

JULY

High Holidays

BY: Dari Goodfellow

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
✱	✱	✱	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
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✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱

————— Leviticus 23 —————

In the Old Testament God set up specific times for ancient Israel to meet with Him in various and special ways. As given to the Israelites in Leviticus 23, the Jewish calendar contains seven sacred feasts or festivals. Times that God set aside for His people when He asked them to come away from their daily, regular routines; to stop their activities; and give their time and attention to Him through celebration and rest.

These “appointed times” were for the benefit of the people. In the days of Moses when these feasts were inaugurated, the Israelite life was full of tedium and labor. God blesses the nation by commanding they stop their work and rest. And in that resting, they were to lay aside the busyness of the routine and focus on the magnificent — the true and living God. They were to feast and celebrate, not only as a commemoration and remembrance, but these ‘holidays’ were given so God’s people could participate and immerse themselves in the celebrated event and the full worship of God. By the reading of the Torah and through prayer and celebration, these feasts offered the Israelites a tangible activity by which they could participate in the past deeds of God’s salvation and His rescue. They were enjoying the blessing of the past right now in the present.

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts (times) of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations (assemblies); they are my appointed feasts (times)’” (Leviticus 23:2).

These seven appointed feasts are: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.

Before God gave the details for the seven feasts, He instituted the Sabbath, (as covered in a previous study). When God gave this command to the Israelites, He was symbolizing for them the six days of creation and day seven of rest. *“God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:3).* God

set the rhythm of time in motion, and this rhythm guided the Israelites through each year.

Going forward, the number ‘seven’ has significance all through Scripture, and it is used to calculate the rest of the festival schedule:

- Sabbath, the seventh day of the week
- Passover and Unleavened Bread, lasts one day plus seven days and no work on first and seventh days
- First Fruits, celebrated the day after the seventh day of Passover
- Pentecost, celebrated seven times seven (49) plus one day after Passover
- Trumpets, first day of the seventh month
- Day of Atonement, tenth day of the seventh month
- Tabernacles, middle of seventh month lasts seven days with no work on first and seventh day.

Representing a picture of the beautifully perfect “Garden of Eden” rest, the daily, delightful fellowship, and the exquisite tranquility Adam and Eve experienced with God, the Sabbath is interjected every seven days into ordinary lives and time. All the other feasts duplicate the Sabbath “rest” by calling God’s people aside to pause their daily living and concentrate on Him alone.

This study will focus on the last three feasts of the seven Jewish Festivals: Festival of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and briefly, Festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot). Together these three are known as the “High Holidays,” and occur in the Fall (September and October). Viewed also as the ‘days of awe and wonder,’ these special days begin a stirring journey for the Israelite soul as they each follow on the heels of the other. The close proximity of these festivals offered each Israelite multiple opportunities for soul searching and for vicariously experiencing the meaning of each celebration. The Festival of the Trumpets is the starting point.

The Festival of the Trumpets

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. On the first day of the appointed month in early autumn, you are to observe a day of complete rest. It will be an official day for holy assembly, a day commemorated with loud blasts of a trumpet. You must do no ordinary work on that day. Instead, you are to present special gifts to the LORD’” (Leviticus 23:24).

In the Old Testament the only explicit instructions for this day were to assemble, to rest, and to offer sacrifices. And special emphasis is given to making noise ... “a day commemorated with loud blasts of a trumpet” (verse 24). The central observance of the holiday is the blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn). In the Old Testament, the trumpet signaled time to stop working and assemble for worship. And “special gifts” were to be presented to the honoree, Almighty God. *“My offering, my food for my food offerings, my pleasing aroma, you shall be careful to offer to me at its appointed time” (Numbers 28:2).*

Today, the blowing of the shofar also reminds the Jewish participants of the coronation of their king, proclaiming God as the King of the universe. Over the course of the holiday, the shofar will sound 100 times. And each blast is an expression of the solemn reason for the celebration.

The Festival of Trumpets is known today as Rosh Hashanah, or, “Head of the Year.” This holiday is recognized as the beginning of the Jewish New Year, and the actions of the Jewish participants on Rosh Hashanah have an enormous impact on the rest of the year for each person.

Rosh Hashanah also commemorates the creation of the world and of Adam and Eve and it emphasizes the special relationship between God and man. It is the anniversary of man’s first sin and subsequent repentance. The call of the shofar is a call to repentance. The shofar blast also speaks of Abraham and his son Isaac, who was tied and ready to be sacrificed, when God suddenly produced a ram to be his substitute.

Jewish participants are urged to enter this special time with repentant hearts, as they recognize their sin and unworthiness before the Lord God. In one ritual of the festival, the men go to a body of water and empty their pockets into it, symbolically casting their sins into the water. They believe on Rosh Hashanah the destiny of the righteous is written in the Book of Life and the destiny of the wicked is written in the Book of Death. However, no name will be inscribed in either book for ten days.

