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Celebrating Biblical Holidays



Part 50 (000910PM)

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The feasts of God may well be the most comprehensive roadmap ever made to point at Jesus Christ. Today we return to [Mark 2:23-28](#) as we look at the Biblical teaching on the Sabbath. Jesus clearly sets the tone for the controversies of the day and speaks to us to this day on the Sabbath.

1. First, SABBATH PURPOSES: What did **Jesus say about the Sabbath**? As Lord of Sabbath He said one thing: The Sabbath was made for man to worship God. It was not a prison, a straight jacket, a death squad to hunt Sabbath breakers; no, it was a delightful offer of spiritual communion with God.
2. Second, SABBATH PROMISES: **Do we need to rest and to cease from our wearying schedules**? Yes, and that is what this Old Testament picture teaches us New Testament saints! God offers rest!
3. Third, SABBATH LAWS: **Should we really meet on Sunday** or on the Sabbath Day, which is Saturday?
4. Fourth, SABBATH BLESSINGS: **How do we apply all this to our lives**? How do we cultivate a rest, a cessation from weariness in our lives? How do we make worship of the Lord special on our Day of Gathering, the Lord's Day?
5. Fifth, SABBATH THIEVES: What **takes away the blessings** and promises of the rest God offers?
6. SABBATH PLANS what are **some simply wonderful plans** we can make to heighten our worship, our communion with God? Some real blessings can come with some small changes and some preparations.
7. SABBATH PICTURES what are **the illustrations** that Jesus, His apostles, and all the Old Testament saints used to show the plan of God? God's holidays, the feasts, and each is a wonderful picture and pathway to deepening our devotion to Jesus.
8. Finally, SABBATH REST what does God want more than anything? Our minds. What is the key to our spiritual success? A mind that rests upon, and is fixed upon the Lord God Almighty!

The Jewish calendar is built on a series of sevens. The seventh day of the week is the Sabbath, and the seventh week after Passover brings Pentecost. The seventh month brings the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. The seventh year is a Sabbatical year, and after seven Sabbatical years comes the Year of Jubilee. Thus the seven feasts are an elegant demonstration of God's prophetic time table. Briefly, our Lord was crucified on Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread, raised on First fruits, and sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Those are the feasts we have seen fulfilled. Evidently in up-coming days He will hold the Rapture on the Feast of Trumpets and return in His Second Coming on the Day of Atonement. Finally, the Kingdom itself will be characterized by the triumphant Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feasts

PASSOVER. The religious year opened with Passover, which pictures the death of Christ. Israel sacrificed the Passover lamb on the 14th and then, under the light of a full moon, left Egypt on the 15th of Nisan. Ever since, observant Jewish people have remembered this deliverance by removing all traces of leaven from their homes. Their actions are more than tradition.

FIRSTFRUITS. On the day following the Passover Sabbath (a Sunday), the Israelites celebrated Firstfruits, picturing our Lord's resurrection from the dead. According to Leviticus 23, God linked an anticipation of a future day of harvest. Moses called for a Festival of Firstfruits to be kept "on the day after the Sabbath." Once Israel was in their land, they were to celebrate in the same Passover week three festivals: the first one for their freedom, the last one for their separation from sin, in the middle this One to remember God's ability to provide for His people. With the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest, the Lord reminded His people of His ability to provide, as well as of their dependence upon Him for the harvest to come.

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UNLEAVENED BREAD. The week following Passover was devoted to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when all the leaven was put out of the houses. This illustrates the sanctification of believers as they put sin out of their lives. All of this took place in the first month of the year. As Moses called for the Passover lamb to be sacrificed on the 14th, he required all Israel to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread starting on the 15th. For the seven days of unleavened bread following Passover, the children of Israel were to remember that God had not only given them freedom but called them to a new way of life.

