah (*Mashiach*) (Colossians 2:16-17). Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus, which means "salvation") was the substance or fulfillment of the greater plan that G-d revealed and foreshadowed in these seven important festivals. To all the readers who are familiar with the festivals, you will be fascinated to discover that the first four feasts or festivals, which are Passover (*Pesach*), Unleavened Bread (*Hag HaMatzah*), First Fruits (*Bikkurim*), and Pentecost (*Shavuot*), primarily teach about the significant events in the first coming of the Messiah (*Mashiach*) and why these events were an important part of G-d's redemption of man. In addition, you will discover that the last three feasts, which are the Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*; also known as *Rosh HaShanah*), the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), give fascinating insight concerning important events that surround the second coming of the Messiah (*Mashiach*).

The festivals are **G-d's feasts** and **His** appointed times that **we** are to observe (Leviticus [*Vayikra*] 23:1-2,4). G-d gave the festivals to teach about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (*Mashiach*); the empowering of the believers by the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*); the resurrection of the dead; the coronation of the Messiah; the wedding of the Messiah; the tribulation (*Chevlai shel Mashiach*); the second coming of the Messiah; the millennium (the Messianic age or the *Athid Lavo*); and much, much more.

To understand *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*, we must review a few things. First, the seven days of Passover (*Pesach*) are followed by a 49-day period of counting the omer, which climaxes with the fiftieth day of Pentecost (*Shavuot*). Thus, the liberation of Passover (*Pesach*) is linked with the revelation and giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, known as *Shavuot* (Pentecost). If we look at the festival cycle, *Shemini Atzeret* is analogous to *Shavuot*, which is understood to be the conclusion or *atzeret* to Passover (*Pesach*). Just like *Shavuot*, a one-day festival, is the conclusion to *Pesach*, a seven-day festival, so *Shemini Atzeret*, a one-day festival, is the conclusion to *Sukkot*, a seven-day festival.

"He (Satan) will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times (calendar) and the laws (feasts). The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time."

Daniel 7:25

Why Study the Feasts?

Many non-Jewish Bible believers wonder why they should study and observe the feasts. I believe there are two good reasons. First, although all Bible believers love G-d with all their heart and seek to serve Him daily, most Bible believers do not have an in-depth understanding of the Bible and do not understand the deep depth of the personal relationship that G-d desires us to have with Him. Most Bible believers understand their personal relationship with G-d the same way I viewed my personal relationship with G-d for many, many years: Attend the local congregation of your choice faithfully and regularly, and be a good, moral, honest, and decent person in living your daily life. Because that was all I knew, that was what I accepted. However, G-d began to teach me and show me the deeper things concerning my personal relationship with Him, and a spiritual understanding of the festivals was a big key to unlocking this mystery. If you are a Bible believer and you desire to understand G-d in a greater way than you do today, the festivals will reveal to you the deeper things concerning your personal relationship with Him.

Secondly, the festivals are **G-d's feasts** and **His** appointed times that **we** are to observe (Leviticus [*Vayikra*] 23:1-2,4). G-d gave the festivals to teach about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (*Mashiach*); the empowering of the believers by the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*); the resurrection of the dead; the coronation of the Messiah; the wedding of the Messiah; the tribulation (*Chevlai shel Mashiach*); the second coming of the Messiah; the millennium (the Messianic age or the *Athid Lavo*); and much, much more.

The Bible provides several powerful reasons for studying and understanding the seven festivals of the Messiah:

1. The feasts are in the Bible, and **all** the Bible is inspired by G-d (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*).
2. The feasts are a shadow of things to come that teach us about the Messiah (*Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1*).
3. The feasts are prophetic types and examples foreshadowing significant events in G-d's plan of redemption (*1 Corinthians 10:1-6,11*).
4. G-d gave the feasts so we could learn and understand G-d's plan of redemption for the world and our personal relationship to Him (*Romans 15:4*).
5. The feasts, as part of the Torah (which means "instruction"), are as a schoolmaster or tutor that leads us to the Messiah (*Galatians 3:24*).

