

# SEASONS OF OUR JOY

## The Festivals of Leviticus 23

### And their meaning for those who follow the Jewish Messiah

All of the Festivals (and Fasts) mentioned in Leviticus 23 have a meaning in the past, present and future. They are multi-faceted and learning of them is much like peeling an onion. Even after you remove one layer there are more layers to be discovered. Each Festival teaches us about Messiah. Each speaks to the nature of God, and the ministry, life and message of Messiah. An example is **Shabbat**. It remembers the Exodus from Egypt. It is therefore a joyful expression of our Freedom. This is its past meaning. It reminds us that God is the creator (six days He worked and on the seventh He rested). It tells us that God is Awesome (He spoke and creation happened.) This tells us about the nature of God. It tells us that God wants peace and rest in our lives and that peace comes from worshipping the Prince of Peace. It also teaches that we do not have to work seven days a week. That God will take care of our needs as we rest in Him. This is its present meaning. And **Shabbat** looks to the time when Messiah returns when all creation will be redeemed and the world will know peace and Jew and Gentile will worship Him in Jerusalem. That is its future meaning.

Some of the Festivals also have agricultural meanings: **Firstfruits, Shavuot, and Sukkot**. **Firstfruits** occurs during the **Passover** (Pesach) season. It is the day after the Shabbat of the Festival. The Saducees believed this to be the Shabbat that occurs during the Passover season. So **Firstfruits** to the Saducees occurred on Sunday. **Firstfruits** acknowledges that it is God who blesses us with increase. Every blessing in my life comes from God and I acknowledge that and honor Him by setting aside the first part to God. A farmer would actually put a ribbon around the first fruit on a tree and that firstfruit belonged to God. That firstfruit which is dedicated to God makes holy the rest of the harvest. That is its important present meaning. **Firstfruits** was the day of Messiah's resurrection. This is another past meaning. We remember Yeshua, who is the firstfruits of the resurrection on that day. Because He was resurrected we can trust that we will be resurrected also. That is its future meaning.

**Passover** (Pesach) is about the Exodus. We teach our children history by eating the story and telling the story. That is its past. Yeshua used it to teach about himself; He was the Passover lamb; and changed its celebration into a way of remembering Him. That is its present meaning. We remember Messiah in the Passover Seder. But it also has Messianic kingdom themes in Elijah's cup and it draws us to Messiah's return. We send a child to see if Elijah has come, because Elijah will appear before Messiah's return. We say and sing, "Next year in Jerusalem!" This reminds us that our greatest desire is for Messiah to return so that we can worship him in Jerusalem. (Zech 14)

**Shavuot** (Weeks) in English is often called Pentecost (50) to represent the 50 days between Firstfruits and Shavuot. \*(See Endnote)

Using the word Pentecost misses how we are to count. We count seven weeks (a completeness of a completeness-seven is the number of completeness) and then one day. It has an agricultural theme. Judaism which has been celebrating these Festivals for millennia has added extra-biblical meaning to these days. We should not be afraid of extra-biblical teaching so long as it does not violate what we know to be truth in the Bible. Some of this teaching can be of great value to us as believers. **Shavuot** is connected in Jewish life with the giving of Torah and Ruth (past meaning.) The giving of Torah is a part of **Shavuot** because of the time of the year that **Shavuot** occurs and Ruth because of the admonition not to harvest the corners of the fields. The grain on the edges of the fields belongs to the poor and is to be harvested by them. This is what Ruth was doing in Boaz' field. The Giving of the Holy Spirit on **Shavuot** tells us much about the nature of God who has given us his Holy Word and the Holy Spirit so we might be led into Truth. These two past events are the foundation for our life in Messiah. All the agricultural feasts are also looking ahead to the great celebration of the harvest perhaps best represented by the resurrection of the dead. Ruth reminds us that the O'lam Haba (the world to come) will include Jews and Gentiles worshipping Him in Jerusalem. These are its future meanings.

**Yom T'ruah** (Day of the Sounding of the Shofar) is a remembrance of the creation. The blasting forth reminds us that God spoke forth and the heavens and the earth were created. This is its past. The Shofar was sounded upon going into battle and also to announce the King. This also represents the past. The blowing of the shofar is a call to repentance. This is its present meaning. It reminds us of the great heavenly shofar mentioned in 1 Thess. 4:16 which will announce the return of our King, who will be returning as King of Kings and Lord of Lord's before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that "He is Lord." He will return as Judge and so the hearing of the shofar should cause us to take stock and repent and prepare ourselves to meet Him. The truth in Messiah is that repentance in the present prepares us for His future coming. Judaism teaches that Messiah will come on this day. The days between Yom T'ruah (or Rosh haShanah) and Yom Kippur are the **Days of Awe**: Days of self-examination and making things right between us and God and between us and others. This is a present season of repentance which leads up to **Yom Kippur** (The Day of Atonement).

**Yom Kippur** was the one day of the year that the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. God has always made a way for our sins to be forgiven, because He is a God of Mercy and He desires reconciliation with us. We fast to add some seriousness to the process. Mercy and the forgiveness of sins is a life and death business. This is its past meaning. Yeshua went into the real Holy of Holies as the High Priest did on **Yom Kippur** to provide for forgiveness of sins. The atonement has been purchased and is complete. It is available to all through faith in Messiah. **Yom Kippur** today is a fulfillment of the prophetic calling of the Jewish people from the time of the Tabernacle and Temple. There is salvation for the Jewish people and for Gentiles in the work that Yeshua accomplished by taking a better sacrifice once and for all time into the real Holy of Holies. (Heb. 9) This is its present meaning.

**Sukkot** (Feast of Booths or Tabernacles) is a harvest festival. We live in Sukkahs (temporary dwellings) to remind us of when we lived in the wilderness. We remember we were once wanderers in the Wilderness. This is its past meaning. It teaches us that the world is transitory. What is important is dwelling with God. His Shekinah filled the Tabernacle and He dwelt with us. This is its present meaning. **Sukkot** looks to the time when Messiah will dwell with us again. This will be a time when Messiah will rule the world and dwell with us as King of Kings. We also worship God with the four species: Lulavs and Etrogs. And we anticipate the harvest yet to come.

We are seeing a wonderful harvest today among the Jewish people. And I myself am one small fruit in the harvest of Jews that God is bringing into the world today. Last Shabbat in Israel eleven came to faith at a congregation near Haifa. This is happening all over Israel right now. The faith of Jews in their Jewish Messiah is the necessary ingredient for Messiah's return. His words on the Mt of Olives looking over Jerusalem, the capitol of the Jewish people, is that you will not see me until you say: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Or "Welcome Messiah." What God is doing among the Jewish people today will usher in the fulfillment of **Sukkot**-Jew and Gentile worshipping together in the Kingdom to Come (Olam Haba).

\*(One should use the Hebrew names for the Feasts and Fasts. One of the things that has happened to Jews is that Christians have changed Jewish things so that they have become unrecognizable to Jews. The gospel is very Jewish and yet has become foreign to Jews by changing Jewish language and context. If you talk to a Jew about Pentecost, he will have no idea that you are talking about Shavuot.)