

What Are the Lord's Appointed Times?

One of the first areas of Torah observance which comes into play, when outside people enter into the Messianic movement and commit themselves to a Messianic lifestyle, is that of **the holidays**. The appointed times guide the yearly cycle of events which help to form Messianic identity.¹ The appointed times guide the yearly cycle of events that help to form Messianic identity. Messianic Believers do not observe mainstream Christian holidays such as Christmas or Easter, but rather remember the Biblically-prescribed holidays of God's Torah, which are first fully detailed in Leviticus 23. This can, unfortunately, be an area of high contention between Christians and Messianics (because of misunderstandings on both sides), but when emphasized properly, celebrating the God-ordained appointed times of Scripture can be a great blessing—a blessing that many have unfortunately missed out on. It can be a unique way of testifying to others of God's ongoing plan of salvation history—the past and future redemptive acts involving Yeshua the Messiah.

Many Christians today are aware of the Messianic movement, but they are not really aware of what it stands for, or various Messianic views relating to the Scriptures. Some Christians today, however, are fascinated by it, and such fascination often abounds in the area of the Biblical holidays.

A holiday, as we call it in English, is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary* as, "A day on which custom or the law dictates a halt to ordinary business to commemorate or celebrate a particular event."² Another definition provided is very simply, "A holy day." American holidays may include the Fourth of July or Independence Day, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Flag Day, or Pearl Harbor Day. Each

¹ This article is reproduced from the author's book *Torah In the Balance, Volume 1* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2003/2009).

² William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1969), 628.

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one of these days memorializes a particular event or group of people in American society. If you are not an American, you still no doubt have various national holidays which define the important history and events of your culture. **The same is true if we are citizens of God's Kingdom.**

As Believers in Messiah Yeshua, we are all a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). This does not just mean we are a part of Israel in some generic, detached way. Be we Jewish or non-Jewish, we are citizens of God's Kingdom of Israel. Our King has prescribed specific times when we are to come to Him, when we remember events in the history of Ancient Israel, which in turn picture His plan of salvation and redemption through Messiah Yeshua. It is the heritage that we are called to take hold of in a very real and significant way throughout the seasons of the year.

In this article, we will briefly review what the Lord's appointed times are, and their importance for us today.³

What does “appointed times” actually mean?

In the opening verses of Leviticus 23, it is directed, “The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “The LORD’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these”’” (vs. 1-2).

The Hebrew term for appointed time or “appointed festival” (ATS) is *moed* (מוֹעֵד), and its plural form is *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים). It has a variety of meanings, including “appointed time, appointed place,” and “set feast or appointed season” (BDB).⁴ It “is also the worshipping assembly of God’s people” and “may possibly be an early designation for the synagogue” (TWOT).⁵ A *moed* is to be a special time between God’s people and Him. The *ArtScroll Chumash* remarks that “*Moadim* are the days which stand out from the other days of the year. They summon us from our everyday life to halt and to dedicate all our spiritual activities to them....The *Moadim* interrupt the ordinary activities of our life and give us the spirit, power, and consecration for the future by revivifying those ideals upon which our whole life is based, or they eradicate such

³ It should be emphasized that although this chapter uses Leviticus 23 as an outline, it would be inappropriate for any teacher or reader not to recognize that throughout the Torah, and indeed the Bible, additional instructions regarding these festivals are given. Leviticus 23 happens to be the most comprehensive Biblical chapter where all of the *moedim* are listed.

⁴ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 417.

⁵ Jack P. Lewis, “mô’ēd,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:389.

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evil consequences of past activity as are deadly to body and spirit and thus restore us to lost purity and the hope of blessing.”⁶

The “Tent of Meeting,” where Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel met the Lord in the wilderness, is called the *ohel moed* (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד), which could be understood as the “tent of appointment.” Numbers 20:6 details, “Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them.” Using this as a frame of reference, if we truly want the glory of God to appear before any us, then the importance of meeting Him when *He wants*—not just whenever we want to meet Him—should be realized. Relegating the appointed times to past history, or ignoring them completely, is not something that is wise for students of the Scriptures.

The Hebrew term used for “convocation” in Leviticus 23:1-2 is *miqra* (מִקְרָא), and it specifically means, “convocation,” “assembly,” and a “reading (aloud)” (*CHALOT*).⁷ It is derived from the verb *qara* (קָרָא), one possible meaning of which is “recite from, read aloud from (book, scroll)” (*CHALOT*).⁸ The appointed times do call God’s people together for them to remember what He has done for us in His Word, and recalls us to the heritage that we have going all the way back to the beginning. Consulting relevant passages of the Bible, and the important lessons that they teach us, is something surely witnessed when the appointed times are honored.⁹

Many Messianic Believers, especially those who place a high prophetic emphasis on the pattern of the Biblical appointments, define them as *rehearsals*. Certainly, when we celebrate the Biblical holidays we not only remember the historical events in the life of Ancient Israel such as the Passover and Exodus or the giving of the Ten Commandments, but we also recognize the prophetic fulfillment—both past *and* future—of Messiah Yeshua in them. We essentially “rehearse” what is to come, in preparation for the Messiah’s return.

The Apostle Paul noted how the Biblical appointments “are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:17, ESV). The outline which the appointed times give us, is to naturally point to the Messiah. The Greek word for “substance” here is *sōma* (σῶμα), and while it is translated as “body” in some Bibles (KJV, NKJV, LITV), “substance” is by far better. It is better because

⁶ Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 682.

⁷ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁹ “This word can also mean reading in the sense of a public reading or that which is read in such a meeting” (Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003], 662).

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the true meaning of the *moedim* is found in Messiah Yeshua. The Biblical festivals paint a pattern of His First Coming and sacrifice for our sins at Golgotha (Calvary), *and* they portray how He will return at His Second Coming, gather the saints, defeat His enemies, and establish His Kingdom. And, we would point out that this prophetic pattern of the holidays is not just something believed by Messianics, either. It is notable that many evangelical Christians express an interest in the Biblical festivals for this very reason, and recognize the important gospel lessons that they contain.

