

THE
JEWISH
HOLIDAYS
AND THEIR
NEW COVENANT
IMPLICATIONS

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PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Pesach, or Passover, the Jewish feast celebrating the liberation from Egypt, occurs in the spring during the Biblical month of Aviv, or Nisan as it is known today in the Jewish calendar. This holiday is celebrated during the last few days of March or during April. (See the chart at the end for the date this year. Remember, the Jewish day begins at sundown of the previous day.) Pesach initiates the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread during which no leaven is eaten.

Pesach is celebrated primarily in the home. In an observant Jewish home, careful and thorough spring cleaning is carried out weeks prior to the holiday. Special dishes and cooking utensils are brought out from storage. Everything used must be absolutely pure and leaven-free. All leaven, which is symbolic of man's evil inclination, must be removed from the house or isolated and temporarily sold to a non-Jewish friend so that, technically, no leaven is possessed. The night before Pesach, the final search for leaven is conducted by the head of the household. A candle, wooden spoon, feather, and an old cloth napkin or bag are used to seek out and remove the leavened bread which has been conspicuously placed for the express purpose of discovery and removal. The proclamation is then made, "Now I have rid my house of leaven." The leaven is taken to a bonfire the next morning and burned.

The Passover Seder is conducted in the evening, which is the beginning of the first day of Passover. (In orthodox homes, a second Seder is held on the second day of the feast.) The Seder meal is a joyful, yet solemn feast occurring in the midst of a family religious service. The meal is eaten while leaning on a pillow. Ritual washings precede the meal. "Seder" means "order of service." During this service, a special book called the "Haggadah" is used. Haggadah means "the telling forth" or "narrative." It contains the biblical story of the Passover and, also, many traditional explanations and embellishments, one of the most prominent being the asking of the Four Questions by the youngest child. The questions are begun by the familiar introduction, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" All celebrants are to think of themselves as having been at the original Exodus.

During the reading of the Haggadah, the meaning of the symbolic Passover foods is explained. The Seder plate occupies the most prominent place on the table. Here we find a number of important symbolic items. Maror, or ground bitter herbs (usually horseradish) represent the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt, as does the Hazaret or the whole root of bitter herbs. Karpas, usually parsley, symbolic of "life", is dipped into salt water, representing tears, the sorrow of life. Charoset, a mixture of chopped apples, nuts, honey and wine, represents mortar the Israelites used when slaves to Pharaoh. The rabbis say that even the bitterest work is made sweet by the promise of redemption. The roast egg, or Chaggigah, represents the sacrifices offered in the Temple which have ceased. The shank bone of a lamb, or Zeroah, represents the Passover lamb itself. Four cups of wine are drunk by each person during the Seder, and, of course, matzo, or unleavened bread, is eaten. A special place is set in hope that Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, will come join the feast. Traditional, but non-symbolic foods, include gefilte fish, matzo ball soup, candied carrots, a main dish such as roast chicken, and macaroons. The last thing to be eaten is the Afikomen, which had been hidden earlier

and is now found by one of the children. The Afikomen represents the Passover lamb.

In the Bible, in the book of Exodus, we find a description of the first Passover. In the time of Joseph, the sons of Israel had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine. By the time of the Exodus some four hundred years later, the Israelites had become slaves to Pharaoh. God promised to deliver them from this bondage and bring them into the promised land. He brought the judgement of the ten plagues on Egypt, the last being the killing of all the firstborn in Egypt. God told the people to sacrifice the Passover lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the sides and top of their doors. Only through the sacrifice of the lamb would they be spared judgement. Both Jews and non-Jews participated in the Passover; anyone who was circumcised and joined to Israel could participate (Ex. 12). The feast was to be kept by future generations as a remembrance.

The Significance of Pesach for the New Covenant believer

We know that Jesus has come as the ultimate Passover lamb who causes the judgement of death to "pass over" us. He brings us freedom from the bondage of sin and leads us into His kingdom. The setting of the Lord's supper is the Passover Seder. Jesus proclaimed himself to be the ultimate Passover lamb, represented by the unleavened (sinless) bread and the wine. He brought the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34) and redemption through his sacrifice for sin and resurrection.

Suggestions

1. Read Exodus 3-12; Dt. 16:1-8; Isaiah 53; John 1:29; Matt. 26:17-30; Luke 22:7-23; I Cor. 10:14-22; and I Cor. 5:6-8.
2. Ask your Jewish friend what his family does for Passover. (Maybe he'll invite you!)
3. Ask your friend what Passover means to him.
4. Prepare a 1-2 minute testimony of how Jesus is the Passover lamb and how important this holiday is to you. The Christian holiday, Easter, is still called by a name derived from Pesach (Passover) in Romance languages. (Easter derives its name from a pagan deity, "Ostara" or "Eastre", goddess of spring and the dawn!)
5. Attend or have your own Passover Seder celebrating Jesus as the Passover lamb. Encourage your church to recognize the Passover setting of the Lord's Supper.
6. Send a Passover greeting card to Jewish friends.

