



How Should We Celebrate the Feasts?

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*“Let us therefore
celebrate the festival.”
I Corinthians 5:8*

In my book, *Shadows and Substance: The Truth About Jewish Roots and Christian Believers*, I address the main contours of the theology and practice of the worldwide Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM). This movement has swept thousands

of believers into its wake, having been convinced by HRM teachers that believers ought to observe the Mosaic ordinances. This is especially true when it comes to observing the Hebrew Feasts. Indeed, the majority of HRM teachers emphasize the fact that (according to them), the Christian holidays (Christmas and Easter) are highly pagan in their beliefs and practices. They believe that it is only by abandoning them (the Christian holidays) for the Hebrew feasts that believers can practice a pure faith.

In the book, I demonstrate that nowhere in the New Testament do we find the apostles teaching Gentiles (non-Jews) to observe the Hebrew Feasts. But that is not to say that the feasts did not have meaning for them and that they should ignore them

entirely. They were part of the elaborate *shadow* language of the Hebrew Bible shedding light on the Substance. As such, there is much that believers can learn through these feasts.

For example, for many years I have conducted a Passover *Seder* (the technical name for the special celebration of the first night of Passover) in which I reenact all of the events that occurred in the Upper Room leading up to and during the Last Supper meal. Every time I do this presentation someone will inevitably say that until then, they had not understood the Lord's Supper. This is not surprising since the commemoration of the Lord's Supper is derived entirely from the Passover. It is little wonder therefore that when people sit through the Seder, it sheds new light on the meaning of

the Lord's Supper.

But that is a far cry from saying the apostles taught non-Jewish believers they must literally keep the Hebrew feasts. It is reasonable to assume that Jewish believers continued to celebrate the Jewish holidays since they had grown up with them. Some have assumed that Paul was teaching the Corinthian believers they should *literally* keep the Passover when he told them to 'celebrate the feast' (I Corinthians 5:8). But reading his words in context reveals that he was not literally calling on the Corinthians to observe the Passover but was drawing from the Passover *figuratively*. If they were to literally keep it, they would have to choose a lamb for Passover sacrifice. But there was no need to since "Christ, our Passover lamb, has

been sacrificed” (I Corinthians 5:7). Therefore, they were to celebrate the feast, not by literally removing leaven from their homes, but from their lives:

Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I Corinthians 5:8

What We Learn from the Feasts

In the opening chapters of the book of Genesis we learn that God is the Lord of time. He lives beyond it but created it to be the stage where God intersects man. That is why the

opening chapter of Genesis informs us that God created the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) to serve as signs and seasons. This was reflected in the Hebrew calendar and the various feast days Israel was commanded to keep.

God perfectly reveals His sovereignty through the manner in which he ordered the days of his people in the holy calendar given at Sinai. These feasts were not given to enslave people, but to help them reflect on the Person and plan of the living God. Since the law is our schoolmaster and leads us to Christ, these feasts are the best way of seeing Christ. As previously stated, they are part of the elaborate shadow language given in the Old Testament to prepare New Testament believers for the new life to come when Jesus appeared.

How then should New Testament believers view these feasts? Should they continue to observe them? The first thing we must make clear (and I attempt to do so in the book) is that New Covenant believers are free in Christ to observe any day they choose as Paul makes clear in the fourteenth chapter of Romans (Romans 14:5-6).

They can do so as long as they don't insist everyone shares the same conscience in these matters. As I point out in the book, most HRM (Hebrew Roots Movement) teachers are not teaching believers are free to observe these feasts if they should desire but must do so covenantal obligations. But as Paul writes to the Romans, he was not teaching believers are under obligation to observe them. Rather, it was a matter of personal conscience before God.

But that does not mean there is no value to gain from studying these feasts. The very fact they are part of the shadow language of the Old Covenant reveals the benefit to studying them. In the remainder of this article, we will carefully examine each of the seven feasts, helping the reader to understand not only what each feast meant for Israel, but what they mean now for New Covenant believers.

