

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

It is approaching the third hour of the day on Nisan 14, 33 AD. His back torn open and bleeding, Jesus stumbles forward under the heat of the almost midday sun. Staggering up the rugged heights of Golgotha, He finally reaches the appointed place of execution, where His hands and feet will be nailed to a cross.

The crossbar that Simon of Cyrene has carried for Him is placed on the ground. Jesus is abruptly thrown backward against the timber and held in position while a Roman legionnaire drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through His wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, so as to allow for some flexion and movement. The crossbar is then lifted into place, and a small sign reading “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” is nailed above His head.

The left foot is then pressed backward against the right, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arches, leaving the knees moderately flexed.

Jesus is now crucified. As His body sags downward from the force of gravity, exerting pressure on the nails that have pierced the median nerves in the wrists, excruciating pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on

the nail through His feet. Again, there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

He will hang like this for hours, the pitiless rays of the sun beating down on His thorn-crowned head, enduring limitless waves of pain, joint rending cramps, bouts of intermittent partial asphyxiation, and, of course, the vicious mockery of those present at the scene.

Afternoon arrives, bringing darkness—and a new agony: a terrible crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. A sponge soaked in cheap, sour wine is lifted to His lips, but He refuses the liquid.

It is now approaching the ninth hour of the day and the body of Jesus is in extremes; He cries out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Immediately thereafter, He begins to sense the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This final realization brings an unexpected air of calm to His battered features—and a final utterance to his lips: “It is finished.”

A BLIND REHEARSAL

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is unquestionably the most important event in all of human history. It was, in essence, the ultimate sacrifice; the ransom of all ransoms in which one man would suffer unspeakable agonies as He bore the brunt of mankind’s sin.

The above description of this event, written nearly twenty centuries after the fact, captures the basic details of what happened that day: the piercing of His hands and feet; the excruciating pain and near asphyxiation He suffered as the force of gravity literally pulled His bones out of joint; the terrible thirst that went unquenched; the mockery He endured at the hands of the Romans and priests gathered at the scene, and finally, the words that He uttered just before giving up the ghost. But did you know these same

details were also spelled out in the ancient Scriptures many centuries *before* the crucifixion of Christ took place, in fact—long before the practice of crucifixion had been invented? (Psalm 22:1, 7, 14-18, 69:21).

Of course, the Jews who witnessed the event did not understand this, and even the Apostles and other disciples could not completely comprehend it at first, even though Jesus had spoken about it many times. Only later did things become clear, after the Lord in His resurrected state explained it to them.

While most who know the Bible well are familiar with the prophecies that prefigured this ultimate sacrifice, many are not aware of another decidedly prophetic element of the crucifixion: Unbeknownst to the Jews, who rejected Jesus as Messiah and called for His execution nearly two thousand years ago, they themselves had been ritualistically rehearsing for and acting out this particular sacrifice to the very calendar day—and even the *hour* that it would take place—for well over a millennia before Christ was born.

SHADOWS AND TYPES

The fact that Christ's crucifixion was ritualistically foreshadowed by the Jews long before the Messiah came into the world underscores one of the most common themes in the Bible: God gives us the natural to explain the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:46, 47). Indeed, all throughout Scripture we find the Lord revealing His plan of redemption in the form of various earthly rituals and observances that He has given to man. For instance, we learned earlier how the seven-day week and the seven-year sabbatical cycles foreshadow God's larger seven thousand year timeline for the world. Also, we noted how the jubilee celebration prefigures the joyous return of Christ.

In this chapter, we are going to take a look at some additional types and shadows of things to come, specifically some special observances that God handed down to Moses and the Israelites as they

wandered the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. Similar to the Sabbaths and Jubilees, these observances also prefigure key elements of God's plan. They are known as the "Feasts of the Lord," and, as you may or may not have guessed, there are seven of them.

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

The seven Feasts of the Lord are first described to Moses by the Lord Himself in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 23:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.

—Leviticus 23:2

In subsequent verses (3 through 44), God proceeds to lay out a series of dates on which the Israelites were to observe some very specific rituals, Sabbaths, and offerings. Beginning with the Feast of Passover and ending with the Feast of Tabernacles, He describes all seven, designating them as "holy convocations."

But what exactly was the Lord's purpose in highlighting these particular dates, and why does He designate them as "holy?"

LOST IN THE TRANSLATION?

To begin to understand what the feasts are really all about, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the two key words God uses to describe them in verse 2, which are, of course, "feast" and "convocation."