6. The feasts will point to the Messiah and G-d's plan for the world through the Messiah (Psalm [*Tehillim*] 40:6-8; Hebrews 10:7).
7. *Yeshua* (Jesus) came to fulfill all that was written in the Old Testament (*Tanach*), which consists of three parts: the Torah, the prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the writings (*Ketuvim* - personified by the Psalms) concerning Him (Luke 24:26-27,44-45; John [*Yochanan*] 5:46-47).
8. The feasts set forth the pattern of heavenly things on earth (Hebrews 8:1-2,5; 9:8-9,23; Exodus [*Shemot*] 25:8-9,40; 26:30; Numbers [*Bamidbar*] 8:4; Ezekiel [*Yechezkel*] 43:1-6,10-12).
9. G-d gives the natural to explain the spiritual (*1 Corinthians 15:46-47*).
10. By studying the natural, we can understand the spiritual (*1 Corinthians 2:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:18*).

What is the Meaning of the Word Feast in the Bible?

Two important Hebrew words appear in Leviticus (*Vayikra*) chapter 23, and each word is translated as feast in English. In verse 2, the word for feast is the Hebrew word *mo'ed*, as it is written, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, concerning the feasts [*mo'ed*] of the Lord...." The word *mo'ed* means "an appointment, a fixed time or season, a cycle or year, an assembly, an appointed time, a set time or exact time."² By understanding the Hebrew meaning of the English word feast, we can see that G-d is telling us that He is ordaining a "set time or exact time or an appointed time" when He has an appointment with humanity to fulfill certain events in the redemption. In fact, *Yeshua* (Jesus) came to earth at the exact time ordained by G-d (*Galatians 4:2,4*), and G-d has an exact time or set appointment when, in the future, He will judge the world (*Acts 17:31*).

In verse 6 is another Hebrew word translated as feast, as it is written, "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast [*chag*] of unleavened bread...." The Hebrew word *chag*, which means a "festival,"³ is derived from the Hebrew root word *chagag*, which means "to move in a circle, to march in a sacred procession, to celebrate, dance, to hold a solemn feast or holiday." By this we can see that G-d gave the festivals as cycles to be observed yearly so that, by doing them, we can understand G-d's redemptive plan for the world; the role that the Messiah (*Yeshua*) would play in that redemption; and our personal relationship to G-d concerning how we grow from a baby Bible believer to a mature Bible believer. Although G-d gave us the festivals to observe, G-d never gave the festivals so we would obtain salvation from Him by observing them because salvation only comes by faith (*emunah*); however, G-d did give the festivals for the purpose of teaching and instructing His people concerning His plan of redemption and our personal relationship to Him.

The Appointed Place

The feasts are not only G-d's appointed times, but also were to be observed at G-d's appointed place. G-d said that He would choose a place and that it would be a set place where His redemptive plan would be accomplished. Passover (*Pesach*), the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (*Shavuot*), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) were to be observed at an appointed place (Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 16:2,6,9-11, 13-16). This place was Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim*) (2 Kings [*Melachim*] 21:4). From this we can see that Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim*) was appointed by G-d to be the place where important events surrounding the redemptive plan of G-d would be accomplished. *Yeshua* (Jesus) died, was buried, and resurrected in Jerusalem. The empowering of the believers by the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) took place in Jerusalem. Messiah (*Yeshua*) will return and set His foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (*Zechariah 14:4*) and Jerusalem will be the center of world attention and controversy before the coming of the Messiah (*Zechariah 12:2-3; 14:2-4*).