SHAVUOT, THE HARVEST IS THE LORD'S

Shavuot is the Biblical holiday known as the Feast of Weeks. Shavuot means "weeks" or "sevens" in Hebrew. Pentecost is from the Greek and means "fiftieth". The festival is also referred to as the Feast of Harvest and "Bikkurim", the Day of Firstfruits. In Temple times it was one of the most popular and joyous festivals of Israel. It was celebrated as a harvest festival seven weeks, or fifty days after Passover. From the second night of Passover until the night before Shavuot observant Jews "count the omer" (a measure of grain) marking the days from Passover until Shavuot. The Feast of Firstfruits was one of the three festivals for which the people of Israel were required to "go up" to Jerusalem in order to celebrate. The other two holidays are Passover and Sukkot.

The original setting of Shavuot was the wheat harvest, however, since the diaspora the focus has shifted away from the agricultural aspect. Some remnant of the agricultural origin remains in the custom of decorating the home and the synagogue with fragrant flowers and bright foliage and the eating of dairy products, such as cheese blintzes. Two loaves of Hallah (a braided bread) are prepared to symbolize both the two tablets of the Law and the loaves of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest presented at the Temple. In Judaism today, it is the giving of the Torah, the Law at Sinai, which is celebrated. Shavuot is considered the birthday of the nation of Israel. This idea may be a response to the Christian belief that the church was founded at Shavuot, or as it is currently known, Pentecost. There is no Biblical reference to the understanding that the nation of Israel was founded at Shavuot, though the giving of the Law did perhaps follow seven weeks after Passover.

In the synagogue, traditional readings include the Ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). The congregation stands as a gesture of respect as this expression of the Moral Law of God for all mankind is recited. (Have them stand and read the Ten Commandments.) Other readings include the biblical passages establishing the feast and the corresponding sacrifices (Numbers 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-17). Many religious Jews stay up all night reading the Psalms of David. The book of Ruth is also read because it has reference to both the harvest and the acceptance of the Law of God by Ruth, a Moabitess. Ruth is also connected with David. It is believed that David died at Shavuot. Hope for the coming of the Messiah, David's descendant, is in focus. This may also be a reaction to Christian thinking.

In the Biblical account the context for Shavuot is the Passover redemption (See Deut. 16:12). It is because of the Passover that the people of God could enjoy the harvest as free men in the land. The counting of the omer (Deut. 16:9 and Lev. 23:15-16) also connects this feast with Passover. On the day after Passover a sheaf of grain, the first harvested, was to be brought to the priest in the Temple and waved before the Lord as Symbolic of the whole harvest. A year old lamb without spot or blemish was sacrificed at this time. After seven weeks, fifty days after Passover, the people were to present two loaves of bread made from the firstfruits of the grain harvested as a wave offering to the LORD. seven male lambs, one young bull, and two rams were to be offered as a burnt offering. One goat served as a sin offering and two lambs made up the fellowship offering. The lambs were waved together with the bread by the priest. The people were

commanded to do no regular work and to hold a sacred assembly.

The Significance of Shavuot for the New Covenant Believer.

Just as Jesus came to fulfill the Passover through his death as the Lamb of God, so also the pouring out of the Spirit was the expression of the completed redemption he provided. Jesus was raised from the dead as the "firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). As our Redeemer he won for us the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). On that great day, when Pentecost came in all its fullness, three thousand came to faith and were baptized. This was the firstfruits of the great harvest of the nations the Messiah came to bring. And if there was a firstfruits, there was certainly to be a full harvest. Isaiah had prophesied that the "Law would go out from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:3). He spoke of the day when the "earth would be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" and the root of Jesse, the Messiah, would "stand as a banner for the peoples and nations would rally to him" (Is. 11:9). He said of Christ "I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations...he will not be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.; In his Law the islands will put their hope" (Is. 42:1-4).

Suggestions

1. Ask yourself: "Do I realize the power of God available for us through the redemption Jesus has provided? Do I have this perspective on evangelism? Am I expectant that God will reap a great harvest?"
2. Pray for boldness to share Messiah with your Jewish friends. The disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem to count the omer, until they received power through the Holy spirit to be witnesses of the Messianic Redemption to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Timothy was told, "for you have not received a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-control. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord" (2 Tim 1:7-9).

THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

PART 1. ROSH HASHANA

Tishri, the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, contains three major holidays. Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Succos. Tishri begins sometime during the last three weeks of September or the first week of October. The first day of Tishri is the Jewish New Year or Rosh Hashana which means "head of the year." If you read Exodus 12:2, you will discover that the Torah teaches that the month of Nisan when Passover is celebrated, is to be the first month. How then did the first of Tishri come to be celebrated as New Year's day? Probably because the letters of the words "the first of Tishri" in Hebrew can be rearranged to form the words "in the beginning". This was probably understood as being a hidden indication that the world was created on the first of Tishri, according to a certain method of Rabbinic interpretation, and, therefore, the year begins on this day. There is a Biblical holiday, however, on this day, the Feast of Trumpets (see Lev. 23:23 and Nu. 29:1-6).