For those of us who celebrate these holidays, why do we do it? Certainly, the reasons are varied. **Obedying and wanting to please the Lord at the times that He wants us to should top the list.** We should “meet” Him when He wants to be met. He has specified throughout the Torah when He wants to be met and specific days that He wants to see consecrated unto Himself. If we meet Him on these days and follow the instructions, He should reveal His presence to us in a very profound and special way. But if we do not, and we believe in arrogance that we can meet at replacement times that are solely of our own choosing, what will happen? Will He still show up? Or, will those choosing not to celebrate His appointed times be left alone? While we can surely meet with God even now in prayer, the appointed times are important moments when we are to focus on Him in very specific ways.

The author of Hebrews admonishes, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). What is this “assembling together” spoken of? The Greek *episunagōgē* (ἐπισυναγωγή) just means “*a gathering or being gathered together*” (LS).¹⁰ AMG adds, “Thus it would have the meaning of not betraying one’s attachment to Jesus Christ and other believers, not avoiding one’s own personal responsibility as part of the body of Christ.”¹¹

When we understand this in light of the Biblical holidays representing the pattern of Yeshua’s First and Second Comings, as many think that the season of His return is probably approaching—we should not forsake the festivals of the Lord given to us in the Torah. We should realize that we are responsible to observe them, because they depict His redemptive plan for humanity, and most importantly the salvation message of Yeshua. Corporately, we should come together at each of the appointed times, and press into God in a very distinct way, desiring

¹⁰ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 303.

¹¹ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 640.

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Him to reveal Himself to us! These are to be times when we find ourselves bonded together in significant unity as the Body of Messiah.

Shabbat: The First Appointed Time

The first appointed time that the Lord prescribes is the Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), opening the list seen in Leviticus 23: "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:3). It is the day of the week that God has made a holy convocation—a time for us to be in special fellowship with Him.

The precedent for *Shabbat* is established all the way back in Genesis 2:3: "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of who God is and a proclamation that He is indeed Creator and in control of the Earth. Because *Shabbat* is designated as being on the *seventh day*, it is a reminder to us as Believers, many of whom have been taught in the past that the Sabbath was either done away with or changed (discussed further), that the Lord indeed is the only One in control of Creation.

Every week in Jewish homes prayers are offered to the Lord on *Shabbat* that recognize He created the world, and rested after His six creative acts were complete. They proclaim that He is the Creator God and that He controls the universe. Consider the implications if all of us repeated that God gave people the Sabbath, as a special gift to rest, every week. We would recognize that the Sabbath is to be kept because *there is indeed a God* and we are His people. We would recognize our Creator's Lordship, and His control of the universe.

The Sabbath is the time when God rested from His work, and so it is to be for us as well. It is to be a time of physical abstention from labor and a separated convocation for us to spend time with Him. While the Jewish tradition contains much we can benefit from in observing *Shabbat*, the need to rest in Him should have even more significance for us as Believers in Yeshua. We are told in Hebrews 4:9, "There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God." But this Sabbath rest cannot be some generic rest where in our minds we claim to rest, but our bodies are still working. We must take a complete rest and spend the day focused on our Heavenly Father, our Messiah Yeshua, and the Scriptures. The rest that we experience on *Shabbat* gives us a foretaste of what eternity is to be like.

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah." While these are multiple parts of our being, they still have

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to function together. God has commanded that we have a complete rest of our entire beings each week, not one of just our minds or spirits—but also of our bodies. In our hectic world today, taking a physical *Shabbat* rest is something that every Believer can benefit from! There are many testimonies from today's Messianic Believers (non-Jewish or Jewish) who missed out on the blessings of *Shabbat* rest in the past, but are now keeping the Sabbath. Many of you know the joy that *Shabbat* is, taking a complete day off and dedicating it entirely to the Lord and to fellow Believers.

This is something that many have sadly not had. Yet as many are diligently seeking God and asking Him to convict them of areas of their lives which need to be changed, many are being convicted about the importance of *Shabbat*. Furthermore, it is also important that many are realizing how *Shabbat* is one of the *moedim* or appointed times. It is notable that while many Christian Bible teachers have written on the Biblical holidays, and have helped to stir a great deal of interest in this subject matter, they commonly gloss over the Sabbath. Is this perhaps because they do not want Christians to consider *Shabbat*? If they were to write on the Sabbath as one of the appointed times, after all, is it possible some Christians will start asking questions and may even start to keep it? These people might wonder why Sunday Church really is not a “sabbath.” How important is it for today's Believers to recapture a theology of “rest”?¹²

Passover/Pesach

The second of the Biblical *moedim* that God prescribes is *Pesach* (פֶּסַח), or Passover. It is specified, “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD's Passover” (Leviticus 23:5). Of all the Biblical holidays, this is probably the one with which most Christians are familiar. Their familiarity with Passover is no doubt due to the fact that the Exodus of the Ancient Israelites from Egypt is **one of the most important themes in the Bible**,¹³ as it depicts the Holy One of Israel as the God of freedom, able to deliver people from slavery, but also as it depicts our Exodus as born again Believers from death in sin to new life in Yeshua. The Angel of Death would *pass-over* the homes of the Egyptians, and if the blood of the lamb were not over the doorposts, the firstborn would die. Using this typology in relation to our faith in the Messiah, if we do not have His blood covering us, then we will suffer the second death—eternal damnation.

Observance of *Pesach* in ancient times is specified in the Torah. Here were just some of the requirements:

¹² For resources on how to keep *Shabbat* with your family, consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹³ Consult the author's article “The Message of Exodus.”

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1. Families were to sacrifice a blameless lamb for their household: "each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household" (Exodus 12:3, NIV).
2. The blood of the lamb was to be placed on the doorposts and lintel of the house: "Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it" (Exodus 12:7).
3. When eating of the Passover lamb, families were to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs: "They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8).
4. Passover was to be observed for all of the generations of the Israelites: "It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations" (Exodus 12:42).

Exodus 12:26-27 issues an important instruction: "when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.' And the people bowed low and worshiped." Knowing the scenes of the original Passover are to cause God's people to approach Him with great awe and reverence.