WEEKS. Fifty days after Firstfruits is the NT Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Church. Then God tied a fourth holiday to the first three. The Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot* in Hebrew and *Pentecost* in Greek) was to be kept seven weeks (on the 50th day) after the Passover-week offering of the firstfruits. At this festival, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were to be offered to the Lord. It marked the end of a critical period of the annual agricultural cycle during which many unpredictable natural factors could have ruined the crops. Over the centuries observant Jewish people have seen in these four holidays a rich picture of God's provision. And ever since the first century Jewish Christians have seen not only evidence of God's provision but of the coming of His long awaited Messiah.

TRUMPETS. In the seventh month three feasts were celebrated. The Feast of Trumpets opened the month, reminding us of the gathering of God's people when the Lord returns. Not until the beginning of the seventh month does God call for another festival. Throughout the Jewish world this first day of the seventh month is known as the Feast of Trumpets, or *Rosh Hashanah*. It is a day of spiritual awakening. The ram's horn (*shofar*) is blown, followed by ten days of repentance and reflection.

The Scottish [1] [1] preacher Alexander Whyte once said, "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings." God gives His people opportunities for new beginnings, and we're foolish if we waste them. Unlike our modern New Year's Day celebrations, the Jews used *Rosh Hashanah*, the first day of their new year, for prayer, meditation, and confession. They sought to make a new beginning with the Lord. The Hebrew word for *seven* comes from a root word that means *to be full, to be satisfied*. Whenever the Lord "sevens" something, He's reminding His people that what He says and does is complete and dependable. Nothing can be added to it. The basic interpretation of this feast relates to Israel, but we can make an application to the church.

DAY OF ATONEMENT. On the tenth day was the Day of Atonement, illustrating the cleansing of God's people. On the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) is observed. In Israel it is the highest holy day of the year, and the whole nation comes to a standstill. It is the only festival which is not a feast. It is a fast. On this day Moses instructed the people of God to afflict themselves (in awareness of sin) while waiting on God for personal and national forgiveness.

Tabernacles. Five days later the last of the seven feasts began, and from the fifteenth to the twenty-first days, the Jews joyfully celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, picturing the blessings of the future kingdom. God's people are a scattered people who must be gathered, a sinful people who must be cleansed, and a suffering people who must be given joy. The long period (about three months) between Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets speaks of this present age of the Church, when Israel is set aside because she rejected her Messiah. Known as the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot* in Hebrew), this is Thanksgiving Day in Israel. The Feast of Tabernacles signals the most happy holiday season of the year. The harvest is in, the barns are full, and spiritually sensitive people know that the hard work would not have paid off if God had not given conditions necessary for the harvest. During the Feast of Tabernacles Moses instructed the children of Israel to live in "booths" for seven days to remember their days in the wilderness. For generations to come this annual, national "camp-out" would be a rich opportunity not only to remember what God had done for them in the past but also to anticipate what He would yet do in the future.

The feasts of Trumpets, Yom Kippur, and Tabernacles form a group picture of what is still ahead.

- ✓ According to the prophets, God will call for the blowing of the *shofar*. He Himself will awaken Israel and regather her. FEAST OF TRUMPETS.
- ✓ He will judge His people, give the nation a spirit of repentance, and then cover them with the blood of Messiah's atonement (which the temple sacrifices anticipated). YOM KIPPUR
- ✓ Then, and only then, the feasting will begin. Messiah will enter His Temple and, according to [Zechariah 14:16-19](#), all nations will come annually to Jerusalem to celebrate the FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

What a picture of provision, of history, of the work of the Messiah. Seven holidays. Seven reasons to stop, to think, and to remember that everything we have comes from God. Everything good comes from the One who is our Passover, our Unleavened Bread, our Firstfruit evidence of a resurrection to come. He is the one who has given His Spirit, and who now works in us in anticipation of a future sounding of the *shofar* that will begin the last-phase work of Messiah and fulfill all that the prophets have foreseen.

So this morning I invite you to make some kind of plans to reflect upon the truth that, according [2] [2] to the New Testament, Jesus a rabbi of unparalleled character used the festivals of Israel to declare Himself the spiritual Deliverer and Messiah of His people.