Rosh Hashana, also known as Yom ha-Din (Day of Judgement), begins the "Ten Days of Awe" (Yomin Noraim), the "Ten Days of Turning or Repentance" or "the High Holy Days" which conclude with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. During this period, it is customary to greet one another with the phrase, "L'Shanah Tovah Tikateyvu" meaning "May you be inscribed in the Book of Life." This holiday is both solemn and joyous since it is both the Day of Repentance or Day of Judgement and the birthday of the world. It is celebrated for two days. On the first day, some Orthodox Jews practice a custom called "tashlich", which involves going to a body of water and emptying one's pockets or casting bread crumbs into the water. This is symbolic of Micah 7:19, "And you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." A family meal is celebrated which includes honey cake, wine, and apples dipped in honey to symbolize hope for a sweet and happy year. On the second night, a fruit not yet eaten that season is served. Hallah bread, in a round loaf, symbolizing a crown, is another traditional food.

In the synagogue, the major focuses are introspection and repentance. It is a time for recognizing one's sins and turning from them. The blowing of the shofar (trumpet) is a central feature and calls the worshippers to turn to God. It also announces that a great event is about to take place. Genesis 22, which tells of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, is read on the second day.

The Biblical holiday of the Feast of Trumpets is described most fully in Numbers 29:1-6. The central elements are the number 7 (7th month, 7 male lambs offered), the abstaining from regular work, the sounding of the ram's horn trumpets, various burnt offerings, and the sin offering of one male goat to make atonement for sin.

Notice that this holiday, which focuses on sin and repentance, is followed by the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur on the 10th of Tishri, and then Succos or the Feast of Booths on the 15th of the month, which focuses on God's providential care of his people. We must acknowledge our sin, repent and receive God's atonement for sin before we can experience God's providential care over our lives.

The significance of this feast for the New Covenant believer.

We know that God has provided the ultimate rest from our works, the ultimate Sabbath rest through Jesus the Messiah. We know He is our sin offering and that we must recognize our sin and repent for our names to be inscribed in the Book of Life (Phil. 4:3 and Rev. 3:5). We know the ultimate Day of Judgment of sin will come because Jesus' death demonstrated that sin must be judged (He received the judgement in our place), and His resurrection shows that God has appointed Him the Judge (see John 5:21-27; 12:31; and Acts 17:31). The Ultimate Day of Judgment will come when the trumpet shall sound and Jesus the Messiah returns to judge the earth (I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:52). We are called to repent and celebrate the New Creation that has begun in the Messiah (2 Cor. 5:17; Romans 5:12-19; and I Cor. 15:45) and will come in fullness when he returns (Romans 9:19-22).

Suggestions

1. Wish your Jewish friend a Happy New Year. Perhaps you could even send a Rosh Hashana card.
2. Ask your Jewish friend what he is doing for Rosh Hashana and how his family celebrates the holiday.
3. Be prepared to give a brief (one or two minute) testimony of what the Feast of Trumpets means to you as a New Covenant believer. You might find it helpful to write this out and have the outline firmly fixed in your mind.
4. For educational purposes, attend High Holiday services at a Messianic congregation (invite a friend) or at a synagogue (seats are expensive, but some non-paid seating is usually available for students and some synagogues advertise free seating).

THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

PART 2. YOM KIPPUR

Ten days after Rosh Hashana (on the 10th of Tishri) comes Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. This most solemn of days occurs sometime during the last two weeks of September and the first two weeks of October.

The Biblical day begins at sundown, not sunrise. ("And there was evening and there was morning — the first day." Gen. 1:5) Yom Kippur, then, begins at sundown on the 9th of Tishri. Since this is a day of solemn fasting, a large family meal is joyfully eaten during the afternoon before the fast begins.

Among some orthodox Jews, there is a custom (rare today) called "Kapporot." This involves swinging a chicken over one's head to atone for one's sins, a rooster for a male and a hen for a female. A prayer is recited: "This is my substitute, this is my pardon, this is my atonement, this rooster goes to death and I shall enter a long, happy and peaceful life." The bird is then ritually slaughtered and given to the poor. Although this practice is not widely accepted among the rabbis, its very existence shows a certain consciousness of the necessity of a substitutionary blood atonement. A remnant of this practice substitutes a charitable gift of money, tied in a handkerchief, in place of a chicken. This is known as "tzedakah" (righteousness).

The synagogue services begin with the Evening Service at which the famous Kol Nidrei is chanted. The Kol Nidrei, or "All Vows", is a prayer which asks God to absolve the worshipper from all vows made during the previous year, vows which were imperfectly kept. During this service, the Tallit or prayer shawl, is worn by all males who have been "Bar Mitzvahed," i.e., who have passed through the rites of manhood. (Only married men wear the Tallit in Orthodox synagogues.)

The lengthy Yom Kippur services involve confession of sin collectively, traditional prayers, chants, and scripture readings (Lev. 16, the Book of Jonah, various Psalms, etc.) The services close with the sounding of the shofar, or ram's horn trumpet, symbolizing the closing of the heavenly gates. During the High Holy Days, God is said to bring His heavenly court into session to judge the deeds of mankind. Court opens with Rosh Hashana and closes with the final shofar blast of Yom Kippur. One hopes one is sealed in the Book of Life at the close of Yom Kippur.