Passover was originally to be celebrated and remembered as a time when God showed His mighty power to the Egyptians and delivered His people into freedom. It is, in essence, Israel's first national holiday. It is to be a special time when we are to honor our Heavenly Father for the deliverance of the Ancient Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, and how He spared the firstborn by the shed blood of the lambs. It is something that we are to instill in offspring so that they might remember the power of God. J.H. Hertz describes this in more detail:

"The children of successive generations are to be instructed at Passover as to the origin and significance of the Festival. In the Seder service on the first two nights of Passover, this command has found its solemn realization. In it we have history raised to religion. The youngest child present asks the Questions, which are answered by a recital of the events that culminated in the original institution of Passover. Education in the home is thus as old as the Hebrew people."¹⁴

We must all admire the tenacity of the Jewish people for instilling this, as particularly witnessed in the Passover traditions of the *haggadah*

¹⁴ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 257.

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(הַגְּדָה), the traditional order of service used for one's *Pesach* meal at home and/or with one's congregational community.¹⁵ Hopefully, as many of today's non-Jewish Believers come to the realization that they too can take a hold of Passover, they will see the need of similarly instilling Scripture as *all of our history* to future generations—because as Messianic Believers in Yeshua, Passover has a greater significance and importance than just the Exodus from Ancient Egypt.

The events surrounding Passover are significant to all people of faith. The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians, “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1). Every person who partakes of salvation in Israel's Messiah benefits from the Exodus—and even more!

Pesach has a great significance as it relates to the sacrifice of the Messiah for the forgiveness of our sins. Yeshua is the blameless Lamb of God. John the Immerser proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29), and the Apostle Peter wrote that the redeemed are covered “with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Messiah” (1 Peter 1:19). Most important, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “For our *Pesach* lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed” (CJB). Yeshua's sacrifice for us is to be understood as a blameless Passover lamb, killed so that we can have His blood covering the doorframe of our hearts.

Yeshua's Last Supper meal was in actuality a Passover *seder*. This is recognized by many Christians today who are beginning to celebrate and remember Passover in their churches, as a useful educational tool for reconnecting with the Old Testament. This is often how many evangelical Believers (including my own family) get exposed to the Messianic movement.

For people of faith, Yeshua's Last Supper is often one of the most important scenes in Scripture, depicting the agony that our Lord endured prior to His execution (Matthew 26:39). The importance of Passover is seen in how the Messiah told His Disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15).¹⁶

The Last Supper is summarized for us in Matthew 26:18-19; 26-28:

“And He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, ‘My time is near; I *am* to keep the Passover at your

¹⁵ Consult Joseph Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), for an overview of the traditional Passover *haggadah*, as well as its historical development and use in the Synagogue.

¹⁶ From this Last Supper is derived the common Christian practice of communion with the bread and the wine—although in its proper context the Lord's Supper should be practiced with *matzah* or unleavened bread, not leavened bread, and probably only once a year during the *seder* meal. Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website “Communion.”

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house with My disciples.” The disciples did as Yeshua had directed them; and they prepared the Passover...While they were eating, Yeshua took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.’”

Commemorating Passover today should be a great time of remembrance and celebration for us as Messianic Believers, as well as a time of reverent severity. We remember the Exodus from Egypt, and we remember the Last Supper and sacrifice of Yeshua on the cross for the remission of our sins. We remember the original Passover in Egypt, and compare it to what happened at Golgotha (Calvary). We see a great correlation of the Ancient Israelites being brought forth from bondage into freedom, and born again Believers being brought out of sin into forgiveness.

In addition to remembering *Pesach* for the events of the past, we also remember it for the future. Yeshua told His Disciples, “‘for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes’” (Luke 22:16-18). We still recognize that there is a future Passover coming, when the cycle will be complete, as the Messiah will be ruling and reigning from Jerusalem.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread/*Chag HaMatzah*

Concurrent with the remembrance of Passover—and in Jewish tradition witnessed in the New Testament and today often just called by the general season “Passover”—is the Festival of Unleavened Bread:

“Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work” (Leviticus 23:6-8).

The Festival of Unleavened Bread is called *Chag HaMatzah* (חַג הַמַּצֹּת) in Hebrew. It was instituted so that the Ancient Israelites would remember eating the bread of haste that they had to prepare quickly as they left Egypt. There was no time to let their bread rise, so instead they were forced to eat it unleavened. Unleavened bread or *matzah* (מַצֹּת) was required to be eaten on the first night of Passover, and then was to be eaten for the week following:

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“Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel” (Exodus 12:14-15).

Deuteronomy 16:3 notes how the Ancient Israelites were to eat Unleavened Bread so that they would remember their affliction in Egypt: “You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.”

The Festival of Unleavened Bread is observed by removing all leavened items from one’s house. You are probably aware of the many “Kosher for Passover” items available during this time, as leavening items such as yeast have been removed from many products for use during the Passover season.

As Believers in Messiah Yeshua, the Festival of Unleavened Bread takes on very important meaning for us. Hertz validly states that “Leaven is the symbol of corruption, passion and sin,”¹⁷ which is *exactly* what Yeshua took upon Himself when He was crucified. The Messiah spoke of leaven in Matthew 16:6 when He said, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” in reference to some of their teachings which were non-Scriptural and were no doubt sinful.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 5:8, in relation to Passover, “Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,” encouraging Believers that when they celebrate this holiday, they are to get the leaven or sin out of their lives. During the Passover season we participate in *Chag HaMatzah* by eating unleavened bread for seven days. Each time we pick up a piece of *matzah*, we should be consciously reminded of Yeshua’s sacrifice for us, as He is the sinless, leaven-less, Bread of Life. Interestingly enough, Yeshua was born in Bethlehem or *Beit-Lechem* (בֵּית-לֶחֶם), a name which means “House of Bread.”

As Messianic Believers commemorate the week of *Chag HaMatzah* or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we must be reminded of the prophecy of Isaiah 53:5: “But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes [Heb. sing. *chaburah*, חַבּוּרָה] we are healed” (KJV). Many Messianics have validly compared this prophecy to the beatings of Yeshua, who was scourged and mocked and shamed

¹⁷ Hertz, 256.