The Spring Feasts

Passover, Unleavened Bread, Sheaf of the First fruits, Pentecost

Jewish believers celebrated the feasts two times in the year, Spring and Fall. There were seven of them altogether, broken into the two seasons

(although they celebrated Pentecost in late spring or early summer). The Spring feasts include Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of the Sheaf of the Firstfruits, and Pentecost. The three Fall feasts include the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These seven feasts together demonstrated the sovereign rule of the God of Israel over his covenantal people.

Passover

The first and most important of all the feasts is Passover. Before giving the instructions regarding it in Exodus 12, God told Moses that Israel should rearrange their calendar year, so that the month of Nissan “shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the

first month of the year for you” (12:2). On the tenth day of the month, the head of every Israelite family should go to the flock and choose a lamb out of the flock (a lamb for a household unless a family was too small in which case, they could share a lamb). God instructed them to separate the lambs from the flock for four days and on the fourteenth day the head of every household was to plunge his sacrificial knife into the neck of those lambs, catching the blood in a basin. Then they applied the blood to the doorposts and lintel of their house.

A chief part of that ceremony was not only the applying of the blood to the house, but the meal which consisted of the lamb’s body eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (12:8). They consumed the lamb

in its entirety—whatever remained they were to reduce to ashes. Since fire is a type of judgment, it signifies how the Lamb of God, to whom this type points, exhumed God’s wrath entirely in his body on the cross: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Hebrews 9:11-14).

They roasted the Passover lamb entirely, a perfect picture of Messiah as a wrath-bearing instrument. The technical term for this in the New Testament is *propitiation*, which is defined as “the act of appeasing or making well-disposed a deity, thus incurring divine favor or avoiding divine retribution“ (Smart Lookup). In our day,

many liberal scholars and teachers reject this view, using instead the word *expiation*, meaning the act of making amends for guilt or wrongdoing. In this way, they are able to reject the idea that Jesus actually bores the wrath due us in his own Person. Nevertheless, the New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus bore in his own Person on the cross the penalty due us, which is, divine wrath.

This can be seen by calling to mind Scriptures such as Psalm 75:8 which speaks of the cup of wrath in his hand:

“For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs” (Psalm 75:8).

Here, God is portrayed as having a cup of wine which he pours out upon the wicked. That is significant, especially in light of the fact that Jesus specifically spoke of drinking his Father's cup twice the evening he was betrayed (John 18:11, Mark 14:36). It is significant that at the Seder in the Upper Room (for that it was what it was), the Lord took the bread and a cup and instituted the Lord's Supper. But this was not any ordinary bread and cup. Many believe that the bread was actually the *afikomen*; the middle of three pieces of matzah which is broken and wrapped in a cloth and hidden to be brought up again on the third cup of wine traditionally known as the Cup of Redemption. Only Luke's Gospel says that he took *the* cup after eating with his disciples saying "this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant

in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

It is obvious that these Passover elements serve as the foundation for the continuing feast He instructs the Church to have on the Lord's Day. Apparently, the Lord's Supper was served as a full meal, the bread and the cup serving as the centerpiece (otherwise why did the apostle chide the Corinthians for eating and drinking before the others arrived: see I Corinthians 11:20-21).

Feast of Unleavened Bread

(Exodus 23:15, I Corinthians 5:6-8)

They mentioned this feast earlier as an appendage to the Passover. They celebrated the feast for seven days immediately following the Passover

(Exodus 23:15). Paul alludes to it in Corinthians.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I Corinthians 5:6-8

When the apostle exhorts the Corinthians to “celebrate the festival,” he does not mean to *literally* observe it. Rather, he speaks of keeping it in its *figurative* reality. Since the Passover Lamb (Jesus) has already been slain, believers are to remove the leaven from their lives (“not the

old leaven of malice and evil” but with the “unleavened bread and sincerity and truth”). In New Testament terms, it is the fact that *sanctification* follows justification. Since the Lamb has been slain, believers must live out their justification by their sanctification.

