

10 things Christians can learn from the Jewish High Holidays.

In each of the three Jewish High Holidays of *Rosh Hashanah (New Year)*, *Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)* and *Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)* are gems hidden by the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Beyond a yearly calendar of Holy convocations, the Levitical Feasts (Lev. 23), as a whole, point the reader to a deeper understanding of the God of Israel.

Year after year, as we celebrate God's provision for and preservation of the Jewish people, we are reminded that the same G-d who promised to never forsake Israel (Jeremiah 31:35-37) has also promised us forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Here is a list of a few things Christians can learn for the Jewish High Holidays:

1. God has a special plan for the Jewish People

No! God is not finished with Israel and the Jewish people, but on the contrary, He is has a special plan for them. The Jewish calendar found in Leviticus 23 and partially repeated throughout the rest of the Tenach (Old Testament) shows us that God gave the Jewish people "Holy convocations" to set them aside and make them "a light to the Nations". (Lev 23:1-3, Deut 7:6-11, 1 King 8:53, 59-61, Isaiah 42:6).

2. God is a God of covenant relationships

From the early chapters of Genesis through the rest of Scriptures, God has always been a God of relationships, with mankind in general and with the Jewish people in particular. It started with the Edenic (Gen 2:15-17) and Adamic (Gen 3:14-19) Covenants made with mankind, continued with several other covenants to culminate with the New Covenant made with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Mosaic Covenant made with the children of Israel, contains the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) which includes the celebration of the Feasts of Israel for all generations. God expressed His deep desire for relationship by teaching Israel how to relate to Him through many ways including the Fall Feasts as a yearly reminder to bring Jewish people back to focusing on Him.

3. A Better understanding of the Jewish people

Genesis 12:1-3 tells us of the Covenant God made with Abraham. In verse 3, God said: "*And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" As Bible believing Christians who love Israel, Blessing the Jewish people is part of what we do. There is no other blessing than giving them the gift that never stops giving, that is the message of the Good News (Romans 10:1-5, 11:11). The Jewish Fall Feasts and their contemporary practices give us a wonderful bridge between followers of Messiah Yeshua and the Jewish Community. As we study the feasts of Leviticus 23, we learn more about the Jewish people and as a result, we are able to relate and contextualize our message in a bold but not obnoxious way.

4. The redemptive career of the Messiah

Not only will we understand the Jewish people better by knowing the Feasts of Israel, but a deeper study of them will also deepen our understanding of the Jewish Messiah as each of the Feast point to a specific event in the redemptive career of Yeshua our redeemer. In a sense, God’s grand plan is revealed. Many believers agree that each of the Levitical holy convocations has been or will be fulfilled by a specific event, in a specific order, in the prophetic career of the Messiah. As the Spring Festivals were all fulfilled by the First Coming of the Messiah, the Fall feasts will be fulfilled by His Second Coming. Incidentally, the order of the feasts on the Jewish calendar might give us a great eschatological insight (the sequence of events of the Last Days.)

Messiah’s Second Coming	
<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	Trumpet Blast heralding End Times (Rapture)
<i>Yom Kippur</i> (The Day of Atonement)	The Great Tribulation
<i>Sukkot</i> (Feast of Booths or Tabernacles)	The Thousand Year Messianic Kingdom

5. Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah is the “head of the year”. It is also known as the Feast of Trumpets and is the first of three Fall Feasts. The theme of *Rosh Hashanah* is regathering and repentance in preparation for the other two feasts: *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement, the most holy day of the Jewish calendar) and *Sukkot* (the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles).

With *Rosh Hashanah* we prepare our hearts for the beautiful season of the High Holidays (Lev. 23: 23-25, Num. 29:1-6, Ps. 81:3-4, Ezra 3:1-6, Neh. 8:1-12). Jewish people all over the world blow the *shofar* (ram’s horn). Prophetically, Rosh Hashanah will be fulfilled by the ultimate regathering of the Rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor. 15:50-58). The rapture doesn’t have to take place on the day of *Rosh Hashanah* to fulfill it. The Bible is clear that we don’t know the day or the hour (Matt. 24:42-44, 25:13)

6. Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement

Yom Kippur is the most solemn of the Jewish Holy Days. It is a fast and a day of affliction.(Lev 16, 23:26-32). As greatly detailed in Lev. 16, *Yom Kippur* was a day for all Israel to be atoned for by the yearly sacrifices of the High Priest. First, he would atone for himself by providing both a sin and a burnt offering (Lev. 16:3). After offering sacrifices to the Lord for himself and the other priests, He would be ready to make an offering for the atonement of all of Israel (Lev 16:5-7). Two male goats were used. One goat was slaughtered and its blood applied on the other goat, known as *Azazel* or the “scapegoat” was then escorted into the wilderness. Tradition tells us, the scapegoat was kicked off a cliff to its certain death, taking with it all the sins of Israel to be remembered no more.

