

Late Summer 2018: Keep Watch!

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PREVIOUSLY we've noted how early-to-mid summer, around Pentecost, is a high watch time for prophetic events. With September just around the corner, it's time to consider the reasons late summer, specifically August-September, is a time to keep watch as well.

The most obvious reason late summer qualifies as a high-watch time is that the scriptures linking summertime to the end of the age are not explicit as to a month.¹ Since, biblically, summer begins at the vernal equinox (March 20) and ends at the autumnal equinox (September 22), the whole six-month season is a viable time for a prophetic "harvest" or other major event.²

Another reason late summer warrants the watchman's attention, for those keeping track of feasts and holy days, has to do with the possibility of the calendar being a month off.³ If the biblical New Year, or Nisan 1, is the first new moon *after* the vernal equinox, as some teach, the current biblical year began in April instead of March. A post-equinox Nisan 1 puts the Feast of Trumpets in October rather than September and the holidays Tisha B'Av and Tu B'Av in August rather than July.

For those unfamiliar with the significance of Tisha B'Av and Tu B'Av, a brief summary:

TISHA B'AV

The Hebrew calendar date Av 9 (Tisha B'Av) is an annual day of mourning and fasting in Israel that commemorates a number of disastrous events that occurred on this day in Jewish history.⁴

According to rabbinic tradition, the tragedy that caused God to put a curse on the date of Av 9 was the bad report of the 12 spies sent to search out the Land of Canaan (Num. 13). The spies' report of giants in the land caused the children of Israel to be fearful of possessing it as God instructed. For this lack of faith, the Lord punished everyone over the age of twenty by sentencing them to wander the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land (Num. 14).

Significantly, Scripture records that Moses sent the spies into Canaan in the season of the "first ripe grapes," which is typically July in Israel (Num. 13). The spies searched out the land for a period of weeks, arriving at the brook of Eshcol where they cut down a giant cluster of grapes and gathered some pomegranates and figs before returning to camp after a total of 40 days (vv. 23-25). Assuming the spies' 40-day mission began in early July, around the 10th, they would have returned to Moses with the bad report around August 20, corresponding to the adjusted (post-equinox) Tisha B'Av in 2018. A late August

Tisha B'Av is also consistent with the spies' gathering of pomegranates, which begin to ripen in mid-to-late August, reaching their peak in September-October.⁵

TU B'AV

A week after Tisha B'Av comes the Jewish holiday Tu B'Av. In contrast to the somber tone of Tisha B'Av, Tu B'Av is a joyous day in Israel. One reason Tu B'av is a time of celebration is that it's associated with the end of the curse put on the generation who feared to take possession of the Promised Land. According to tradition, each year on Av 9, Moses commanded the people to dig graves and sleep in them as punishment for believing the spies' bad report about the Land. Each year they would awaken to find that all those who had reached the age of sixty had died during the night. When the final (40th) year of Israel's sentence of wandering the wilderness came, however, the last 15,000 of that generation did not die on Tisha B'Av. Assuming they had erred in calculation, they waited another day, then another, for death to come. When the full moon appeared on Tu B'Av, they realized God had forgiven the sin of the spies.

After the Jews entered Canaan, Tu B'Av began to be celebrated as the day they had been freed from the curse of the grave and allowed to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, who is a prophetic type of Christ.

Another rabbinic teaching is that Tu B'Av commemorates the readmission of Benjamin into the tribal community and the lifting of the ban on tribal intermarriage through the daughters of Zelophehad. Thus, in ancient Israel, Tu B'Av is the day when virgins would dress in white and dance in the vineyards to attract husbands.

Some speculate that Ruth's wedding to Boaz, a typological picture of the wedding of the Church to Messiah, occurred on Tu B'Av. Scripture records that Ruth lived with her mother-in-law, Naomi, until all of the wheat harvest was complete (Ruth 2:21-23). Tu B'Av traditionally marks the beginning of the grape harvest and, therefore, an unofficial conclusion to the wheat harvest. This, presumably, is when Ruth would have stopped living with her mother-in-law to take up residence with her new husband.

Related to the grape harvest, a rapture typology in Song of Solomon associates the ripened grapes with the coming of a Shepherd to gather and spirit away his beloved Shulammitte maid:

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song 2:11-13).

Notice that "tender grapes" are the final agricultural sign mentioned before the shepherd says, "Rise up, my love ... and come away." Some Bible translations state that the vines are "in blossom," denoting an

earlier part of the summer. The King James description of “tender grapes,” however, makes more sense in view of the mention of foxes spoiling the vines in verse 15:

“Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines *have* tender grapes” (v. 15).