Feast of the Sheaf of the Firstfruits

(Leviticus 23:9-14)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the Firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may

be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Leviticus 23:9-14

This feast foreshadowed the resurrection in a powerful way. This celebration came only after Israel inherited the land of Canaan. Once there, they were to observe this special feast on the “day after the Sabbath”

of the week of Passover (Sunday). They were to bring the “sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest to the priest” who was then instructed to “wave the sheaf” before the Lord. What is the significance of this ritual?

Israel’s cycle of agriculture revolved around two harvests, one in the spring and one in the fall. Before the first harvest could be harvested, the first sheaf of the harvest was brought to the priest who in turn waved it before God. The first sheaf of grain was called the “first fruits” (Leviticus 23:10). It was the first fruits of the barley harvest, the first part of the grain harvest. But the ritual centered around a single sheaf which the priest would wave a single sheaf or sheaf of the first fruits. Centuries later, the apostle Paul described the Messiah Jesus as the “first fruits of

those who have fallen asleep”: But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (I Corinthians 15:20).

So, think carefully about the meaning of this ritual. Early Sunday morning (which would really be late Saturday evening), the priest waved the sheaf of the first fruits. It is possible that at that very moment, the Messiah of Israel, the “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” was awoken from the dead. That single Sheaf was the guarantor of a first fruits company to be raised in the future. This is amazing, especially when calling to mind how at Jesus’ resurrection an earthquake occurred and many of the saints of old were raised out of their tombs and appeared in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:51-53).

Thus, the sheaf of the first fruits, this ancient ritual celebrated Sunday the week of Passover, was perfectly fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah rose from the dead. I can’t prove it, but I can’t help imagining that the very moment the priest waved the sheaf of the first fruits before the Lord, Messiah Jesus rose from the dead two thousand years ago.

Pentecost

(Leviticus 23: 15-16)

You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall

present a grain offering
of new grain to the Lord.

Leviticus 23: 15-16

The next feast Israel celebrated in their calendar year was the Day of Pentecost. That is the Greek name for what is called in the Hebrew Bible the Feast of *Weeks* or *Shavuot*. Why was it called that? Israel was to count “seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering.” So essentially, they were to count seven Sabbaths (seven Saturdays) and the day afterwards (Sunday) was set apart as a special day of worship and offerings.

Pentecost was the celebration of the beginning of the early wheat harvest. What is really amazing is that

in Judaism, it is commonly believed that the Day of Pentecost was the actual day God gave the Law engraved on stone to Moses on Mount Sinai. If that is true, that is incredible. Having received the Law carved in letters on stone, God ordered the slaying of three thousand Israelites due to their sin in the matter of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:28). It was the Levites willingness to carry out God’s command that was the basis of their selection as the priestly tribe.

Fast forward to the second chapter of Acts, we find an account centuries later of another Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Remember, Israel had two annual harvests, one in Spring and one in the Fall. The early one gathered in the Spring, which the Day of Pentecost celebrated. And just as the first Day

of Pentecost celebrated the giving of the Law on tablets of stone, so the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts (2:1) celebrated the fact that the Law no longer is engraved on stone tablets, but on “on tablets of human hearts” (II Corinthians 3:3). It was the celebration of the writing of that Law given on Sinai now on human hearts rather than as merely an exterior code. While the Law written on stone tablets remained a “ministry of death, carved in letters on stone” (3:7), the new covenant, now written on human hearts by an operation of the Spirit, was a ministry of life.

And what did Luke, the author of Acts, record as to how many responded to that ministry of life on that second Pentecost? *“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand*

souls” (Acts 2:41).

That is why the apostle Paul went to such great lengths to describe the new covenant as a covenant whereby God wrote the Law on human hearts rather than on stone as an exterior. This life-giving, free-flowing water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit which believers would receive after Jesus had completed his earthly mission and had been glorified.