Three Times a Year They Were to Assemble

Although there are a total of seven feasts (the divine number for perfection or completeness in the Bible), G-d divided the seven festivals into three major festival seasons. The feasts of Passover (*Pesach*), Unleavened Bread (*Hag HaMatzah*), and First Fruits (*Bikkurim*) are in the Hebrew month of Nisan, which is the first month of G-d's religious calendar in the spring of the year. (We'll examine this calendar a little later.) The Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*), or Pentecost, is observed in the third month, which is the Hebrew month of Sivan. The Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*), Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) are observed in the seventh month of Tishrei, which is in the fall of the year (Exodus [*Shemot*] 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 16:16-17). Three is the number of complete and perfect testimony and witness (Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 17:6; 19:15; Matthew [*Mattityahu*] 18:19-20; Luke 24:44-45; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; 1 John [*Yochanan*] 5:8). So the feasts are a witness to G-d's divine plan and the role of Messiah (*Yeshua*) fulfilling that plan. This is the message being communicated to Bible believers concerning the three major festival periods in the year.

Traditionally, non-Jewish Bible believers understand the festivals to be exclusively Jewish feasts. However, Leviticus (*Vayikra*) 23:1-2,4 tells us very clearly that these are **festivals of the L-rd**. In reality, G-d in His divine wisdom instructed us that these festivals are for both Jew and non-Jew, and are to be celebrated jointly with each other (Deuteronomy [*Devarim*] 16:10-11, 14-16). In Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 16:11, 14, the word translated in English as stranger is the Hebrew word *ger*, which means the non-Jew (Bible-believing Gentile) who has joined himself to the Jewish people. Therefore, the L-rd is the Host of the festivals and all Bible believers are His invited guests.

The Biblical Calendar

In order to fully understand and appreciate the feasts being appointed times given by G-d, it is important to understand the biblical calendar that G-d gave us. There are two primary calendars in the Bible. The first is called the civil calendar and is used from Genesis (*Bereishit*) 1:1 to Exodus (*Shemot*) 12. The first month in the civil calendar is Tishrei. *Rosh HaShanah* (the Jewish New Year), the first day in the civil calendar, is the beginning of the new year. The second calendar in the Bible is the religious calendar. The religious calendar is used from Exodus (*Shemot*) 12 to Revelation 22. G-d established the religious calendar in Exodus (*Shemot*) 12:2, as it is written, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." The month that G-d was referring to was the month of Aviv (*Exodus 13:4*), which is now called the month of Nisan. Prior to G-d's establishing the month of Nisan as the first month in the religious calendar, it was the seventh month in the civil calendar. G-d gave the religious calendar so we could understand that these feasts, which He gave and which are His appointed times and foreshadow important events in the redemption, would happen on the days He ordained on the religious calendar. These important days on the religious calendar are the same days that He gave as festivals in Leviticus (*Vayikra*) 23.

Another understanding for G-d giving a civil calendar and a religious calendar is that everyone who accepts the Messiah (*Yeshua*) into his heart by faith (*emunah*) experiences two birthdays. Just like Tishrei 1 is the first day on the civil calendar and Nisan 1 is the first day on the religious calendar, everyone who accepts the Messiah (*Yeshua*) into his life has a physical (civil) birthday when he was born into the world and a spiritual (religious) birthday the day he accepts the Messiah into his life. The following chart illustrates both types of calendars, showing the names of the months in the biblical calendar.

Civil Calendar

1. **Tishrei** (September/October)
2. **Cheshvan** (October/November)
3. **Kislev** (November/December)
4. **Tevet** (December/January)
5. **Shevat** (January/February)
6. **Adar** (February/March)
7. **Nisan (Aviv)** (March/April)
8. **Iyar** (April/May)
9. **Sivan** (May/June)
10. **Tammuz** (June/July)
11. **Av** (July/August)
12. **Elul** (August/September)

Religious Calendar

1. **Nisan (Aviv)** (March/April)
2. **Iyar** (April/May)
3. **Sivan** (May/June)
4. **Tammuz** (June/July)
5. **Av** (July/August)
6. **Elul** (August/September)
7. **Tishrei** (September/October)
8. **Cheshvan** (October/November)
9. **Kislev** (November/December)
10. **Tevet** (December/January)
11. **Shevat** (January/February)
12. **Adar** (February/March)

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