As we consider these words, the first thing to keep in mind is that they are an English translation derived from a Hebrew text. We note this because due to the inherent difficulties associated with trans-

lating any given text from one language to another, it is not always possible to convey the most accurate meaning of a particular word. In this case, for instance, when most of us hear the word “feast” we think food, perhaps relating to the Thanksgiving holiday. Yet if we look to the original Hebrew we find that the word translated as “feast” is actually *mo’ed*, which means “*a fixed time or season; an appointed time; a set time or exact time.*” Consequently, rather than necessarily denoting a gathering that involves food, as implied by the English translation, the Hebrew reveals that God was actually speaking more in terms of an “appointed” or “fixed” time.

The other word in question, “convocation,” is in the English language normally associated with an “*assembly*” or “*ceremony.*” The original Hebrew word, however, which is *miqra*, denotes a meaning more specific to “*a rehearsal.*”

And so, as the added insight provided by the Hebrew meanings reveals, the feasts detailed in Leviticus were not merely to be celebratory gatherings, but were intended as holy “rehearsals” that were to be observed at “an appointed time” on God’s calendar. Therefore, in keeping and observing the Feasts of the Lord, the Jews were essentially rehearsing and preparing for some very special “fixed” or “appointed” moments in time that God had pre-identified. These times, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, are those in which He has chosen to intersect human history through His Son, Jesus Christ (Chumney, 7).

THE FORGOTTEN FEASTS

Many Christians today do not understand the importance of the feasts and more or less view them as merely “Jewish” Holy Days that celebrate the ancient aspects of Hebrew culture. It should be pointed out, however, for those who hold this view, that the feasts are not called the “Feasts of the Jews” but the “Feasts of the Lord,” thereby implying a universal relevance. Furthermore, Scripture tells us that

these observances were not to be limited solely to the Jews but to be shared in equally by the foreigner or stranger in the land (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14).

Another reason the feasts are ignored by many Christians is the belief that when Christ died on the cross these ceremonies became irrelevant because they were part of the Old Testament Law and sacrificial system, which, of course, gave way to “salvation by Grace.” This sentiment is somewhat understandable in view of Christ’s teaching that salvation is not earned by upholding “the Law.” Yet we must keep in mind that He also said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). The fact is that the early Christians continued to observe the feasts. Even the Apostle Paul in his ministry made it a point to observe the holy days with both Jewish believers and Gentile Christians alike (Colossians 2:16).

The point to be taken from all of this is that the primary role of the feasts, which, again, was to foreshadow what is yet to come, is just as important now as it was before the time of Christ. And so if we as believers want to fully understand what God has done in the past and even more importantly what His plans are for the future, we must ourselves begin to learn about the feasts and the rich symbolic meaning embedded therein.

Thus is described our objective for this chapter. In the following pages, we are going to begin to peel back the layers, revealing the remarkably prophetic nature of the feasts, thereby gaining access to some of the Bible’s most incredibly detailed foreshadowings of the future.

Before we get into the details of each feast, however, let us first take a moment to note some general themes and characteristics that are common to all of them.

AN AGRICULTURAL THEME

The feasts observances are organized around the spring and fall

sowing and harvesting cycles and therefore include many *agriculturally themed* rituals and activities.

AN APPOINTED PLACE

The Bible teaches that in addition to being observed at God's appointed "times," certain feasts, namely Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles were to be observed at God's appointed *place*: a place that He shall "choose to place His name in" (Deuteronomy 16:2, 6, 9-11, 13-16).

As highlighted previously, God's chosen place is, of course, Jerusalem.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Unlike the ancient Jews who practiced them, we can, from our vantage point in time, clearly see how each of the feasts has not only a rich historical significance but also an instructive prophetic meaning. For instance, to the ancient Jews a certain feast may have served to commemorate a significant event in their relatively recent history, such as the handing down of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, but lost on them was the fact that the same set of rituals also pointed forward to a *future* event that would eventually be fulfilled by the Messiah.

AN APPOINTED TIME

Another obvious yet nonetheless amazing aspect of the feasts is that they prefigure much more than just the prophetic events themselves, but also reveal the exact day on which these events will occur. For example, let us consider once again the crucifixion: God predetermined Nisan 14 as the day on which the sacrificial "Lamb," or Jesus, would be put to death, roughly 1,400 years before Christ's birth!

SEASONS

Now, with our basic understanding of what the feasts are all about, we are prepared to take a look at each individually. The first four observances are known as the “spring feasts.” These were fulfilled by Jesus Christ at His first coming. As history confirms, all of the key events in Christ’s life, namely His death, burial, and resurrection occurred on particular feast days in the spring.

The remaining three feasts, which are yet to be fulfilled, are known as the fall feasts. Secure in the knowledge that God “does not change” (Malachi 3:6) and is eternal in His nature, we can be confident that just as Christ fulfilled crucial aspects of His redemptive plan on the appointed days in the spring, He will likewise return to fulfill the events foreshadowed by the fall feasts.

These important points noted, let us begin our look at the already fulfilled spring feasts, noting first how each was historically observed and then how each was ultimately fulfilled:

THE SPRING FEASTS: FULFILLED BY CHRIST AT HIS FIRST COMING.