If this is the Day of Atonement, then where is the Atonement, where is the payment for sin? In the Torah, the five books of Moses, sin is atoned for by the sacrificial animal, as we shall see below. But how is sin atoned for now, according to Rabbinic Judaism, since the Temple is not in existence? Leviticus 16:30 reads ". . . on this day, atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you." The rabbis have interpreted this to mean that the day itself atones for sin. Since there is no longer a blood atonement possible, repentance, prayer, fasting, and charity are substituted for the sacrifice. There is also reference made to Abraham's obedience in being willing to offer up his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice, on Mount Moriah (which later became the Temple Mount). His act is thought to have some merit in saving the nation.

In the Bible, however, we read in Leviticus 16 that sin was atoned for by the blood of the sacrificial victim. The high priest, after becoming ritually pure, offered a bull for his sins and the sins of his household. Then two goats were set aside. Lots were cast, and one goat was chosen to be the scapegoat or "Azazel." The High Priest slaughtered the other goat to atone for the sins of Israel and brought the blood into the Holy of Holies. The scapegoat was sent away to be lost in the desert after the High Priest laid both hands on its head and confessed the sins of Israel. In this way, the sins of the nation were symbolically carried off into the desert. The hides, flesh, and offal of the sacrificial animals were carried outside the camp and burned. The people were to fast and rest from their work. Anyone who did not fast was to be cut off from the people, and anyone who did any work at all was to be destroyed.

The Significance of Yom Kippur for the New Covenant believer.

As New Covenant believers, we know that the Messiah is the "atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:2). Jesus is our great and pure High Priest who offered himself as the atonement for our sins by taking all the punishment for our sins upon himself in our place. As the prophet, Isaiah, said, "the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6). He was taken outside the camp to be destroyed, and his blood was presented in the ultimate, heavenly Holy of Holies once and for all, not year after year. God calls us to humble ourselves before Him, to repent and turn to him in faith, resting from our works, our own attempts to be accepted as righteous in His eyes (Gal. 3:10 & 11, Heb. 4:1-11), and to personally receive the Messiah's sacrifice as the all sufficient atonement for our sins. (Hebrews 1-12, Titus 3:4)

Suggestions

1. Read Leviticus 16, 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11, Isaiah 53, & Hebrews 5-10
2. Ask your Jewish friend what he is doing for Yom Kippur, etc. (He may be fasting and going to services or he may be doing nothing at all.)
3. Ask Jewish friends about their concept of sin and atonement. Discuss the sacrificial system. Challenge them to read Leviticus with an eye towards atonement.
4. Prepare a 1-2 minute testimony of what Yom Kippur means to you.
5. For educational purposes, attend a Yom Kippur service at a synagogue (paid seating is expensive, but free student seating is often available and some synagogues advertise free seating). I recommend the Kol Nidrei service at a Reform or Conservative synagogue. You might also visit a Messianic congregation if they have a service.
6. Fast, pray and mourn for those who have no atonement apart from Messiah.

SUCCOS (OR SUKKOT)

On the fifteenth day of the month of Tishri (late Sept. or early Oct.) comes the joyous holiday of Succos, or the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. This is five days after Yom Kippur. Observant members of the Jewish community begin building a succah as soon as Yom Kippur is finished. This is a small booth with a roof made of branches so that the stars can shine through and direct one's thoughts toward heaven. The Succah is often decorated with colorful fruits of the harvest, gourds, pictures, etc. Meals are to be eaten in this structure during the celebration of this feast which lasts for eight days.

Traditional symbols include the "lulav", made of palm, myrtle and willow branches bound together and the "etrog" or citron, which is a citrus fruit resembling a lemon. Together these are known as the "four species." They are carefully purchased in preparation for the feast. The four species cannot be borrowed (although they can be given away with the stipulation that they must be returned!) The four species have numerous possible symbolic meanings. They are seen as representing the four-letter name of God, YHVH). They can also refer to the worshipper. The etrog represents the heart, the palm the backbone, the myrtle the eyes and the willow the lips. The participant is reminded to serve God with one's heart and mind, body, eyes and lips. The four species are waved in the four directions of the compass to remind the worshipper of God's rule over all creation.

Succos is a harvest festival and is a time to ponder the harvest of the nations in the Messianic Age, when all nations are brought into God's kingdom. Redemption, peace and brotherhood are expected to be experienced by all. The seventy bullocks sacrificed during the first seven days are interpreted by the rabbis as having atoned for the sins of the 70 nations of the world; the single bullock offered on the eighth day is interpreted as having been for Israel. Hospitality and the invitation to the poor to participate in the feast are also in focus. The Hallel (Ps. 113-118) is chanted.

In the Bible, the Israelites were told to refrain from work and hold a sacred assembly on the first and eighth days. They were to dwell in booths (as a reminder of God's care during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness) and take choice fruit and leafy branches and rejoice before the Lord. On the first day, in addition to the regular offerings, 13 bullocks were sacrificed along with two rams, 14 male lambs and a goat for a sin offering. The number of bullocks diminished by one each day to make a total number of 70. On the eighth day, only one bullock was offered. The prophet Zechariah spoke of a time when all nations would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16 & 17). The penalty for not coming was to be drought.

The significance of Succos for the New Covenant believer.