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for us (cf. Matthew 27:26-31; Mark 15:15-20). Those of you who have seen *matzah* know that it has “stripes” and small holes in it, and it is indeed “flat,” or leavenless. When we partake of *matzah*, it should hopefully remind us of the true Bread of Life, who is Messiah Yeshua. He was leavenless and without sin as the Bread of Life, and was the atonement for us by His sacrifice. He indeed had to take the punishment due us, incurred by our sin, onto Himself (Colossians 2:14).

We observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread today as a reminder of the Ancient Israelites’ trek from Egypt and the bread of haste that they had to eat. But we also observe it in remembrance of Messiah Yeshua, who came as the leaven-less, or sinless Lamb of God, beaten and bruised for us. Every time we see *matzah*, we are to be reminded of what He endured for us.

The Waving of the Sheaf

An important ceremony, known as the waving of the sheaf of first fruits, was to be observed in conjunction with the Festival of Unleavened Bread:⁸

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “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”’” (Leviticus 23:9-11).

This first fruits offering was commanded to be presented before God, during the season of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Because there is no Temple any longer in which the priest can wave the *omer* (עֹמֶר) or sheaf of first fruits, or present the proper offerings, its celebration was largely discontinued in Judaism after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.⁹ Leviticus 23:11-14 describes the kinds of offerings God expects to have presented to Him at this time:

“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. Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an *ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain

⁸ Please note that as important as the waving of the sheaf ceremony is for understanding prophetic typology, that the Torah does not specify it as “*Chag HaBikkurim*” or the “Festival of First Fruits,” as is common in some Messianic circles.

⁹ Consult the entry for “firstfruits” in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds. *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 228.

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nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.”

Yeshua the Messiah fulfilled the typology of firstfruits via His resurrection. Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “if Messiah has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” This was the time when the high priest or *ha'kohen ha'gadol* (הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל) would enter into the Temple and wave the first fruits of the harvest before the Lord. It is representative of Yeshua's being raised for us, as He is the first fruits of those who have been raised from the dead:

“But the fact is that the Messiah *has* been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died” (1 Corinthians 15:20, CJB).

Yeshua's resurrection from the dead as first fruits—assures us that there will be a future resurrection of all redeemed saints into the restored Kingdom of God on Earth (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)!²⁰

Pentecost/Shavuot

Beginning during the season of Passover and Unleavened Bread is a counting of weeks to the Festival of Weeks:

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths [seven full weeks, RSV, NIV, CJB, ESV, et. al.]. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD...On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations” (Leviticus 23:15-16, 21).

Shavuot (שָׁבֻעוֹת) is known to many by its Greek-derived name Pentecost or *Pentēkostē* (πεντηκοστή), meaning “fiftieth.” Its Hebrew name is derived, however, from the plural form of *shavua* (שָׁבִיעַ), which means “week,” in reference to the seven weeks which are to be counted to *Shavuot*. In Exodus 34:22, *Shavuot* is described as being “the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.” Deuteronomy 16:9-10a further specifies how God's people are to “count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand” (Deuteronomy 16:9-10a).²¹

²⁰ For a discussion on what transpires in the intermediate time between death and resurrection, consult the author's article “To Be Absent From the Body.”

²¹ Note that the command to count “from the day after the sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15) has been interpreted differently for at least 2,300 years. During the time of Yeshua, the Sadducees considered “the sabbath” here to be a reference to the weekly *Shabbat*, whereas

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Shavuot was originally intended to be an agricultural festival, where primarily the first of the wheat harvest would be presented to the Lord as a special offering, in the form of bread, waved before Him:

“You shall bring in from your dwelling places two *loaves* of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an *ephah*; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. Along with the bread you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the LORD; they are to be holy to the LORD for the priest” (Leviticus 23:17-20).

Since the destruction of the Temple, additional importance has been applied to *Shavuot*. Hertz indicates, “Jewish tradition...connects it with the Covenant on Mount Sinai, and speaks of the festival as...‘the Season of the Giving of our Torah’. The Israelites arrived at Sinai on the New Moon. On the second of the month, Moses ascended the mountain; on the third, he received the people’s reply; on the fourth, he made the second ascent and was commanded to institute three days of preparation, at the conclusion of which the Revelation took place. Hence its association with the Feast of Weeks, which became the Festival of Revelation.”²² H.M. Adler further comments, “With the destruction of the Second Temple, the agricultural aspect of the Festival receded, and Shavous became primarily the Feast of Revelation.”²³

Shavuot, referred to here as the Feast of Revelation, is readily associated with God giving Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, which is certainly something worthy of celebration and convocation. The giving of the Ten Commandments, and indeed the entire Torah, is something that is monumental for all of humanity—arguably second to the resurrection of Messiah Yeshua! Without the Torah, we would be unable to see the Messiah to whom it points (Romans 10:4, Grk.)!

However, in realizing the traditional connection between *Shavuot* and the giving of the Law, we see that the first *Shavuot* was not as glorious as one might make it out to be. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the commandments from God in an awesome scene of fire and smoke, the Ancient Israelites were forsaking God and

the Pharisees interpreted it as a reference to the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread. In Judaism today, the Pharisaical method is what is followed. Messianic practice invariably differs.

Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website “*Omer* Count.”

²² Hertz, 521.

²³ Cited in *Ibid*.

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making themselves a golden calf. We know the story all too well from Exodus 32, as when Moses came down from the mountain, he smashed the tablets:

“It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*” (Exodus 32:19-20).

A cry of war went out in the Israelite camp because of this grave and terrible sin. Moses called those loyal to God to his side and ordered that they slay those who were sinning:

“Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.”’ So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day” (Exodus 32:25-28).

Three thousand Israelites were killed in association with this first *Shavuot* because they sinned against the Lord and worshipped an idol. However, thirteen hundred years later in Jerusalem, as *Shavuot* was required to be one of the three pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16), this appointed time experienced some important prophetic fulfillment. At this time, just after Yeshua had ascended into Heaven, the Apostle Peter proclaimed a riveting message to those assembled in Jerusalem:

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Yeshua the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death...Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:22-23; 36).