1) THE FEAST OF PASSOVER (PESACH)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

As instructed by God, the Nation of Israel was to keep the Passover Feast by sacrificing a lamb “without blemish” on the Hebrew calendar date of Nisan 14 (Exodus 12:5, 6). For the Jews, this feast was a memorial of the night they put the blood of a lamb upon their doorposts and were spared by the Angel of Death that killed the first-born of Egypt—the plague that finally convinced Pharaoh to release the Hebrew slaves from bondage.

Subsequent Passovers were observed by Jewish families as follows: The head of each household was to take a lamb of the first year on

the tenth day of Nisan and set it aside until the fourteenth day (Exodus 12:3-6).^{*} In the evening of the fourteenth day, at exactly 3:00 pm, the lamb was to be killed (Exodus 12:6). Then, just as on the very first Passover in Egypt, its blood was to be sprinkled on the lintel and two side posts of the household door. The lamb was to be roasted with fire, with bitter herbs, and with unleavened bread—then feasted upon by the entire household.

The Temple version of the sacrifice was observed in similar fashion: At the third hour of the day, or 9:00 am, the Jewish high priest would take the lamb and ascend the altar to tie it in place, where it would remain throughout the day. At the time of the evening sacrifice, which was the ninth hour of the day, or 3:00 pm, the high priest would ascend the altar and cut the throat of the lamb with a knife, afterword uttering the phrase, “It is finished.”

SYMBOLY AND FULFILLMENT:

Spiritually, the ritual involving the blood of the lamb on the doorpost, which, again, memorialized the deliverance from Egypt, is a picture of the Messiah and the freedom He offers from the bondage of sin via His sacrifice as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). Here, sin is represented by the Jewish captivity in Egypt (14). Egypt represents a type of the world, or “world system,” and its ruler, Pharaoh, represents a type of “Satan” (13, 14).

The ritual involving the priest’s binding and sacrifice of the lamb, however, is the most stunningly prophetic element of this feast as it provides a remarkable foreshadowing of Christ’s actual crucifixion: On the day of His death, Nisan 14, Jesus was bound and nailed to the cross at the third hour of the day, or 9:00 am (Mark 15:25), the exact date and time that the Jews had been binding the Passover

^{*} The significance of setting the lamb aside for four days is rooted in the ancient belief that the Messiah would remain hidden from the world until four thousand years from the creation of Adam, thus alluding to God’s “seven thousand year plan” (15).

Lamb to the altar for centuries on end. Jesus hung on the cross for the better part of the day and eventually died at the ninth hour, or 3:00 pm (Matthew 27:46, 50), the same time that the Passover Lamb, as instructed by God, had been sacrificed by the high priest for well over a millennia. Before He bowed His head and “gave up the ghost,” Jesus uttered the same words that had long since been ritualistically uttered by the priest as he sacrificed the lamb: “It is finished” (John 19:30). Thus, in true rehearsal-like fashion, the Jews had sacrificed the Passover Lamb—representing Jesus Christ—on Nisan 14, for well over a thousand years before He had been born!

2) THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD (HAG HAMATZAH)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which runs from Nisan 15 through Nisan 21, God forbade the Jews to have any leaven in their homes. Therefore, they would take care to remove all traces and eat only flat bread, or *matzah* (28).

A fascinating aspect of this feast centers on a traditional ceremonial dinner known as the Seder. This tradition, which remains a mystery to most Jews, is observed as follows: At a certain point during the dinner, the leader of the Seder picks up a linen bag from the table, which contains three pieces of matzah. He then removes the second, or middle, matzah and breaks it in half. Half is placed back into the bag and the other half is carefully wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden somewhere in the home. The piece that is hidden is known as the “afikomen” and reappears later in the service.

After the meal, the children are sent out to find the hidden afikomen; the child who finds it receives a reward. Rabbinic Law then requires that a small piece of the retrieved afikomen be eaten by everyone present at the service as a reminder of the Passover Lamb.¹

SYMBOLY AND FULFILLMENT:

The removal of leaven (representing sin) from the home during this feast is symbolic of putting away the sin in one's life and, in turn, the corrupting influence that it has on the soul of the believer. Ancient Israel learned that keeping this feast meant a complete separation from Egypt's religion, as well as its worldly glory and splendor (32, 33).

The bread made without leaven, or matzah, also reminded the Jews of their ancestors, who hurriedly left Egypt for the Promised Land, not having time to wait for the dough to rise.

The symbology behind the ceremonial Seder dinner is perhaps the most remarkable though. For the Jews involved in this service, the question must be asked, why three matzahs? One rabbinic tradition holds that they represent the three groups of Jewish people: the priests, the Levites, and the Israelites. Another tradition holds that they represent the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, there is no biblical basis for either of these explanations, and neither fit the symbolism behind the breaking of the bread ceremony. Basically, rabbinic tradition is at a loss to explain why the middle matzah must be broken.