- ✓ On PASSOVER, He became our Passover Lamb (paying for our life with His own).
- ✓ During UNLEAVENED BREAD He remained in the grave (putting away sin for us).
- ✓ On FIRSTFRUITS, He rose bodily from the dead to become the evidence of God's ultimate provision, and the promise of a last-days resurrection harvest.
- ✓ And at PENTECOST, on the 50th day, the Holy Spirit united 3,000 Jewish believers into the body of Messiah. While these Jewish believers became the first members of an international body called the Church, they were themselves firstfruits of a future regathering pictured in the remaining three holidays.

Seven holidays. Seven reasons to deepen our confidence in a Provider. God offers a way to take us back to our spiritual roots and to prepare us for days which will soon come to pass.

"Three times a year shall all thy sons come to present themselves before Me," God had said. And so in Christ's time along the roads of Israel thousands of pilgrims retraced the way to Jerusalem. They again came for refreshment and renewal within the sacred walls of holy Jerusalem. As Acts 2 reminds us, they came from every corner of the empire. From across the river to the east, Jews

from Mesopotamia, Elam, Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Parthia journeyed along the great trade route that arced along the Fertile Crescent and then swung south to bring them to their destination. They followed exactly the roads Abraham had taken as he made his way down to the land that the Lord was to show him. Others would cross the ancient road through the barrenness of the Sinai. As the pyramids fell into the background sunset, they recalled God's triumph over pharaoh.

Others from the north passed frowning legionnaires who watched pilgrims streaming out of the royal city, Rome, to answer the divine summons. From every land and nation to which they had been dispersed, they trudged with excitement and anticipation gripping their souls. They were in the land of the Book of their fathers to celebrate as all faithful sons of Abraham had done for centuries!

THREE TIMES IN A YEAR

What drove them on? Not culture or mere tradition. They were drawn to the feasts by the very Word of the God of Heaven. Listen to His call to them through Moses:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee. ([Deuteronomy 16:16–17](#))

God's Word specifically commanded all faithful Jews to "appear before the Lord" three times in a year, at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost., and Tabernacles. Contained in that call of God were three specific elements:

1. All males were to appear before the Lord.
2. They were not to come empty.
3. Every man was to bring what he was able to give, according to the blessing of God on his life.

The heart of these seekers was filled with anticipation, as God had said:

"And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates" ([Deuteronomy 16:14](#)).

God had built the feasts around the four pillars of His revelation to them as His chosen ones. And each feast displays four primary features:

1. **THEIR GOD OF HISTORY:** The feasts were each a reminder of one facet of God's Word recording His faithfulness to deliver, lead, and provide them with a place and nation.
2. **THEIR GOD OF THE LAND:** Each of the feasts reminded them of the Land God had given them, and their need to trust Him for fruitfulness through safety, rains, dews, and harvests.
3. **THEIR GOD OF SACRIFICE:** God was only to be approached by way of a substitutionary sacrifice, so the Temple worship drew spiritually hungry Jews to the altar on Mount Moriah like a magnet.
4. **THEIR GOD OF PROPHECY:** Each of the feasts was a package with past, present, and most of all, future Messianic promises. So the mechanics of each feast were to paint a picture of Christ, the coming Son of God, Lamb of God, and Savior.

"One [3] [3] day a young man stepped from a carpenter's shop to present Himself in the City of David. Placing His credentials, already certified in heaven, before the priests and people, Jesus of Nazareth came to Jerusalem in a different way than all His fellow Jews. They came bringing a gift to God; Jesus came presenting Himself as God's gift to them. He was coming to give Himself for each one who would look to him as the Lamb of God."