Acts 2:41 states that “there were added about three thousand souls.” On the first *Shavuot*, or the day of Pentecost as it is widely known, three thousand died because of their idolatry. Thirteen hundred years later, on the day of Pentecost, three thousand came to faith in the Messiah.

The Book of Acts describes how on this *Shavuot*, people believing in the Holy One of Israel from all over the known world came to gather

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in Jerusalem, both those who were observant Jews and proselytes (Acts 2:9-11). Contrary to popular belief, Peter did not proclaim to the crowds amassed the beginning of “the Church.” Rather, he proclaimed the good news and that Yeshua was both “Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). What Peter proclaimed was that He is the promised Redeemer of Israel, and that those assembled were to “Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the *Ruach HaKodesh*! For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away—as many as *ADONAI* our God may call!” (Acts 2:38-39, CJB).²⁴

The events at this *Shavuot* are extremely important for us to remember today. It was the time when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in all the Believers, as the close and personal presence of God: “And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4). Prior to this time, the Holy Spirit was only given to kings of Israel, prophets, and those specifically anointed by the Lord—but now, all who had faith in Yeshua were given the Spirit! This new work of God, inaugurated at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, was preparing to change the world.

When we celebrate *Shavuot* now, there is much to be thankful for and to remember. We first remember the baked loaves and offerings that were to be presented to the Lord as a pleasurable aroma to Him. We then remember what we should consider to be the second most important event in our faith (the first being the Messiah's resurrection): the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai. And as Messianic Believers, we are reminded that on the *Shavuot* following the Messiah's ascension into Heaven that the Holy Spirit was poured out and that many were saved, decisively beginning the era of the New Covenant (cf. Acts 15:8-9).²⁵

²⁴ For a further discussion, consult the author's article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?”

²⁵ For resources on how to keep the Spring festivals with your family, including the Festival of *Purim* (Esther 9:26-27), consult the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

The Day of Blowing/Yom Teruah

Rosh HaShanah

The Summer season does not include any Biblically-mandated times of appointment, and so the cycle of *moedim* does not pick up again until the Fall or Autumn:

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD”’” (Leviticus 23:23-25).

The first of the Fall *moedim* is known as *Yom Teruah* (יום תְּרוּעָה) or the Day of Blowing, also commonly called the Feast of Trumpets. *Teruah* (תְּרוּעָה) means “shout or blast of war, alarm, or joy” (BDB).²⁶ All of these definitions play out on *Yom Teruah*, as God’s people are commanded to have a holy convocation and enjoin themselves to one another. It is to be a day of rest so that we might be properly called into a time of extreme holiness. In Judaism today, *Yom Teruah* is called *Rosh HaShanah* (ראש השנה) and is celebrated as the Civil New Year. In Jewish tradition it was during this time of year that God created the world, and so it will be this time that He will judge the world (b.*Rosh HaShanah* 27a).²⁷

Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah has been honored in the past, and is honored today as a holiday, when we remember God and we acknowledge the fact that we are His people and we can convene together. It is a time where the *shofar* (שֹׁפָר) or ram’s horn is traditionally blown to commemorate the work of God, and call His people together. As Messianic Believers, we assemble to hear the *shofar* blown, and convene together as we prepare ourselves for the even more serious Day of Atonement.

Rosh HaShanah is a festival which many Christians are familiar with. They are familiar with it because many prophecy teachers, both pre-tribulational and post-tribulational alike, believe that Yeshua will return on this day to gather the saints, because of the simple reason that the trumpet is blown on this day. They compare the *shofar* blown to the trumpet blown in Second Coming passages such as Matthew 24:29-31, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. But contrary to popular belief, the Messiah will not gather the saints into the clouds on

²⁶ BDB, 929.

²⁷ It is commonly thought in much of today’s independent Messianic quarters that the practice of remembering *Rosh HaShanah* on the first of Tishri was a pagan error that the Jewish exiles picked up in Babylon. This is not based in an accurate understanding of history, or of the Scriptures, but is often rooted in the conclusions of a Higher Criticism that dates the composition of the Pentateuch not to the time of Moses, but the post-exilic era. Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website “Rosh HaShanah.”

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Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah and then return seven years later to judge the world at *Yom Kippur*. The resurrection will take place, the saints will be gathered to meet Him on *Yom Teruah*, and immediately following the wrath of God will be poured out on the world, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon.²⁸

What must we remember on *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*? Obviously, we must come together in a holy convocation and hear the *shofar* blown. We do this because the LORD is God and He is Ruler of the Universe. We are called to remember that Yeshua is the Messiah and Redeemer, and we praise Him for who He is and what He has done for us. We convene and stand in the awe of God, because we are His people. We acknowledge how Yeshua is coming to fulfill the Fall appointed times sometime in the future, and gather us into His presence at the blowing of the trumpet.

The Day of Atonement/*Yom Kippur*

The time period between *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* is commonly known as the Ten Days of Awe—when the community of God's faithful prepares itself to corporately confess and repent of sin. The Day of Atonement is considered to be the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The Torah specifies,

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God’” (Leviticus 23:26-28).

Just as many Christians are familiar with the Festival of Trumpets, many of the same are familiar with *Yom Kippur* (יום כיפור) or the Day of Atonement, if for any other reason that they know that this is the one day of the year when Jews fast. *Yom Kippur* is to be a day when God's people are commanded to “afflict” themselves, usually by fasting, and by spending the day before Him. They should be individually confessing their sins of the previous year, making peace with anyone who has been wronged, and meditating on the future.

The Day of Atonement was the only time when the high priest was really permitted to go into the Holy of Holies and spread the sacrificial blood upon the Ark of the Covenant for covering the sin of the people (Leviticus 16). Following the Southern Kingdom's exile to Babylon, *Yom Kippur* was considered the only appropriate time that God's Divine Name was to be spoken aloud—and that was in the Temple alone (m.*Yoma* 6:2).