The truth, though unrecognized by many of the Jews who routinely participate in this ritual, is that the trinity of the Godhead is being symbolized: three persons within the oneness of God, just as three matzahs are in the oneness of the linen bag. The second person of the Godhead, the Son, came to Earth as the Messiah. He was "broken" (on the cross), "wrapped in linen" (Christ's burial shroud was linen), and "hidden" away (buried in the tomb).² Thus is revealed the true spiritual meaning behind this feast: Jesus was buried and lay in the tomb on the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The matzah, which was traditionally pierced and striped, was seen as being symbolic of Christ, who was also "striped" (whipped by the Romans) and "pierced" (on the cross).

Interestingly, there is much debate among rabbis concerning the

meaning of the word afikomen; this, perhaps, owing to the fact that the word afikomen does not even exist in the Hebrew language. Rabbinic consensus, nonetheless, usually maintains that it means “dessert,” since it is eaten after the meal when a dessert would normally be eaten. Digging a little deeper, however, we find that afikomen is a Greek word—which makes a certain amount of sense considering that Greek was the common language of Jesus’ day. Yet, oddly enough, it is the *only* Greek word in the Seder ceremony. Everything else is, again, in Hebrew. It is also the second aorist form (completion of an action, without reference to length of action) of the Greek verb *ikneomai*—a word with an electrifying translation: It simply means “*He came*.”³

Indeed, the death of Jesus—the man without sin—symbolizes the opportunity for the burden of sin to be removed from mankind forever. Perhaps the Prophet Isaiah put it best when he wrote, “with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

3) THE FEAST OF FIRST FRUITS (BIKKURIM)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

As commanded by God, the people of Israel kept this feast on Nisan 18 as a *joyous* occasion. Chapter 23 of Leviticus details God’s instructions:

God said to Moses, ‘When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the Lord.

—Leviticus 23:9-12

In Israel, barley would be the first grain to ripen, followed by fruit, olives, grapes, and finally, wheat. At the time of planting, the Jewish people would mark off certain barley in the field. Later, when the harvest season arrived, they would carry a sickle and basket and on command reap this specially designated grain. They would then march to the Tabernacle, bringing a sheaf of the “first fruits” of the harvest to the priest. The priest would then, as prescribed in Leviticus, wave the sheaf before the Lord, accompanied by burnt and meal offerings. This “first fruits” ceremony was a way of giving thanks to God for a good harvest by offering Him the very first of the larger harvest that yet lay in the field.⁴

SYMBOLGY AND FULFILLMENT:

Representative of the “first fruits” of the “harvest of the redeemed,” Jesus was resurrected from the grave during this feast. In 1 Corinthians, below, Paul confirms that Christ’s immortal resurrected body, being the first, was the model, or prototype, of what believers have to look forward to when they are also given immortal bodies at the final harvest, or resurrection (36):

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming.

—1 Corinthians 15:20-23

4) THE FEAST OF PENTECOST (SHAVVOT)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

The fourth spring feast, known as “the Feast of Pentecost,” occurs fifty days after the Feast of Passover. Pentecost was a one-day

Sabbath feast, a new meal offering to the Lord that was celebrated with two large loaves of leavened bread. Historically, this feast was a memorial of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, which, according to the Bible, occurred exactly fifty days after the crossing of the Red Sea. It is said that at this time God recorded “the Law,” or “the Torah,” on two tablets of stone.

SYMBOLGY AND FULFILLMENT:

After being crucified on *Passover* and then resurrected at *First Fruits*, Christ appeared to and spoke with the Apostles over a period of forty days. In His final words to them He said that He must return to the Father, but that He would send the “Holy Spirit” as a comforter. This came to pass just days later on the next Jewish feast, *Pentecost*, when He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of those who would receive Him (Acts 2:1-18). It is said that at this time God’s Law was written not on “tablets of stone” but on the “hearts and minds” of all believers (41).

Thus, Pentecost was fulfilled by Christ’s sending of the Holy Spirit, marking the beginning of the Church and the beginning of God’s early “harvest” of mankind.

SUMMARY OF THE SPRING FEASTS

As we wrap up our look at the spring feasts, let us briefly review how each of them has been fulfilled by Jesus:

Jesus, who was our “Passover Lamb,” was crucified on the day of Passover (Nisan 14). He, being the “bread of life” and the “man without sin,” was lying in the tomb wrapped in a linen shroud on the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Christ arose on the Feast of First Fruits as the first to rise from the dead and receive a resurrected body.

And finally, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first believ-

ers during the Feast of Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the Christian era.