ROSH HASHANAH (TRUMPETS)

Jesus brought forth His witness at the Feast of Trumpets in Jerusalem. The confirming voice of testimony from the Father in heaven had been placed before the leadership. Now He spoke again: "Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (12:28). The Father's word came in response to Jesus' plea, "Father, glorify thy name." The witness-voice referred to the lifting up of the Son (12:32), which was related to two encompassing events. In complete harmony with the theme dominating the feast, He spoke of judgment. But here He dealt with wider elements. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (12:31). The future of a world system that is hostile to its Maker and the future of the world's "prince," Satan, is sealed. In anticipation of Christ's final triumph, He declares, "He shall be cast out."

Resurrection and life were also important themes for *Rosh Hashanah*. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (12:32). The word *from* used here actually means *out of*. Thus Jesus is speaking at one and the same time of His cross, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father. Through His "lifting up" all men will be drawn toward life in Christ. To be sure, all will not come, but the way will be opened. [4] [4]

Sound the Trumpets [John 5:1–47](#)

The northwest suburb of Jerusalem was called Bezetha in Christ's time. Today it was alive with the vigor of a young community. Pushing northward outside the walls were markets, bazaars, and the shops of busy craftsmen.

"Jesus entered Bezetha unnoticed and unattended. He had come to Jerusalem alone. As He moved quietly along, His attention was not drawn to the Antonia, the sheep market, or the great entry gates into the Temple. Deliberately He directed His steps to a place of refuse, not a receptacle for the castoffs of people but a place of people who were cast off—human debris. As he reached His destination He saw spread before Him a shabby array of physical hulks who had fallen prey to malicious diseases—diseases that had dragged them to the point of no return. It

was Jerusalem's repository for hopeless cases. Sightless eyes turned upward imploringly, as crippled limbs and twisted bodies covered before their conquering infirmities. Babbling sounds came off inarticulate tongues attempting to frame expressions that would not take coherent dimensions in stunted minds. It was a place where maladies varied, but every heart and mind was fixed upon one thing—they were all waiting for a miracle.

Bethesda was a pool around which five porches had been arranged. On these porches, beside the pool, the infirm situated themselves and tarried, "waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (5:3–4).

But for one who awaited troubled waters, a solution would be found in the presence of the Man who was accustomed to stilling them. "Wilt thou be made whole?" (5:6). This stranger, who from His appearance was obviously a Galilean, was asking something that scarcely required a reply. Was He mocking the old man who had already known more than full measure of ridicule? The head on the tattered mat turned for a look at the One who posed the apparently ludicrous question. Jesus' face answered his internal query, and the paralytic found himself saying, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me" (5:7). It was a lament the man had raised many times in the wearying search for someone who cared enough to help him obtain his long-sought miracle.

Jesus' words were few but infused with revitalizing power. "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (5:8). The result was immediate and electrifying. His subject sprang to this feet, trembling with joy. As he did, a crowd quickly milled around this one they had known for such a long time. Their old companion in suffering was erect before them. His laments had turned to laughter; his pleas were transformed to praises; his lameness had given way to leaping. Had such a thing ever happened in all of Israel before? It had, indeed, and it would again. Jerusalem would see "greater works than this." By the time the man had gained his wits and sought out his mysterious benefactor, He was nowhere to be found. Jesus had quietly left the pool to continue His walk to the Temple, there to await the unfolding of the second phase of this astonishing transaction.

For his part, the man obeyed Jesus' instructions implicitly—he took up his bed and walked. One can imagine this thankful recipient of Jehovah's mercy hurrying away from the pool toward the massive gates leading to the sanctuary where he would convey the news of his great good fortune to the priests and throngs of Sabbath worshipers. His euphoric enthusiasm was short-circuited, however, when instead of hosannas, he was accosted by cries of outrage. "It is the Sabbath day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed" (5:10). He for whom God had miraculously set aside physical laws in order to bring deliverance from suffering, now found himself being flogged by the inflexible strictures of human traditions. Religious enforcers gathered about with shaking fingers and crude catcalls of condemnatory derision. Befuddled, the man, so quickly robbed of his joy by men who judged themselves more pious than he, attempted to raise a defense. "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk" (5:11).