²⁸ For a further analysis, consult the author's publication *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism*.

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Within Judaism, *Yom Kippur* is to be a very serious time of spiritual reflection. Hertz elaborates, “Confession of sin is the most essential and characteristic element in the services of the Day of Atonement; ‘every one entreating pardon for his sins and hoping for God’s mercy, not because of his own merits but through the compassionate nature of that Being who will have forgiveness rather than punishment’ (Philo).²⁹ The confession is made by the whole Community collectively; and those who have not themselves committed the sins mentioned in the confession regret that they were unable to prevent them from being committed by others (Friedländer).”³⁰

In recent days within the evangelical Christian community, there has been a substantial amount of discussion on the need for repentance and reconciliation with God. *This is good*. Many of the movements which have arisen have had some limited success for a season, but then fade away or lose their impact for some reason or another. While we as individuals should always be in the process of spiritual reflection, the simple truth of the matter is that there is a Biblical time when required corporate repentance and reconciliation with God are to take place: *Yom Kippur*. This is the day that the Body of Messiah is to entreat the Lord for mercy, as it involves fasting and traditional liturgy that *really* is designed to get people to think about their sins.³¹

Furthermore, concerning *Yom Kippur*, Leviticus 23:29-30 describes how “If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.” The severity of the Day of Atonement cannot be overemphasized here. Those who did not humble and afflict themselves and abstain from work (in ancient times) would literally be cut off. The Hebrew verb is *karat* (כָּרַת), and generally means to be “cut off, cut down” (BDB).³² The *ArtScroll Chumash* actually says, “one who works on Yom Kippur, about whom the Torah says he will be destroyed, is judged more harshly than one who eats, about whom the Torah says only that he will be cut off. One who eats is treated more leniently, because he is merely a glutton who cannot control his desires, but one who works shows that he is contemptuous of God’s wishes.”³³

As Believers in Messiah Yeshua, we need to learn to take *Yom Kippur* very seriously. The Day of Atonement is intended to be a very serious and sober time. It is to be a time when we are reminded of our

²⁹ Philo *The Special Laws* 2.196.

³⁰ Hertz, 523.

³¹ Consult the order of worship seen in “A Traditional Morning Service for Yom Kippur,” appearing in the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

³² BDB, 503.

³³ Scherman, *Chumash*, 687.

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humanity before a holy and righteous Creator. It is to be a time when we are to reflect and confess sin. As members of the Commonwealth of Israel, Jewish or non-Jewish, we each must be reminded, in the words of Hertz, that “No other nation, ancient or modern, has an institution approaching the Day of Atonement in religious depth—‘a day of purification and of turning from sins, for which forgiveness is granted through the grace of the merciful God, who holds penitence in as high as esteem as guiltlessness’ (Philo).”³⁴

Sadly, it has been our family observation over the years that a few in the Messianic community do not take *Yom Kippur* as seriously as they should. Part of this comes because these Messianics do not really know what to do about spiritual introspection. Many Christians today believe that since they have been forgiven of their sin through Yeshua, that it is unnecessary for them to ever ask for any forgiveness of sin again once they have been converted. They really do not see any importance in *Yom Kippur*, and in the need of taking a yearly spiritual inventory, and so some of today's Messianics have the same attitude and do not take *Yom Kippur* very seriously. This, I believe, is a very immature attitude because Paul teaches plainly, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). We should always evaluate where we stand before Him at least once a year.

Yom Kippur is not just a day when we abstain from eating and the usual pleasures; it is to truly be the time when we are to stand in fear of an Eternal God. In no way are we to have a cavalier attitude about it, where one is “counting down the hours” left before breaking the required fast of the day. Many of us have to learn to take our salvation more seriously—or at least fast and pray for the salvation of others. Even if you think that you are right with God and that you have no business yourself to conduct with Him, there are lost people all over the world—especially our unsaved Jewish brethren—whom we should be fasting and interceding for!

As far as *Yom Kippur's* eschatological fulfillment is concerned, a future Day of Atonement will probably be the time when the Day of the LORD occurs, that being the time when God's wrath (Grk. *orgē*) is poured out upon the unsaved of Planet Earth and Yeshua defeats His enemies at Armageddon.

This concept is readily emphasized in the Tanach in the various Day of the LORD prophecies. “Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty...Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it...Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place

³⁴ Hertz, 523.
Cf. Philo *Special Laws* 1.229.

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at the fury of the LORD of hosts in the day of His burning anger” (Isaiah 13:6, 9, 13). We are told in Ezekiel 30:3: “For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of *doom* for the nations.”

There are numerous other references in Scripture to this horrible time, each of which speaks in some way of “the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:2). In its largest Biblical context, the Day of the LORD is a very short period of time (even though the terminology can be used to describe the force of God’s vindication). The prophetic fulfillment of *Yom Kippur* is probably best understood to represent this coming Day of the LORD, as the Day of Atonement is to be considered a very solemn, serious occasion between oneself and the Lord for reflection. *Yom Kippur* is to be a day of mourning, and the Scriptures tell us that at Yeshua’s appearing to defeat His enemies, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7).

We Messianics must observe *Yom Kippur* each year by afflicting ourselves and standing in awe of a holy, righteous, and Eternal God. We must take this day very seriously and confess our sin before the Lord, claiming the blood of Messiah Yeshua, and dedicating ourselves to His service for the next year. All too often, on the Day of Atonement we are reminded of how really human we are before our Creator and how much we must be humbled. It reminds us of God’s future judgment on the world when many will say, “who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:17, KJV).

Yom Kippur is to be a time of severity and it is an appropriate time for us to remember Yeshua’s triumph over sin, death, and Satan. It would be good for the Messianic community if we started emphasizing the events of the coming Day of the LORD at *Yom Kippur* as well, when we might read the Scripture passages of the judgment of the world that is prophesied—so that we might really pray and intercede for the salvation of the lost:

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi 3:2).

Tabernacles/Sukkot

The final of the major appointed times occurs five days after *Yom Kippur*:

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work.”’” (Leviticus 23:33-36).