Remarkably, these feasts, as recorded in Leviticus and observed by the Jews for over a millennia before Christ's appearance, were fulfilled to the very day and in at least one case—to the very hour—by Jesus when He came to carry out the most critical phase of God's redemptive plan.

At this point, before moving on to the fall feasts, we should take the opportunity to acknowledge yet another aspect of the feast cycle that is rooted in the underlying agricultural theme, which is the fact that there exists a significant span of time, or what some call a “gap,” between the spring and fall feasts. Might this also hold some meaning?

THE SUMMER GAP

The season that lies between spring and fall is, of course, the summer season. In the context of the feast cycle, this “summer gap” symbolizes the span of two thousand years that began at Christ's resurrection from the dead and ends roughly at the present day. This time period is also known as the “summer harvest” and represents the growth of Christ's Church and the redeeming of those who have heard and responded to His call during this era.

This important element noted, let us move on to the fall feasts.

THE FALL FEASTS: TO BE FULFILLED BY CHRIST AT HIS SECOND COMING

The fall is arguably the most important time of year in Judaism and, though many Christians do not realize it, it should likewise be for them, as the fall feasts foreshadow the future return of Jesus Christ. For this reason, we are going to take a slightly more in-depth look at these holy rehearsals and what they portend—beginning with “the Feast of Trumpets.”

5) THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS (ROSH HASHANAH)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

Tishrei 1 on the Hebrew calendar marks the Feast of Trumpets. Because it falls on the first day of the Jewish “civil” calendar, this feast represents a type of New Year’s Day in Jewish culture. It is also viewed as a type of “birthday of the world,” since, according to tradition, it is believed that Adam was created on this day (Mishnah, San Hedrin 38b).

The Feast of Trumpets was traditionally reserved as a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent of them before the arrival of the next Jewish feast, the Day of Atonement.

SYMBOLGY AND FULFILLMENT:

The ten days that fall between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement are known as the “High Holy Days” or “the Days of Awe.” Significantly, the Sabbath that falls within this ten-day period is called *Shabbat Shuvah*, or the “Sabbath of Return” (52, 53). Accordingly, several important themes related to the Messiah’s return are associated with the Feast of Trumpets. Since each of these is fairly extensive, for the sake of clarity, we will list and discuss each separately over the course of the next several pages.

We begin with the most obvious theme:

Feast of Trumpets Theme (1): “The Sounding of the Shofar”

Considering the name of this feast—“the Feast of *Trumpets*”—it is no surprise that the sounding of the shofar, or trumpet, is the primary theme. Tellingly, the trumpet is often associated with the resurrection, or rapture, as we see in 1 Corinthians:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for *the trumpet shall sound*, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

—1 Corinthians 15:52

In the Torah, this feast is referred to as “The Day of the Sounding of the Shofar,” or *Yom Teruah* (55). *Teruah* translates to “*an awakening blast*.” In the Bible, the word *awake* is also often associated with the resurrection, as we note in Isaiah:

Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, *awake* and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

—Isaiah 26:19

Teruah is also translated as “shout.” In 1 Thessalonians we see the word shout used in connection with the resurrection:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven *with a shout*, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

—1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

Feast of Trumpets Theme (2): “Gates of Heaven Opened”

In accordance with the theme of the resurrection, it is also believed that the gates of heaven are opened on the Feast of Trumpets to allow the righteous to enter. We find this scene illustrated in the Book of Psalms (63, 64):

Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.

—Psalm 118:19-20

Feast of Trumpets Theme (3): “The Wedding of the Messiah”

The Hebrew sages considered marriage to be the ideal human state and the model for the relationship between God and Israel. Thus, the Jewish wedding ceremony was understood by early Christians to be a picture of the joining of Christ with His Church. Scripture confirms this in Ephesians, wherein the Apostle Paul draws this very analogy:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

—Ephesians 5:25-27

Another example of the wedding analogy is, as we recall, found in “The Parable of the Ten Virgins” cited earlier in chapter 1. Here, again, Jesus is pictured as the bridegroom returning for His bride (the Church) at the end of the age:

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him...and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage...

—Matthew 25:6, 10

Many other scriptural references can be cited that link the return of Christ to the Jewish wedding tradition. For instance, in Jewish cul-

ture it was customary that after the bride had accepted the groom's proposal the bridegroom would depart, going back to his father's house to prepare the bridal chamber. It was understood to be the man's duty to go away to be with his father, build a house, and prepare for the eventual wedding. Before he departed, however, he would make the following statement to the bride: "I go to prepare a place for you; if I go, I will return again unto you." This, of course, echoes the well-known statement that Jesus made to the Disciples in John 14—just before leaving to return to His "Father's house" in Heaven:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Fathers' house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. *I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself that where I am, there ye may be also.*

—John 14:1-3

Here, we have a clear picture of the bridegroom (Jesus) returning to His Father's house (heaven) to prepare a place for His bride (the Church) (68).