In Jesus' time, there was the practice of the pouring out of the water libation conducted by the priest on duty. This practice reached its climax on the last day of the feast known as the Hoshana Rabba, when, with much ceremony and singing, a golden vessel of water was poured out symbolizing dependence upon God to send down his blessing from heaven, the rain. It was in this context that Jesus said, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living

water will flow from within him." (John 7:37 & 38). Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to quench our spiritual thirsting and produce a harvest of fruit in us. (John 15:5)

We are eligible to receive the Spirit because Jesus Himself came and "tabernacled" with us. He became the sin offering we needed. People of all nations are coming into a covenant relation with the God of Israel. He has offered us his hospitality and providential care if we rest from our works and trust in the ultimate sin offering he has provided. We are called, in joyous response to God's love and care, to serve him with all our beings. Psalm 118, part of the Hallel, says that "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone." (Ps. 118:22) Jesus is this stone (Mat. 21:42-44), and he has become the capstone of the New Temple made of living stones (I Peter 2:4-10; Eph. 2:19-22). We are called not only to bear fruit but to reap a harvest. The fields are ripe for harvest. Therefore, pray that the Lord will send out workers (Mat. 9:37 & 38).

Suggestions

1. Read Leviticus 23:33-44, Numbers 29:12-40, Zechariah 14:1-21, Psalms 113-118, and the New Covenant passages cited above.
2. Ask your Jewish friend what he is doing for Succos, if anything. Wish him a "Good Yontif" (literally a "good good-day")
3. Ask your friend if he has read the above passages. Perhaps you could go over them together.
4. Prepare a one-two minute testimony of what Succos means to you as a believer in Jesus.
5. Ask your friend to invite you to participate in the celebration. There is often a succah built on campus. You would probably be welcome to join in the fun.
6. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send out laborers to gather in all nations. Rejoice in God's providential care over you!

HANUKKAH

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire was divided by his generals. Israel was a bone of contention between the kingdoms of Syria to the north and Egypt to the south. After changing hands several times, it was conquered by Antiochus the Great of Syria in 198 BC. Antiochus IV, his son, succeeded him in 175 BC. He decided to launch a campaign against Egypt before they retaliated for his father's conquest of Israel.

Israel was geographically between Syria and Egypt. In order to consolidate his forces and present a united front against Egypt, Antiochus IV instituted a form of religious and cultural totalitarianism. The Jews, who persisted in their ways, were a thorn in his side. Antiochus IV replaced the high priest Onias with his Greek-minded brother, Joshua, who changed his name to Jason. A radical policy of Hellenization was inaugurated. A Greek gymnasium was constructed, Greek customs were propagated, and Greek athletics were encouraged among the junior priests.

Many of the upper class and many priests went along with these policies, but pious Jews known as the Hasidim kept Jewish practices. Antiochus established a state religion of Zeus worship and declared himself the visible incarnation of the deity, "Epiphanes," God manifest. He then issued a decree prohibiting, on pain of death, any expression of Torah observance such as circumcision. The temple and priesthood were to serve the pagan Zeus religion. Pagan gods were brought into the temple, and pagan cultic worship was set up. An altar to Zeus was erected, and pigs were sacrificed to the idol.

Meanwhile in the little village of Modein northwest of Jerusalem, an aged priest, Mattathias, lived with his five sons John, Simon, Judah, Eleazar and Jonathan. An emissary from Antiochus IV called upon Mattathias to make the pagan sacrifice, but he refused. When another of his townsmen stepped forward to do it, the aged priest struck him down on the altar and also killed the king's emissary. The revolution gained momentum under Mattathias and his sons.

When Mattathias died in 166 BC, his son, Judah (nicknamed "the hammer" or Maccabeus) took his place. He led the guerilla fighters against the Syrian Greeks. They fought against overwhelming odds yet won the victory. The temple was regained in 165 BC and rededicated. Hanukkah means "dedication". According to tradition, the ritual oil used in the temple lasted eight days when there was only enough for one. That is why the Hanukkah menorah has eight branches plus the "shamash" or servant light and why the festival lasts eight days.

Hanukkah is a joyful time in the Jewish home. Special foods are prepared. The oil used to fry the traditional potato pancakes, or latkes, is reminiscent of the oil in the temple. (In Israel, doughnuts or "sufganiyot" are fried.) The children are given "gelt" (gifts of money, chocolate coins, or presents). The nine-branched candelabra called the "Hanukkiah" or Hanukkah menorah is lit at dusk. A servant candle called the "shamash" is used to light the rest. Each day an additional candle is lit until all eight plus the shamash are lit on the last evening. A blessing is recited and the traditional song "Maoz Tsur" or "Rock of Ages" is sung. During this festival children play a gambling game

with a top known as a "dreydel". Each of the top's four sides have a Hebrew letter. The letters are said to represent the Hebrew words meaning "a great miracle happened here". The central themes of Hanukkah are God's miraculous deliverance of His people from oppression, His provision for His people, light, and the dedication of the temple.

Hanukkah Fulfilled

We are told in John 10:22 that Jesus was walking in the Temple area at Hanukkah. (This is the only direct mention of Hanukkah in the whole Bible!) The people asked "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus said, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak of me...I and the Father are one." John's reference to Hanukkah is no coincidence. The people were looking for a deliverer like the Maccabees to free them from Rome. This hope was on people's minds especially during Hanukkah. However, a greater deliverance was coming. God himself was in their midst, and His agenda for Israel's salvation was infinitely greater than liberation from Rome.