Following *Yom Kippur* is *Sukkot* (סוכּוֹת) or the Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. Leviticus 23:42-43 instructed how during *Sukkot*, “You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” This was to be in remembrance of the time when the Lord led the Ancient Israelites out of Egypt and when they would build *sukkahs* (pl. *sukkot*) or temporary dwelling places, described by Hertz as being “a hastily-constructed and unsubstantial edifice.”³⁵

Sukkot, along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and *Shavuot*, is one of the three pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16). Today, there are varying ways that Messianic Believers observe *Sukkot*. A few make the sincere effort to go to Israel and to Jerusalem during the feast and assemble with other Believers from all over the world. For those who are unable to go because of financial constraints, which is most, many celebrations take place at local assemblies where a congregational *sukkah* is built, usually from a wooden frame covered in palm branches or other “leafy” branches in remembrance of the temporary dwellings of the Israelites in the wilderness. Many choose to erect a *sukkah* in their backyards as they celebrate *Sukkot* with their families.

There is, of course, even more significance represented by *Sukkot*, especially for us as Believers and its relation to prophecy and to Yeshua. In Exodus 25:8 the Lord declares, “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.” This verse establishes the foundational principle of *Sukkot*: God dwelling in the midst of human beings. We know that this element of our faith is realized fully in Messiah Yeshua, who “became flesh, and did tabernacle among us” (John 1:14, YLT), as God’s presence was manifest via a human body, beyond Him just filling the Temple. But at the same time, we eagerly

³⁵ Ibid., 525.

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cry out “Come quickly Lord Yeshua!” so that we might see the Messiah manifested in all His glory here on Earth in His Kingdom.

In a similar manner as the Tabernacle and the booths were to be “temporary” dwelling places in the wilderness, so will the Messiah’s manifestation on Earth in His Kingdom after the Tribulation period be “temporary,” so to speak. We emphasize “temporary” here because the Seventieth Week of Israel spiritually represents our trek from Egypt or *this world* to eternity. Yeshua’s Millennial Kingdom is but an “intermediate time” before we see the New Heavens and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem—the New Creation God is preparing for us in eternity. We know this to be the case because in Jeremiah 31:38 when God restores Israel’s Kingdom, that “the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate,” which occurs during the Millennium, versus the New Jerusalem which comes down from the sky (Revelation 21:2, 10).

Sukkot is a time when we are to concentrate on our Heavenly Father and His earnest desire to live among us. When Yeshua physically returns to the Earth, all people will be seriously mandated to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Zechariah 14:16-17 describes how those who, during the Millennium, do not go to Jerusalem to honor the Feast of Tabernacles, will not receive any rain from the Lord: “Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.” So for some reason or another, some will not understand the concept of *communing* with the Lord.

The festival of *Sukkot* will likewise experience prophetic fulfillment at the end of the Millennium, as the Apostle John attests, “I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles is a wonderful holiday that the Lord is restoring to His people. *Sukkot* is a time when Messianic Believers are being drawn to the Lord and His desire to have our fellowship tabernacling with Him. They get to experience such a fellowship in a very tangible way, communing with Him and with others in their congregational or home *sukkahs*.³⁶

³⁶ For resources on how to keep the Fall festivals with your family, consult the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

How do we honor the appointed times/*moedim*?

In this article, we have only briefly touched on each one of the appointed times of the Lord; there is certainly more that can be considered, much of which comes every successive year that they are remembered. What we have tried to do here is simply explain the importance of each one of these celebrations for us as Messianic Believers, the spiritual renewal that God is bringing to us by keeping them, and how the work of Yeshua is reflected in each holiday.

Many of us come from diverse religious backgrounds, be those backgrounds Jewish or Christian; liberal or conservative; Protestant, Catholic or Pentecostal. In particular for Messianic Believers from Christian backgrounds—each of whom has had a different “Christian experience,” so too must we recognize that each Messianic congregation, family, and individual will celebrate the *moedim* a little differently. Some people will have more of a “Jewish” flavor to their celebration than others, and some will choose to have as little “Jewishness” as possible. How do we get the most out of the appointed times, so that our observance is focused on the Lord, and is also fulfilling?

There are many good Jewish traditions associated with the *moedim*, which are edifying to the Body of Messiah. Then again, there are Jewish traditions associated with these holidays that are not Biblical and that can take us away from the Messiah. I trust that you will seek balance and fairness in this regard. It is not prudent at all to simply reject everything (Orthodox) Jewish *carte blanche*, but then at the same time accept everything Jewish *carte blanche* either. If the Lord is truly reuniting restoring all His people, then those things that the Synagogue has contributed which are consistent with Scripture and spiritually uplifting **should be practiced**, and our Jewish brethren should be appropriately honored. But like all things, exhibit caution and discernment (cf. Philippians 4:8).

Ultimately, however you choose to celebrate the festivals of the Lord is up to you, but please leave leeway and grace for those who may not celebrate them exactly as you do. Let us remember that we are all on the road and we are all learning together.

The Restoration of the Appointed Times in His Kingdom

We are very excited that God's people are rediscovering His appointed times. It is a part of the prophesied “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) and a return to the way that our Father originally intended. Once we all start to celebrate His holidays on an annual basis, then we can adequately prepare ourselves for Yeshua's coming Kingdom where

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the *moedim* will be restored. Concerning the Levites and the Messianic Age, we are told,

“Moreover, they shall teach My people *the difference* between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths” (Ezekiel 44:23-24).

If we are to truly be ruling and reigning with the Messiah during the Millennium, when God’s Torah will be enforced as the Instruction for the whole Earth—then it is high time that we all start becoming familiar with His appointed times! The Levites will surely be keeping them as God’s officials and judges.