Yet another reference to the wedding tradition was touched on, albeit briefly, in our first chapter. It is, again, the verse most often cited by those who insist that we cannot know the time of Christ's return:

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of Heaven, *but my Father only.*

—Matthew 24:36

Focusing on the italicized portion of the verse, according to Jewish tradition, the timing of the wedding was contingent upon the father's approval of the groom's preparation of the wedding chamber.

So, when someone inquired as to *when* the wedding would be held, the groom would customarily answer, “Only my father knows.” Needless to say, in comparing this customary turn of phrase to the above verse, the correlation becomes obvious! Therefore, the Jewish wedding, which, as we have established, is linked symbolically to the resurrection, is also linked by association to the Feast of Trumpets. All of this points to the fact that verse 36, above, which employs strong reference to the Jewish wedding tradition in speaking to the timing of Christ’s return, is an obvious allusion to the fact that this return will take place at the Feast of Trumpets!

Continuing on, after the wedding it was customary for the bride and groom to remain in the wedding chamber for a week before emerging to take part in the “wedding supper” (44). As we recall, the Hebrew word for week is *shabua*. This, again, can refer to a period of seven days or seven years. In light of this, many believe that this week symbolizes a seven-year period immediately following the resurrection in which the saints will be in heaven, while, on earth, God’s wrath is being poured out on an unrepentant world.*

At the conclusion of this week, the bride (or Church) and the groom (Jesus) will return to earth to take part in the “wedding supper of the Lamb.” It is said that only the invited guests of the “father of

* As J.C. Alexander points out in *Kingdom of the Beast*, when reading the Book of Revelation it is crucial to understand that the “Tribulation” and the “Wrath of God” are two entirely different sets of circumstances that unfold during entirely different time periods (215). The resurrection, or rapture, which occurs at the opening of the “sixth seal,” is the event that separates these two distinct periods. In Revelation 8, with the opening of the “seventh seal” we see the horrific events of God’s wrath begin to unfold. The overall sequence of events, then, is as follows: 1) Tribulation (three and one half years in duration), 2) Resurrection-Rapture (both occur on the same day), 3) God’s wrath (most likely seven years in duration) and, finally, Christ’s return to earth with the resurrected saints. For those thinking seven years seems like a long time for the saints to be in heaven before returning to earth, we must keep in mind that the heavenly estate exists outside the confines of “time and space” as we know it. In other words, it is an *eternal* state where it is believed one is always “in the moment”—where the passing of time literally does not exist.

the bridegroom” (God the Father) will be present at this banquet meal (Revelation 19:9) (70).

Feast of Trumpets Theme (4): “The Hidden Day”

The Feast of Trumpets is also known as *Yom HaKeseh*, or “the Hidden Day.” The term *keseh*, or *keceh*, is derived from the Hebrew root *kacah*, which means to “conceal, cover, or hide.” Every day during the month of Elul, a trumpet is blown to warn the people to turn back to God, except for the thirtieth, or last, day of the month—the day preceding the Feast of Trumpets. On this day the trumpet is not blown, but all is silent. This is done to underscore the fact that much about the Feast of Trumpets is concealed, or shrouded in mystery (72). This somewhat mystical aspect is alluded to in the Book of Psalms: “Sound the shofar on the new moon, in concealment of the day of our festival” (Psalm 81:3).

Part of the reason the Feast of Trumpets is considered mysterious, or hidden, owes to the fact that there was a fair amount of uncertainty with regard to observing this feast on the correct calendar day. As with all of the feasts, the uncertainty stemmed from a calendar that depended on the promulgation of the new moon, which marked the beginning of each new month as designated by the rabbinical court in Jerusalem. The problem with the Feast of Trumpets was further compounded by the fact that it falls on *Rosh Chodesh*, or the new moon, itself. Because the commencement of this feast hinged on the sighting of a tiny sliver of the Moon, even in Jerusalem it would have been difficult to let everyone know in time that the New Year had begun. To solve this problem, a *two-day* Feast of Trumpets was practiced, even in Israel. In the rabbinic view, these two days are regarded as a *yoma arikhta*, or one long day (54). For this reason, when speaking of the timing of the Feast of Trumpets the Jews would typically say, “Of that day and hour no one knows.” Thus, in this theme we have yet another clear reference to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:36 (“of that day and hour knoweth no man”) regarding the timing of

His return for the Church. This reference, in combination with the aforementioned Jewish wedding reference, “Only my father knows,” leaves no doubt that Jesus’ statement in verse 36, which has long been cited by those who argue that the time of the resurrection is unknowable, is actually a confirmation that this event will indeed take place on the Feast of Trumpets!