Isaiah prophesied: "...in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan — The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (9:1,2 & 6). Through the birth of a child, something weak and small, God would provide deliverance for His people! God would send His light into a world of spiritual darkness, first be seen in Galilee, where Jesus began his earthly ministry. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). He came as the servant light or "shamash" in order to give his light to us. Messiah cleanses us and dedicate us to God so that we can be His spiritual Temple.

Suggestions

1. Ask Jewish friends what they do for Hanukkah. Perhaps they will invite you to watch the lighting of the Menorah?
2. Just for fun, sponsor a Hanukkah party and invite your Jewish friends or work on one together! Fry latkes or sufganiyot, play dreidel, enjoy!
3. Send a Hanukkah card or gift to your Jewish friend. Mention that the only passage in the Bible which directly speaks of Hanukkah is John 10:22 in the New Covenant! Perhaps you can explain this as you present your friend with a Bible as a Hanukkah gift.
5. Let us remember God's faithfulness to deliver his people at Hanukkah.

THE JEWISH FEAST OF PURIM A TIME OF REVELRY AND REJOICING

Purim, or the Feast of Lots, was established to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews who remained in Persia after the Babylonian captivity. The account is given in the book of Esther. The feast is celebrated on the 14th of the Jewish month of Adar, the very day which had been chosen by the lot ("pur") for the destruction of the Jewish people. According to the account, the evil Haman (boo!) used his position as the king's advisor to plot to wipe out all of the Jewish residents of the city of Shushan and the rest of the Persian empire. This would have meant the extinction of the people of God!

The account given is a demonstration of the providence of God to deliver his people. Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai were in the right place at the right time to be used of God to bring a turnabout of events. Mordecai, a descendant of Kish (the father of Saul) succeeds in destroying Haman (boo!), a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek. Saul had disobeyed God in not destroying. (See Exodus 17:8-16, 1 Samuel 15:7-33 and Esther 2:5).

Though preceded by the Fast of Esther the day before, Purim is the merriest of all Jewish holidays and is celebrated in an irreverent and riotous manner. During the synagogue service conducted in the evening (the Ma'ariv Service) and then on the following morning, the scroll of Esther, also known as the "Megillah" is read in full. From this is derived the expression "the whole Megillah", meaning a long and involved story. During this reading, the stamping of feet and noisemakers known as "groggers" are used to blot out the name of Haman (boo!). Some people even write the name of Haman (boo!) in chalk on the soles of their shoes so that his name can be literally wiped out. Sometimes Haman (boo!) is even burned in effigy.

A rather interesting part of the Purim celebration, and one which illustrates the extent to which merriment is carried, is the traditional idea of getting so drunk that you cannot distinguish between the phrases, "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessed be Mordecai". Of course, not everyone takes things to this extreme! Traditional foods include tri-cornered poppy seed or fruit-filled cookies known as hamantashen (Haman's ears or pockets). In addition, kreplach, triangularly shaped meat-filled wontons, are enjoyed. It is considered a commanded good deed or "mitzvah" to give gifts to at least two poor people during Purim. Gifts of fruit, cookies, and candy known as "shalach mones" are also given to friends.

During this festival, celebrants frequently dress up as various Biblical characters. Often a raucous and lively "Purimspiel" (Purim play) is performed with a great deal of buffoonery. A child may be chosen as a Purim King, or someone may be picked as Purim Rabbi and honored with mock pomp and ceremony. More common in recent times is a beauty contest to pick a "Queen Esther" for the occasion.

Purim and the New Covenant Believer

Though Purim is not specifically mentioned in the New Covenant, the themes involved are of considerable importance to believers in Jesus as Messiah. Time and time again

in the scriptures that which man meant for evil God used for the salvation of His people. Psalm 22 occupies a central place in the Jewish celebration. This is, of course, the Psalm Jesus quoted from the tree. "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" The evil Haman (boo!) sought the destruction of the people of God, yet the Sovereign One not only preserved his covenant people but also judged those who opposed Him. Many saw and feared and turned to the Living LORD of Israel. Remember if it wasn't for the impalement (a form of crucifixion) of Haman and the deliverance of the Jewish people, the Messiah couldn't have come to deliver both Jews and Gentiles by hanging on a tree himself. He was delivered to death by wicked men, both Roman and Jewish leaders, but God intended it for our deliverance.

Suggestions

1. Wish your Jewish friend "Hag Sameach" (Happy holiday).
2. Read the book of Esther and boo Haman!
3. Sponsor a Purim party yourself. Bake some hamantashen, put on a play, dress up in costumes, and have some fun. (Go easy on the wine!)
4. Give your Jewish friends "shalach mones" (see above).
5. Explain your experience of the providence of God in your life. Tell your Jewish friends the God who was with Esther and Mordecai is still working in the lives of people today.
6. Communicate that Purim is important to you because Jesus our Messiah had to come through the Jewish people.