Remembering God’s Appointed Times

Many Christians do struggle with the issue of keeping the Lord’s appointed times or *moedim*, either by wanting to act as though they were important only for a previous time, or they keep them at a spiritual arm’s length. Yet, it is undeniable that one of the significant ways that today’s Messianic movement has utterly ballooned in number, is because evangelical Believers have been drawn to the richness of keeping the appointed times in Messiah Yeshua. Others have noticed this, and have not been too positive in their assessment of it. Consider the following quote by author Tim Warner, a fundamentalist Christian, of The Last Trumpet website. He says the following in his article “Christians, and the Feasts of Israel”:

“Lets [sic] get one thing straight right up front. Keeping the Feasts according to the Torah REQUIRES OFFERING ANIMAL SACRIFICES. There is no avoiding this conclusion. And, any changes to the festivals by rabbis to accommodate the fact that there is no longer a Tabernacle/Temple or Levitical priesthood, or, any changes by Messianic Christians to accommodate the fact that the New Testament says Christ’s sacrifice has ended the animal sacrifices, makes it impossible to observe these feasts according to the Torah.”³⁷

Warner is correct in asserting that we cannot perfectly observe the appointed times according to the Torah. The *moedim* do require animal sacrifices, and because there is no Temple in which to perform these sacrifices, we cannot keep them one-hundred percent correctly. But what is the position of many Christians because of this? *They reject the celebration of the Lord’s appointed times entirely.* Warner might be

³⁷ Tim Warner (2002). *Christians, and the Feasts of Israel. The Last Trumpet*. Retrieved 06 January, 2003 from <<http://www.lasttrumpet.com>>.

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exceptional when he says, “Does this mean the Feasts of Israel are of no value anymore? Quite the contrary. They are still witnesses to the gospel, in graphic allegory. They are rich in symbolism, and should be studied by all Christians, for a fuller understanding of the atonement of Christ, and how it relates to prophecy.”³⁸ But, he also says, “Should Christians observe the Feasts? Yes, and no. Yes, if it is being done simply as a memorial, and instruction on the basis of our faith. No, if it is done out of obligation or necessity.”³⁹

If you can read between the lines of these statements, many Christians are opposed to any “mandatory” memorial of God's appointed times being observed by born again Believers. The idea that is really being purported here is that because we cannot perfectly observe the Lord's appointed times, because they require animal sacrifices which cannot be offered, is that we should really not try to keep them in any capacity at all. While it is true that the Jewish Rabbis over the centuries have added traditions to the holidays to compensate for the required animal sacrifices—mostly in the form of liturgical prayers—Christianity by-and-large has decided to totally dispense with the Lord's appointed times.

Which is worse: to augment your celebration and do the best that you can given your circumstances—recognizing that God is indeed gracious and merciful? Or, deciding to replace what God has asked His people to remember with something totally different and to do what you want? This, sadly, is what Christianity has often done. Judaism, even with some errors, at least has been trying to honor God in this area.

But this will not stop all Christians from speaking against the Lord's appointments. Consider the following admonishment from the Prophet Isaiah:

“‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

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do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:11-17).

Many of you who have read this text know how it has been misapplied.⁴⁰ Here the Lord speaks of how He was displeased with how the Southern Kingdom was celebrating His feasts and appointments. He specifically said, “I hate all your festivals and sacrifices. I cannot stand the sight of them!” (Isaiah 1:14, NLT). Many Christians have interpreted this as meaning that the Lord was tired with *His* feast days and wanted to get rid of them, but this is not what the text says at all. The text specifically says “I hate **your** new moon *festivals* and **your** appointed feasts [*chodshei'khem u'moadei'khem*, ומוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וְחֻדְשֵׁיכֶם].” Specifically, what God is saying is that He could not stand how the people were celebrating *His* feasts, and so He called them “**your** New Moons and **your** appointed times” (ATS), putting the responsibility on the people for the wrong they have done.

God placing the burden of proof on His people is not something unique to the Tanach. In Exodus 32:7 He told Moses, “Go down; for **your people** [*amekha*, אֱמֶכָה], whom **you** brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.” As Moses reminded the Lord, “O LORD, why does **Your anger** burn against **Your people** whom **You** have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” (Exodus 32:11), indicating that although the people have sinned against Him, He was still the One who led them out of Egypt.

Similarly, the appointed times ordained by God in the Torah, **are still His**. Recognizing that people have improperly used His appointed times in the past is recognized by John A. Martin in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, edited by dispensational theologians John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck of Dallas Theological Seminary:

“Isaiah’s point is that the people assumed that merely by offering sacrifices at the altar they would be made ceremonially clean before God. Even multiple sacrifices are **meaningless** (v. 13) and therefore do not please God when the ‘worshiper’ does not bring his life into conformity with God’s standards. Also the careful observance of monthly **offerings**...were **meaningless** to God when they were not

⁴⁰ Isaiah 1:11-17 was most especially misapplied by Tertullian, where he says “The Holy Spirit upbraids the Jews with their holy-days. ‘Your Sabbaths, and new moons, and ceremonies,’ says He, ‘My soul hateth” (*On Idolatry* 14).

Even more problematic is Tertullian’s conclusion, based on Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33 about him not unnecessarily being an offense, that “No doubt he used to please them by celebrating the Saturnalia and New-year’s day!” This is an extrapolation that the good Apostle would not have supported (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14).

Cf. “Sabbath,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 572.

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done with the proper attitude....Such observances God called evil because they were carried out hypocritically, with sinful hearts."⁴¹

Indeed, if our remembrance of the Lord's appointed times is not from the heart, and is only outward, then our celebration of the appointed times could not mean that much. Sadly, there are Messianics who fit this category all too well, because they use every festival season as a time to unfairly criticize and harass our Christian brothers and sisters who do not celebrate them—rather than inviting people to their homes and fellowships to join with them, so that they might be blessed. But then in total fairness, there are Christians who celebrate non-Biblical holidays and festivals—consciously rejecting and spurning His appointed times, *thinking they are honoring the Lord*. Are they truly honoring Him by rejecting what He has laid out in His Word? Thankfully, He is the One who knows the heart, and the ultimate determination is up to Him and not any mortal.

We need to honor the Lord's appointed times, both outwardly in our congregations and assemblies, and inwardly in our hearts because we have a sincere desire to obey Him. We need to understand His plan of salvation history in a more profound way, and via our proper remembrance, see others drawn to us by the wooing of the Spirit.

⁴¹ John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), pp 1035-1036.