Feast of Trumpets Theme (5): “The Day of Judgment”

Yet another name for the Feast of Trumpets is *Yom HaDin*, or “the Day of Judgment.” According to Jewish tradition, it was seen that on this day God would sit in court while all men would pass before Him to be judged. We see this fantastic scene described in the Book of Daniel:

I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened.

—Daniel 7:9, 10

Since this judgment is taking place immediately following the resurrection, it is obviously a judgment of the *redeemed*. In other words, those being judged are believers only. Therefore, it is not a judgment of one’s salvation, as that has already been determined, but a judgment of one’s works, upon which rewards will be established. According to the Talmud, this is also known as the *Bema* judgment (61).

Now, keeping in mind the amazing revelation that the much anticipated resurrection or rapture of the Church will take place in some

future year during the course of the two-day Feasts of Trumpets, let us move on to the second of the fall feasts, which happens to foreshadow an even more momentous event.

6) THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (YOM KIPPUR)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

Leviticus chapter 16 specifies that ten days after the Feast of Trumpets, on the tenth of Tishrei, the high priest shall conduct a special ceremony to purge the shrine and the people of any defilement. To this end, he is to bring a bull and two goats as a special offering. First, the bull is sacrificed to purge the shrine and to make “atonement” for any misdeeds of the priest or his household (Leviticus 16:6). Secondly, one of the goats is chosen by the casting of lots to be sacrificed as a sin offering (Leviticus 16:7-9). The other goat, known as the “scapegoat,” is not sacrificed but is sent away into the wilderness as a means to symbolically remove the sin from the people (74).

SYMBOLY AND FULFILLMENT:

The Day of Atonement is the most solemn and important of the Jewish holidays; its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a full day of fasting and intensive prayer.

As with the Feast of Trumpets, there are also multiple themes associated with this feast so, once again, we will list and discuss them individually.

Day of Atonement Theme (1): “The Day of Face to Face”

The Day of Atonement is also known as a day of “face to face” with God. Referring again to the above-mentioned special ceremony

involving the bull and two goats, it was during this offering, held only once a year on the Day of Atonement, that the high priest was allowed to go behind the veil of the Temple into the “Holy of Holies” to be in the presence of God (Hebrews 9:6, 7). Thus, the high priest was “face to face” with the mercy seat of the Lord (78-80). At that moment, the nation held its breath as their fate depended on God’s acceptance of the sacrifice.

The term “face to face” also refers to the future physical return of Christ. We see both this theme and the historical, or priestly, reference alluded to in Joel, chapter 2:

Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: *let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?*

—Joel 2:16, 17

The “bridegroom” and the “bride” in this verse represent Christ and His Church returning to earth after the “wedding of the Messiah” that has taken place in heaven. The reference to the “priests” or “ministers of the Lord” that “weep between the porch and the altar” is a picture of the high priest ministering in the “Holy of Holies” on the Day of Atonement.

And so is revealed the future and ultimate fulfillment of the Day of Atonement. It represents the return of Christ to reign as King. This, of course, is not to be confused with the resurrection, or rapture, which has already taken place at the Feast of Trumpets. Here, Jesus has been joined with His bride, having presumably spent “seven days” in the wedding chamber, as they return to earth together.

At this time, according to Scripture, the Holy City is about to come under siege by the Antichrist and his forces.* This siege is interrupted, however, as the Lord returns to “destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (Zechariah 12:9). This, perhaps, explains why the Day of Atonement is also known as the time when “a sentence in meted out.” On this day, it is said that Jesus will stand upon the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, but only after those who had rejected Him as Messiah are brought to mourning, “as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn,” at the realization that He is indeed the Son of God (Zechariah 12:10, 14:4).

Day of Atonement Theme (2): “The Great Day”

As noted in chapter 3, it is believed that Jesus will proclaim a Jubilee when He returns. We also recall that a Jubilee can only be proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. Therefore, the ultimate fulfillment of both the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee will take place at the Second Coming of Christ on none other than the Day of Atonement! At this time the earth will at last be freed from the consequences of sin and come into full and complete rest from the curse brought upon it at Eden. It is no wonder then that this feast is also called “the Great day” (81, 82).

Day of Atonement Theme (3): “The Closing of the Gates”

Just as the Feast of Trumpets is known as the time when the gates of heaven are opened, the Day of Atonement is known as the time when the gates are *closed* (74). Accordingly, the last ceremony to take place on the Day of Atonement is called *neilah*, or the “closing of the gates.” At this point, it is said that it is too late to make a decision to accept the Messiah into your life, as all opportunity has passed (85).

* This siege is described in Ezekiel 38 and is also infamously known as “Armageddon.”