This can be clearly seen in the prophet Ezekiel where describing the new covenant he says, *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).* That

plainly means that the conditions of the old are now the promises of the new. In other words, the old covenant was based upon certain conditions that one must fulfill (“if you walk in my statutes”) whereas the new is predicated on God supplying his Spirit who changes the heart (“I will put my Spirit in you and cause you to walk in my statutes”). That’s why it can be said that the conditions of the old are now the promises of the new.

The Fall Feasts

Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles

Feast of Trumpets

(Leviticus 23:23-25)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the Lord. Leviticus 23: 23-25

God commanded the Israelites to celebrate three feasts in the Fall all held in the seventh month of Tishri. They are the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. This made the seventh month like the first month, a *festival* month.

The Feast of Trumpets is pronounced *T’ruah* (literally, the ‘feast of blowing’) because Israel’s celebration began

with the blowing of trumpets. It is also known as *Rosh Hashanah* which means “head of the year”. That’s because the Feast of Trumpets is the Jewish New Year. It is believed that Fall was the first season of creation (sorry if that ruins your Christmas). Rosh Hashanah is a two-day celebration that begins on the first day of Tishri.

On this day, they blow the ram’s horn, the shofar (hence the name ‘feast of blowing’). The blowing of the shofar begins the “10 days of awe” in which each Jew is to repent before God, leading up to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) on the 10th day.

For the believer in Jesus Christ, the blowing of the shofar has two possible meanings. First, it reminds us that repentance must be our first response

to the Gospel. Before Jesus appeared brining salvation, John the Baptist exercised his ministry, calling Israel to a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4). Even Jesus Himself preached repentance as the means of responding to the gospel (1:14-15). And the apostles he sent called people to repentance and faith as a fitting response to the gospel they preached (Acts 26:19-20).

But there is another meaning to the blowing of the shofar on Yom T’Ruah. It signals the trumpet that shall sound at the return of Jesus Christ: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the *trumpet of God*” (1 Thess. 4:16).

Paul references the trumpet of God at the return of the Lord. He also

references the trumpet which shall sound at the resurrection:

Behold! I tell you a mystery:
We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

I Corinthians 15:51-52

Hence, in these two occurrences we see that the appearing of the Lord and the corresponding resurrection that will occur at that time are preceded by the blowing of the shofar.

The Day of Atonement: 'Yom Kippur'

(Leviticus 23:26-32)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut

off from his people. And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.

Leviticus 23:26-32

Growing up in Judaism, we Jews instinctively knew that Yom Kippur was a special day, even though we weren't very religious. Certain memories of

that day stand out, such as when Sandy Koufax refused to pitch for the Los Angeles Dodgers on the Day of Atonement during the World Series. So serious was that day that it was the only day in the Hebrew calendar when Israel was told they must *afflict* themselves (Leviticus 16:29). That was to prepare them for the great work of atonement that would be accomplished on that day.

In-depth instruction regarding how this atonement was accomplished are given in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. Immediately following the slaying of Aaron's two sons for offering the wrong sacrifices, God tells Moses to tell Aaron not to come into the Holy of holies anytime he wants. The exception was this "day of atonement." On that day he could

enter but not without first offering incense lest he see the presence of the Lord as a brilliant cloud covering the mercy seat. The term '*mercy seat*' when translated from Hebrew could read '*seat of atonement*' for it is the word *kafar* or '*atonement*'. The mercy seat covered the ark and was carved of a single piece of gold. On each end were carved cherubim which looked downward. It was exactly there on the mercy seat above the ark that God said He would meet with Israel (Ex 25:22.) It was right there that atonement was to be made for Israel before the Lord.