While it’s possible that foxes would spoil vines before the fruit appears by gnawing on the bare branches or digging holes to kill the roots, it’s more reasonable to assume the foxes are after the tender grapes. Apparently, primarily carnivorous foxes enjoy the occasional fruit dessert. One commentary notes that in vine-growing countries such as Australia, foxes, when killed, have been found with nothing but grapes in their stomachs.⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For those who like to consider dates, the following are noteworthy:

Tisha B’Av = August 19-20 (post-equinox calendar)

Tu B’Av = August 26-27 (post-equinox calendar)

Last day of summer = September 22

Feast of Trumpets = September 10 (modern Jewish calendar) or October 10 (post-equinox calendar)

Some consider the days after the autumnal equinox, specifically the fall feasts, the most likely time for the Rapture. In view of the typologies and harvest references pointing to the summer, however, not to mention the fact that Jesus says no man or angel knows the day of His coming, it’s wise to keep watch also in the days preceding autumn—*all of them!*

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn” (Mark 13:35).

NOTES

1. Scriptures linking summer to the end of the age:

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near” (Matt. 24:32).

“This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of summer fruit ... Then the LORD said to me, ‘The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer’” (Amos 8:1, 2).

“The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved” (Jer. 8:20).

“What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets” (Mic. 7:1-2).

See also rapture typologies in Ruth and Song of Solomon.

2. While modern calendars divide the year into four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter—the Bible mentions only two main seasons: summer and winter:

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease” (Gen. 8:22).

“It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter” (Ps. 74:17).

Biblically, summer begins at the vernal equinox in March and ends at the autumnal equinox in September. Winter runs the opposite, beginning in September and ending in March. Therefore, to be precise, spring is not a distinct season but, rather, merely the first part of the summer. Likewise, autumn is not a distinct season but, rather, the first part of winter. The June and December solstices, marking the beginning of summer and winter on our calendars, actually represent the midpoint of the respective seasons.

3. Most Jewish calendars reckon the new moon *nearest* the vernal Equinox Nisan 1. An alternate view, however, is that Nisan 1 is the first new moon *after* the equinox. The logic behind the post-equinox reckoning is as follows:

- 1) The *year* is not determined by the Moon but, rather, by Earth’s 365-day orbit around the *Sun*.
- 2) To keep the festivals in their proper seasons God links their observance to the equinoxes—the two points in Earth’s orbit at which its axis is perpendicular to the Sun’s rays, resulting in equal daylight and darkness around the globe (Ex. 34:22).*
- 3) Because Exodus 12 says the biblical year begins in the month of Nisan (March-April), the logical starting point of Earth’s yearly circuit around the Sun is the vernal or “spring” equinox.

With the above in view, it’s reasoned that it’s illogical to place Nisan 1 *ahead* of the spring equinox, *before the earth has completed its yearly circuit around the sun*. To place Nisan 1 before the spring equinox is to, in effect, begin a New Year *before* the prior year has ended. Reckoning the new moon nearest the equinox Nisan 1 also results in the year sometimes beginning in the winter and sometimes in the summer. When Nisan 1 is reckoned the first new moon after the equinox, however, the New Year always occurs in the summer.

If the modern Jewish calendar that most are following is correct this year, then six of the seven festivals (Passover through Day of Atonement) will be observed in the summer, while only the Feast of Tabernacles will be observed

in the season opposite: winter. Conversely, if we reckon Nisan 1 the first new moon *after* the equinox in 2018, the first three festivals occur in the summer, while the last three festivals occur in the winter.

*The word “turn” in Exodus 34:22 is translated from the Hebrew *tekufah*, which refers to the turn of the seasons that occurs at both the spring and fall equinoxes—the two times a year when the sun crosses the celestial equator and the length of the day and night are equal.

4. Disasters that have occurred on Tisha B’Av (Av 9):

- Both the first and second Jewish Temples were destroyed on Tisha B’Av.
- At least three major expulsions of the Jews occurred on Tisha B’Av: England, 1290 AD; France, 1306 AD; and Spain, 1492 AD.
- Germany declared war on Russia on Tisha B’Av, transforming a regional conflict into a World War that would cause massive upheaval in Europe, including a rise in anti-Semitism that would culminate in the Holocaust.
- Hitler’s proclamation to exterminate the Jews was given on Tisha B’Av.
- The disastrous evacuation of the Gaza strip in 2005 occurred at sundown on Tisha B’Av.

5. <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/earliestripening-pomegranate-88246.html>
<https://shalomisraelstours.com/18678/>

6. See Cambridge Bible Commentary
<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/songs/2-15.htm>