Yeshua became our *Azazel* 2000 years ago (Rom. 5:8, 8:3).

Three times in Lev 23(vv. 27, 29, 32) Israel is told to “humble our souls”. The prophetic fulfillment of *Yom Kippur* will come with the great Tribulation also known

as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” which is a specific description of the affliction of Israel during the Great Tribulation (Zech 13:9, 12:10, Luke 13:35).

7. Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles

Sukkot means “booths” in Hebrew (Lev 23:33-44, Ex. 23:14-17, Num. 29:12-38, 1Kg 8:2, I Kings 12:25-33, Neh. 8:13-18). In biblical days as well as in modern days, Jewish people build temporary dwellings or “booths” and eat (sometimes sleep) in them for a week. They do it to remember and celebrate God’s provision and dwelling with the children of Israel in the wilderness wanderings. Based on Leviticus 23:40, Rabbinic laws were developed regarding what is known today as the “four species.” Each year, families must obtain their own *lulav* or “sprout” and *etrog* or “one that shines” (terms not found in the Bible) for the celebration. All four species are held and are waived and shaken all around ones body, atop, under and to all sides symbolizing that God is everywhere.

The prophetic significance of *Sukkot* shouldn’t be missed. The Rabbis of old taught that one day God would pour His Holy Spirit on Israel (Joel 2:28). In John 7:37-39, during the seventh day of *Sukkot*, Yeshua the Messiah relates the outpouring of the water to Himself and the water of eternal life that He gives. His Jewish audience would have made the connection immediately. Furthermore Yeshua, who is God in the flesh dwelling with us, will be the ultimate fulfillment of Tabernacles, when we all dwell with Him in His future Millennial Kingdom (Zech 14:16-19). Additionally, Peter, at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), mistakenly thought Yeshua had brought in the Kingdom, and he wanted to build three booths; one each for Messiah, Moses, and Elijah.

8. God’s promises are irrevocable

With each of these festivals comes a future fulfillment of a promise from G-d to those who have put their trust in the death and resurrection of the Messiah for the forgiveness of their sins. Our G-d who never changes (Hebrews 13:8) The picture of this redeemer is progressively developed in the Bible throughout history, reminding us that God’s promises to Israel are irrevocable (Jeremiah 31:35-37, Romans 9:1-5, 11:26-29). Only if God’s promises to Israel are irrevocable can the promises to those who follow Messiah also be unchanged. If God has changed His mind on Israel, our personal relationship with Him also based on a covenantal promise, stands on nothing!

9. God’s Plan of redemption is not an afterthought.

From the very first messianic prophecy found in Genesis 3:15, the creator of the universe introduced the idea of a “Redeemer” for mankind. The picture progressively painted through the Jewish Scriptures is one of a Jewish man from the tribe of Judah, the line of David, both God and man, born in Bethlehem of a virgin (Genesis 3:15, 49:10, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, Micah 5:2), to name just a few. Obviously, only Yeshua of Nazareth fulfills the description perfectly. Our redeemer is also found in all the Levitical Feasts from Passover to Tabernacles, from death to Millennial Kingdom. God’s love for us is so great that He planned all along to provide a way for us to be reconciled to Him (John 3:16).

10. A Better understanding of God's Word

As most people read the Bible, and they are reading the story of mankind in general and Israel in particular, it is as if we were watching an old movie in black and white with some details but not all. Yet, if we read the Bible from a Jewish perspective, understanding the authors point of view, the audiences and the geographical/historical context, we get so much more. The movie instantly turns to color and details we never knew existed, pop up on the screen, so to speak. The Jewish Levitical calendar is not only a reminder of God's "Holy Convocations" for the children of Israel, but it also renders a vivid picture of God's love, grace, and provision for the Jewish people and the rest of mankind. It helps us to better understand not only the Jewish people, but the very God of the Jewish people, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...Our God, and His Word.