Before entering, Aaron had to be washed in the laver. This was unlike other times where just the washing of hands and feet were all that was needed. If he was going to enter the presence of God, he had to be

thoroughly purified. Rather than donning his usual garments, he would wear special ones for the occasion; holy garments made of linen. On this day, there were three types of special offerings offered; burnt offerings, festive sacrifices, and those offerings which made atonement. This third group included a sin offering for Aaron, his sons, and his family and the two goats, one which is killed and whose blood is sprinkled on the altar, and one that is released into the wilderness.

The first thing Aaron did when he entered the Holy of holies was to offer the incense which arose like a cloud before the mercy seat. He would then take the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, first towards the east and then towards the front, seven times. With that his own atonement

was completed and he could begin to prepare the atonement for the nation. Two male goats had been selected, one to be offered before the Lord and the other as the scapegoat. Aaron would slaughter the first goat and sprinkle its blood, trusting that the blood would suffice in cleansing the nation from their sin. He also had to cleanse the Tabernacle itself which became dirty before God.

Now the ceremony centers around the second goat, called in Hebrew *Azazel*, the Hebrew word for 'scapegoat' (Leviticus 16: 9-10). Other than the four times it appears in this chapter it does not appear in Scripture again. Scholars have debated the meaning of *Azazel* for centuries. The root idea in the word is that of *removal*. Some believe it was the name of the goat, while others the

name of the wilderness where it was sent. Still others believe that *Azazel* is a synonym for Satan. The idea here is that the goat was sent into the wilderness back to Satan, the source of all sin. The Intertestamental book of Enoch refers to *Azazel* in that manner. In Scripture though, *Azazel* is never used of demons or Satan.

While the first goat offered by Aaron demonstrated the appeasement of God's wrath, the second goat demonstrates it is not only appeased, but fully removed. The sins laid upon the head of the goat were now carried into the wilderness and forever banished. What a powerful picture of what God through His Son would eventually accomplish. David alludes to this in Psalm 103:11-12: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so

great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

In Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, the writer draws on the day of atonement to explain what Christ has done. The writer explains how each of the two stations of worship (holy place and holy of holies) corresponds to both the old covenant age and the new covenant ages.

The holy place, where the priests stand daily performing the rituals, represents the old covenant with its elaborate rituals. In Hebrews, the fact that this part of the tabernacle still stands, speaks of the worshipper living under an old covenant. But if the holy place still standing represents the

old covenant, the high priest entering the holy of holies speaks of the new covenant age which was slated to replace the old:

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence It is called the Holy Place.

Behind the second curtain was a second section³ called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing

the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body

imposed until the time of reformation. Hebrew 9:1-10

The distinguishing mark that the new covenant age has dawned is seen by the fact that the high priest alone was able to enter the holy of holies once a year with blood both for himself and the sins of the people. This is a type of the one Great Priest who once for all entered the *true* sanctuary to make atonement for the people:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent (‘not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means

of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11-12

The Day of Atonement is the most powerful way I have found to share the Gospel with fellow Jews. God gave this elaborate picture language to portray how Messiah would eventually enter the true holiest of all and give up his lifeblood for the sake of his people. The goat driven into the wilderness never to return clearly portrays the removal of sin and the guilt associated with it from God's presence forever. And this was accomplished once for all by the blood of the eternal covenant. Hallelujah.

The Feast of Tabernacles: 'Succoth'

(Leviticus 23:33-36)

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths⁶ to the Lord. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the Lord. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work."

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate

the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year.

It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”
Leviticus 23: 33-36

On the fifteenth day of the seventh

month the last annual feast was to be celebrated for seven days called the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. The Jewish people built temporary shelters for the feast to remember their deliverance from Egypt by the hand of God. The Feast of Tabernacles is known by many names: Feast of Shelters, Feast of Booths, Feast of Ingathering, and Sukkot. “The word *sukkot* means “booths.”

Throughout the holiday, Jews observe this time by building and dwelling in temporary shelters, just like the Hebrew people did while wandering in the desert. This joyous celebration is a reminder of God’s deliverance, protection, provision, and faithfulness” (*Learn Religions, What Does the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth) Mean to Christians*).