SOME ADDITIONAL JEWISH HOLIDAYS

The Weekly Sabbath or "Shabbat"

Religious Jews keep the Sabbath from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. There are restrictions regarding work, travel, turning on appliances, etc. which are kept to varying degrees according to the level of commitment to the traditions. Sometimes non-Jews have been recruited to perform functions forbidden to Jews, such as turning on lights, etc. Often Jewish establishments close early on Shabbat. The Shabbat meal on Friday evening is a special time. The mother lights the sabbath candles before the sun sets and recites the blessing. Traditional Sabbath bread (Hallah) and wine are placed on the table. The father says the Kiddush sanctifying the occasion and recites the blessings over the wine and bread. Services are held Friday night and Saturday morning at the synagogue. A special service called "Havdalah" (separation) marks the end of the Sabbath. At the Havdalah service a kiddush cup is filled to overflowing symbolizing God's overflowing blessing, a special spice box is passed around to be smelled, and a special braided candle is lighted.

God instituted the Sabbath for two reasons: to remember the Creation, and to remember the Redemption from Egypt. (Compare Exodus 20:11 with Deuteronomy 5:15.) In Messiah we have a new creation and a new redemption accomplished through his resurrection on Sunday. Through Jesus we have the ultimate Sabbath rest. Just as at Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) the Jewish people were to rest from their labors, so also we have a Sabbath rest from trying to gain acceptance to God through our own works. We can rest in the full redemption Messiah has won for us and gain refreshing for the work He has called us to. (See Heb. ch. 4.)

Yom Hashoah

Special programs are held during this Holocaust day of remembrance. The Holocaust is the ultimate expression of the anti-semitism and persecution the Jewish people have suffered for centuries. Most Jewish people have some connection with the Holocaust, either personal, through a family member, or at least as part of the Jewish experience. This is a good occasion for Christians to educate themselves about these things and to express solidarity with the Jewish community in taking a stand against anti-semitism.

Tisha B'Av

This means the ninth day of the month of Av. This is the day when the ancient temple was destroyed and, according to tradition, is also the date to remember other such catastrophes. We are now the living temple of Messiah (1 Pet. 2:5, Eph. 2:21).

Simchat Torah

Literally this means "Rejoicing Over the Law". It marks the end of the cycle of liturgical readings in the synagogue. (Many passages, including Isaiah 53, are left out of these selected readings.) Simchat Torah occurs immediately after Sukkot. The Torah scrolls are paraded around the synagogue with much joy and festivity. Messiah lived a perfect life for us and fulfilled the Torah, died to pay for our sins in breaking the Torah, and rose to give us new hearts to keep the moral principles of Torah. We can really "rejoice over the Law" now that we are under grace!

Jewish Holidays and Gospel Witness Chart

<u>Holiday</u>	<u>Theme in Judaism</u>	<u>Biblical Emphasis</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
Passover	God's Deliverance Messiah Passover Lamb	God's Deliverance Messiah The "Lamb of God"	Ex. 12, Is. 53 Luke 22
Shavuot Pentecost	Harvest Giving of Torah Birth of Israel	Harvest The Holy Spirit Birth of Church	Nu. 28:26-31, Dt. 16:9-17 Acts 2:1
Rosh HaShana	Judgement Repentance Shofar (Trumpet) Book of Life	Judgement Repentance Last Trumpet Book of Life	Nu. 29:1-6 I Thess. 4:16 1 Cor. 15:52 Dan. 12:1 Phil. 4:3 Rev. 22:19
Yom Kippur	Forgiveness Fasting	Forgiveness Atonement	Lev. 16 Heb. 5-10
Sukkot Tabernacles	Harvest Provision Messiah	Provision Providence Messiah	Lev. 23:33-44 Nu. 29:12-40 Zech.14:1-21 John 7:37ff
Hanukkah	Deliverance Light	Deliverance Dedication Light of World	Is. 9:4ff, Dn.11:31 Jn. 10:22,
Purim	God's Providence Deliverance Paty Time!	God's Providence Deliverance	Esther

JEWISH HOLIDAYS 1998-2005

1998 begins in 5758 and ends in 5759.

Purim	Thu,	Mar 12,	1998
Passover	Sat,	Apr 11,	1998
Yom Hashoah	Thu,	Apr 23,	1998
Shavuot	Sun,	May 31,	1998
Tisha B'Av	Sat,	Aug 1,	1998
Rosh Hashanah	Mon,	Sep 21,	1998
Yom Kippur	Wed,	Sep 30,	1998
Sukkot	Mon,	Oct 5,	1998
Simchat Torah	Tue,	Oct 13,	1998
Hanukkah	Mon,	Dec 14,	1998

1999 begins in 5759 and ends in 5760.

Purim	Tue,	Mar 2,	1999
Passover	Thu,	Apr 1,	1999
Yom Hashoah	Tue,	Apr 13,	1999
Shavuot	Fri,	May 21,	1999
Tisha B'Av	Thu,	Jul 22,	1999
Rosh Hashanah	Sat,	Sep 11,	1999
Yom Kippur	Mon,	Sep 20,	1999
Sukkot	Sat,	Sep 25,	1999
Simchat Torah	Sun,	Oct 3,	1999
Hanukkah	Sat,	Dec 4,	1999

2000 begins in 5760 and ends in 5761.