We can be assured that there were lurking suspicions in the minds of his questioners when they asked, "What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?" (5:12). *Jesus of Nazareth*, they thought, *must be somewhere about*. It was like Him to despise God's Sabbath!

To their disappointment, the man could not name his benefactor—a fact that was singularly important to the purpose of the Messiah, who at that moment may have observed the proceedings. The focus of attention was to be, for the moment, on the man and the miracle. Thus with careful intent Jesus had chosen a man who had lain prostrate before Israel's leadership for nearly four decades. His was a face that was all too familiar among frequenters of the Temple mount. He now stood before them completely whole, as if being forced to the center of the Temple stage for all to see.

It may have been a somewhat dejected figure, now left alone by his interrogators, who wandered across the gleaming stones of the Temple courts. Perhaps it was a hand on his shoulder that turned him about expecting once more to be questioned or condemned. But no, he was again looking into the face of the author of the uproar, his beneficent Galilean. Before the man could blurt out his thanks, Jesus was speaking. "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (5:14).

We are not told whether Jesus instructed the man to go to the leadership of the Temple and identify Him as the one who had performed the miracle or not. The fact is, the man did so immediately, and the authorities reacted, inflamed with the intent to kill.

There is no question that Jesus' act was purposely designed to provoke a confrontation with Jewry's Temple leadership—He had something to say to the nation. We have witnessed the point of *provocation*; now we shall examine the *occasion* and the Messiah's *explanation*.

The air [5] [5] of the Temple courts carried the resounding proclamations of the One who looked into the livid countenances of those who were prepared to stone Him. Their sensitivities, already wounded by His apparent disregard for the Sabbath, were cut deeper still by His words. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Menacing gestures and ominous murmurings made it only too clear that His opponents understood precisely what Jesus was proposing. He said "that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (5:18). They were correct. He had claimed to be at one with the Father and in so doing set three great towers of truth in place.

1. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE CHRIST THE MESSIAH: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (5:17). In this statement He claimed *oneness with Jehovah*. "For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth; and He will show Him greater works than these" (5:20). The implication here is clearly one of *co-regency* between Jesus and the Father. In other words, the Temple hierarchy stood in the presence of their King. "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (5:23). The God-King is *worthy to receive worship*.
2. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE GOD'S SON THE JUDGE: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (5:22). The recording Spirit is very careful to press the *scope* and *significance* of Jesus as universal Judge. Its *scope* was all inclusive: "But hath committed *all* judgment unto the Son" (5:22). "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (5:28–29). Jesus was explaining that it was an ultimate choice they had to make: "The resurrection of life [or] the resurrection of damnation" (5:29). They were to make a personal and eternal choice. Why? Because "every son of Adam will one day hear Christ's voice, shake off the dust of the sepulcher, and quit his tomb. Bodily resurrection is a

- certainty. Every man will receive his eternal due according to his present choice.”
3. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE GIVER OF LIFE: “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and [giveth them life], even so the Son [giveth life] to whom he will” (5:21) “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life” (5:24). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live” (5:25). Pilgrims came up to Jerusalem for this feast wondering about their future. And what did they hear? Jesus told them that “the hour now is” that anyone separated from God can lay hold on eternal life. They could partake of salvation right then and never fear “coming into judgment,” because they had “passed from death to life.” The One who was the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE was among them at that very moment.

[1] [1] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1994.

[2] [2] All of this section quoted and adapted from Mart DeHan, RBC newsletter, 2/97.

[3] [3] Adapted from McQuaid E. , *The Outpouring: Jesus in the Feasts of Israel*, (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.) 1997.

[4] [4] McQuaid E. , *The Outpouring: Jesus in the Feasts of Israel*, (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.) 1997.

[5] [5] Adapted, paraphrased, and some quotes from McQuaid E. , *The Outpouring: Jesus in the Feasts of Israel*, (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.) 1997.

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