Tabernacles is the most joyous festival of the year commonly known as the ‘Season of our Joy.’ It is the celebration of the final harvest of the year. God commanded each Israelite to leave their home and dwell in booths as a remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt and how God cared for and preserved them when they dwelt in booths in the wilderness for forty years.

The observance of the Feast of Tabernacles is recorded in Exodus 23:16, 34:22; Leviticus 23:34-43; Numbers 29:12-40; Deuteronomy 16:13-15; Ezra 3:4; and Nehemiah 8:13-18. The Bible records the Feast of Tabernacle being observed during Hezekiah’s time (2 Chronicles 31:3; Deuteronomy 16:16), and also after the return from exile (Ezra 3:4; Zechariah 14:16,18-19).

The Israelites celebrated two ceremonies during Tabernacles. During the first celebration, the people carried torches and lit the candelabrum. This reminded them that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles. During the second, the priest drew water from the pool of Siloam and carried it to the temple, where they poured it into a silver basin by the altar.

In the New Testament, Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles and spoke these remarkable words on the last and greatest day of the Feast: *“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.”* (John 7:37-38, NIV).

“Each day during the Feast of

Tabernacles, water in a gold vessel was ceremonially carried in procession from the Pool of Siloam to the temple. This water was then poured out in front of the altar of burnt offerings, and Isaiah 13:3 was recited: *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”* Trumpets would be sounded, special Psalms were sung, and the people gave thanks for the rain. It reminded people of the rain God had sent in the time of Moses. It also looked forward to the days when abundant, living water would flow from the temple in the messianic kingdom.

On the last day of the feast, there was a special closing ceremony when even more water was poured out in the temple. Many scholars believe that Jesus made his proclamation about the living water as this water was being

poured out in front of the altar.

“On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.”

John 7:37-38 CSB

This life-giving, free-flowing water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit which believers would receive after Jesus had completed his earthly mission and been glorified. Looking further ahead, Zechariah indicated that the Feast of Tabernacles will be an important festival for the whole earth when Jesus

returns in the future” (Zech. 14:16ff).

The next morning, while the torches were still burning Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk-in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 12, NIV).

Summing it Up

To summarize, each of these feasts portrays a different aspect of our divine salvation. They are elaborate pictures; shadows of the good things to come when Messiah appeared (Hebrews 10:1). Can we celebrate them today as believers in Jesus? We certainly can just as long as we realize their fulfillment in the new covenant. Over the years, we kept the feasts at our house as a way of teaching our children what Messiah has accomplished through his death,

burial, resurrection and ascension. But we never did so in order to come back under an old covenant but as a means of illuminating the *new* covenant.

To this day, my teaching on the feasts is among the most listened to teaching in our library. But what about keeping the Christian holidays? (Christmas and Easter). Shouldn't we avoid them since they are steeped in paganism? It is true that some pagan features have bled into Christmas and Easter celebrations. But our attitude towards them should be that of Paul when dealing with the subject of meat offered by idols (see I Corinthians 8). When asked whether or not believers should eat meat offered to idols, one would think that the apostle would give a definitive *no*. But Paul doesn't do that. Instead, he leaves it up to

each individual believer to determine his practice based on each person's conscience. The same can be said of the Hebrew feasts: Each person must determine whether or not they should practice them. But there are two reasons a person should not practice the feasts.

First, they should *not* observe the feasts as a means of achieving righteousness. Messiah's blood *alone* is the basis of our right standing with God and nothing else. Neither should non-Jewish believers observe them as a way of becoming Jewish. Many non-Jewish believers are observing them for that reason since (according to them), being a Jewish believer is somehow better than being a Gentile believer.

There is one reason a believer

should keep them and that is because of a personal conviction that God was calling them to do so (just as long as they are not doing it for the two reasons cited above). This falls in line with what Paul teaches in Romans 14:5-7:

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

S