Purim	Tue,	Mar 21,	2000
Passover	Thu,	Apr 20,	2000
Yom Hashoah	Tue,	May 2,	2000
Shavuot	Fri,	Jun 9,	2000
Tisha B'Av	Thu,	Aug 10,	2000
Rosh Hashanah	Sat,	Sep 30,	2000
Yom Kippur	Mon,	Oct 9,	2000
Sukkot	Sat,	Oct 14,	2000
Simchat Torah	Sun,	Oct 22,	2000
Hanukkah	Fri,	Dec 22,	2000

2001 begins in 5761 and ends in 5762.

Purim	Fri,	Mar 9,	2001
Passover	Sun,	Apr 8,	2001
Yom Hashoah	Fri,	Apr 20,	2001
Shavuot	Mon,	May 28,	2001
Tisha B'Av	Sun,	Jul 29,	2001
Rosh Hashanah	Tue,	Sep 18,	2001
Yom Kippur	Thu,	Sep 27,	2001
Sukkot	Tue,	Oct 2,	2001
Simchat Torah	Wed,	Oct 10,	2001
Hanukkah	Mon,	Dec 10,	2001

2002 begins in 5762 and ends in 5763.

Purim	Tue,	Feb 26,	2002
Passover	Thu,	Mar 28,	2002
Yom Hashoah	Tue,	Apr 9,	2002
Shavuot	Fri,	May 17,	2002
Tisha B'Av	Thu,	Jul 18,	2002
Rosh Hashanah	Sat,	Sep 7,	2002
Yom Kippur	Mon,	Sep 16,	2002
Sukkot	Sat,	Sep 21,	2002
Simchat Torah	Sun,	Sep 29,	2002
Hanukkah	Sat,	Nov 30,	2002

2003 begins in 5763 and ends in 5764.

Purim	Fri,	Mar 18,	2003
Passover	Thu,	Apr 17,	2003
Yom Hashoah	Tue,	Apr 29,	2003
Shavuot	Fri,	Jun 6,	2003
Tisha B'Av	Thu,	Aug 7,	2003
Rosh Hashanah	Sat,	Sep 27,	2003
Yom Kippur	Mon,	Oct 6,	2003
Sukkot	Sat,	Oct 11,	2003
Simchat Torah	Sun,	Oct 19,	2003
Hanukkah	Sat,	Dec 20,	2003

2004 begins in 5764 and ends in 5765.

Purim	Sun,	Mar 7,	2004
Passover	Tue,	Apr 6,	2004
Yom Hashoah	Sun,	Apr 18,	2004
Shavuot	Wed,	May 26,	2004
Tisha B'Av	Tue,	Jul 27,	2004
Rosh Hashanah	Thu,	Sep 16,	2004
Yom Kippur	Sat,	Sep 25,	2004
Sukkot	Thu,	Sep 30,	2004
Simchat Torah	Fri,	Oct 8,	2004
Hanukkah	Wed,	Dec 8,	2004

2005 begins in 5765 and ends in 5766.

Purim	Fri,	Mar 25,	2005
Passover	Sun,	Apr 24,	2005
Yom Hashoah	Fri,	May 6,	2005
Shavuot	Mon,	Jun 13,	2005
Tisha B'Av	Sun,	Aug 14,	2005
Rosh Hashanah	Tue,	Oct 4,	2005
Yom Kippur	Thu,	Oct 13,	2005
Sukkot	Tue,	Oct 18,	2005
Simchat Torah	Wed,	Oct 26,	2005
Hanukkah	Mon,	Dec 26,	2005

Author's Note

This is an experimental version of the guide, published in-house. Any reactions, suggestions, or criticisms are welcome. I am charting new waters, and any such undertaking involves risks. It is my hope that this guide will serve the church by better equipping God's people for witness and helping them to more fully understand our Jewish heritage as New Covenant believers.

Additional Resources on Jewish Holidays

From an Jewish-Christian perspective

Celebrate the Feasts, by Martha Zimmerman, Bethany House
(This contains practical ideas for families to celebrate Jewish holidays at home.)

Christ in the Passover, by Ceil and Moishe Rosen, Moody Press

The Fall Feasts of Israel, by Mitch and Zhava Glaser, Moody Press

The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel, by Victor Buksbazen, Friends of Israel

The CHAIM New Covenant Passover Haggadah, by Fred Klett, available from the author to copy and use in your church.

The Jewish Holidays and Their New Covenant Implications, Fred Klett, available from the author.
(It covers basically the same material as this guide, but the suggestions are for laymen.)

Shabbat, a New Covenant Perspective, by Fred Klett, available from author.
(Explains why New Covenant believers worship on Sunday. Written for new Jewish believers in Jesus.)

From a Jewish Perspective

Festivals of the Jewish Year, by Theodore H. Gaster, Quill, NY
(This is a scholarly approach.)

Jewish Family Celebrations, by Arlene Rossen Gaster, St. Martin's Press, NY
(A practical guide for Jewish families. This is very helpful in understanding how Jewish families celebrate. Recipes and songs are included.)

The Passover Anthology, The Sukkot Anthology, (Etc.), by Philip Goodman, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia (Goodman has written an anthology for each Jewish holiday including stories, folk tales, and songs.)

The Jewish Catalog, by Seigel, Strassfeld and Strassfeld, The Jewish Publication society, Philadelphia
(Practical and informative. Crafts, recipes, and "do-it-yourself" ideas. This is also useful in understanding how Jewish people celebrate.)

Some materials and articles online at www.chaim.org