Again, just as we found the Feast of Trumpets to be a foreshadowing of the resurrection, the multiple themes associated with the Day of Atonement make it very clear that this feast represents the literal and bodily return of Christ and His resurrected saints to earth. Furthermore, as noted previously, if God's past faithfulness in fulfilling these "appointed times" is any indicator of what is to come, we can be certain that this glorious event will take place on this very calendar day at some point in the future.

And with that, we move on to the seventh and final feast.

7) FEAST OF TABERNACLES (SUKKOT)

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCE:

The Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs for seven days, from Tishrei 15 to Tishrei 21, is the last of the fall feasts and completes the sacred festivals of the seventh month. In contrast to the somber tone of the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, this feast was to be a time of joy (91). Hence, there is a quick transition from a mood of remorse and judgment to one of rejoicing and celebration. At last, Israel has passed through the season of repentance and redemption and will know the joy of walking with, and knowing, God (87, 92).

During this observance, people were commanded to build a "tabernacle" and make it their home. The Hebrew word for tabernacle is *sukkah*, which means "a booth, a hut, a covering, a pavilion or tent." The Greek word for tabernacle is *sk'en'e*, which also means "a tent, hut, or habitation" (89).

Historically, the Torah identifies this booth, or hut, with the temporary dwellings that the Israelites lived in after leaving Egypt while en route to the Promised Land (86).

SYMBOLY AND FULFILLMENT:

In a spiritual sense, the temporary dwelling represented by the hut,

or tabernacle, is a picture of mankind, a spiritually eternal being who inhabits a temporary “covering,” or body, as he dwells in the wilderness of this present world on his way to the *heavenly* promised land (87, 88).

The *ultimate* symbolic meaning of the tabernacle is grounded in the notion that Christ will eventually dwell, or tabernacle, with man here on earth—which leads us to the themes commonly associated with this feast.

Feast of Tabernacles Theme (1): “The Beginning of the Millennial Kingdom”

The fullness of the Feast of Tabernacles will be experienced at the return of Christ when He will begin to reign over the world during the Millennium. This will be a time of great joy for all believers and, according to Jewish tradition, the age of Israel’s glory (103).

Feast of Tabernacles Theme (2): “The Feast of Nations”

This feast is also known as “the Feast of Ingathering,” or “the Feast of Nations,” as Jesus will literally dwell among *all* of the nations as He has promised (87). Moreover, the Feast of Tabernacles will continue to be celebrated throughout the millennial reign, not only by “Israel” as in days of old, but by *every* nation:

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

—Zechariah 14:16

During this time, the earth will be inhabited both by a remnant of mortal human beings who have survived the time of God’s wrath as well as the resurrected saints, going all the way back to the biblical

patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Daniel; a fantastic scene to imagine, to be sure, but nonetheless one that will soon enough come to pass!

SUMMARY OF THE FALL FEASTS

Now, having completed our look at the fall feasts, let us briefly summarize what each reveals about the future:

The first of the three feasts, the Feast of Trumpets, foreshadows the event that is next in line on the prophetic calendar, which is the resurrection, or rapture, of the Church. Christ will descend with a shout as He dispatches His angels to gather the elect. The dead will rise first and those who are alive will immediately follow, all being caught up into heaven together to take part in the “wedding of the Messiah,” or the joining of Christ to His faithful followers.

The second feast, known as the Day of Atonement, marks the return of Christ and His saints to earth, at which time Jesus will destroy the forces gathered against Israel at what is commonly referred to as “Armageddon.” On this day, the Lord will set foot upon the Mount of Olives and begin to rule over all the kingdoms of this world.

The last of the fall feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles, gives us a picture of the first thousand years of this reign, as Christ dwells or “tabernacles” with mankind, fulfilling the ultimate Sabbath and bringing to completion the “seven thousand year plan” of God.

FINAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As we conclude our look at the seven Feasts of The Lord, it should be noted that in studying these rehearsals we have only begun to plumb what is a seemingly inexhaustible well of insight into God’s prophetic plans—both past and future. Nevertheless, we have touched on the most critical aspects and thus come away with a general understanding that each feast has a rich historical significance, as

well as an important prophetic meaning.

Again, knowing that the spring feasts have already been fulfilled to the very day by Jesus, we can be certain that He will likewise honor the fall observances. Therefore, it could be said that we might indeed know the “day” (or “days” in the case of the Feast of Trumpets) on which certain prophetic events will transpire. The year, on the other hand, remains a matter of less certainty.

Be that as it may, considering our earlier revelations concerning the jubilee cycle and Daniel’s “seven sevens,” it seems we have identified in the year 2015, if nothing else, a target worth tracking.

Now, keeping in mind *all* of the compelling data that we have reviewed thus far, including God’s seven thousand year plan, the Jubilee, Newton’s interpretation of Daniel, and the feast days, it is time to move on to the next chapter, wherein we will examine yet another piece of the puzzle—a piece that seems to tie all of this together.