As Rosh Hashanah celebrations end, Jewish believers enter the “Ten Days of Repentance.” These days are sandwiched between Rosh Hashanah and the next festival, Yom Kippur. Ten days to contemplate one’s sin and to repent.

Spiritual preparation includes honest self-examination and a turning to God. Turning away from themselves and reconciling with those who have been offended and reaching out in consideration for the needs of others. The Jewish believer is encouraged to do charitable acts during this time. These days set a tone of repentance for the next festival, just ten days away...the most holy festival...the Day of Atonement.

Something to consider:

What aspect about the Feast of Trumpets strikes you most?

What spiritual application can you find in this Feast that applies to your own life?

What benefits would there be today in having the shofar blasts (or something representing a daily reminder) to cause us to stop and take time to focus on God?

The Day of Atonement

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of Holy convocation (assembly), and you shall afflict (humble/deny) yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his



people. And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:26-32).

In the Old Testament this most holy and solemn day, the Day of Atonement, was the only day of the year when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle...the place where God resided. And God warned Moses that to enter this holy place on any other day would cause the death of the guilty person. The ceremony of atonement for sin was an extremely serious one, and could only be performed following explicit directions given by God. (To better understand how grave the obedience to these instructions was, take time to read Leviticus 10, when Aaron’s sons decided to worship their own way.)

Acting alone, Aaron, (the High Priest at this time), had to cleanse himself before changing into a different and less elaborate garment than the usual high

priestly attire. In preparation for the sin offering for the people, he first had to sacrifice a bull for a sin offering for himself and his own household (a sacrificial animal always had to be without spot or any blemish). That sacrificial blood was taken inside the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant to cleanse it. Afterwards, Aaron brought two goats and, in a type of lottery, selected one goat to represent the “*uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins had been*” (Leviticus 16:16). That designated goat was then sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant, and on the altar, and on the tabernacle itself. From the constant human contact, the house of God was unclean, and this goat’s blood was its cleansing agent. (I also urge you to read Leviticus 16 for the full description of the ritual God gave to Moses for the atoning of sin. God’s instructions are explicit and detailed and were to be followed to the letter.)

Now, for the second goat...

“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on

the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:20-22).

This ceremony became the most important part of the Day of Atonement. All the sins of the Israelites were symbolically transferred to this ‘scapegoat’ as Aaron laid his hands on the goat and confessed over it, “all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.” The laying on of the High Priest’s hands represented a connection between the confession of sin and subsequent atonement. Once this ceremony was completed, the sin-bearing goat was taken into the wilderness to die. The sin was gone, and the Day of Atonement was considered accomplished.

God’s final word on the matter in Leviticus 16:30, “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins.” The hearts of the Israelites were clean for another year.

In today’s Jewish traditions, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is celebrated with a day of rest and abstinence (fasting) from all food, drink, and sexual relations. Charity for others is emphasized during this time. For nearly 26 hours worshipping Jews spend most of the holiday in the synagogue, “afflicting” or humbling themselves through fasting, praying and meditating, contemplating their sin and asking for forgiveness.

Though a solemn day, Yom Kippur also has an element of joy, as Jewish believers are confident God forgives the sins of those who sincerely repent and who demonstrate their repentance through improved living and good deeds. During this time, the Jews believe their verdict of life is sealed in the Book of Life for another year.

Something to consider:

Do you remember the moment you came to faith in Christ? Share your salvation experience.

What brought you to accept the full atonement and salvation of Christ?

Explain why this Feast was so important to the Israelites. Compare that importance with the significance of Christ’s atonement for us.

Once Yom Kippur has ended, plans are immediately begun for the next festival, the Feast of the Tabernacles, which follows in just five days. These days are filled with the plans and construction of the temporary “booths” or shelters where God has commanded the people to dwell for this next festival.

The Feast of Tabernacles

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, besides the LORD’s Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute

forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:23-42).

This feast was covered in a previous study, so I will not explore all its features. But because it is the last of the “high holidays,” I want to remind us of some of its distinctives.

The Feast of Tabernacles is also known as “The Feast of Booths” or Sukkot, the last feast (the seventh) that God commanded the Israelites to observe. Harvest time has just ended, and the people are ready to celebrate, having constructed their temporary shelters (from tree branches) as required. This holiday joyously commemorates God’s continued provision for them with a good harvest and reminds them of His provision and protection during the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness.

In today’s world, the Jews still celebrate this week-long holiday. They build temporary shelters, and the objective is to spend as much time as possible in the “booth,” especially taking all meals in it. Each day of the Feast of Tabernacles is a day of blessings and celebration, and on the seventh day everyone’s fate is finalized (after being signed on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur).

With the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated, the yearly Jewish feasts have ended. The following paragraph is an excellent summary of the Jewish festivals by Duane A. Garrett in his piece entitled, “Feasts and Festivals of Israel,” (www.biblestudytools.com):

“Israel’s festivals were communal and commemorative as well as theological and typological. They were communal in that they drew the nation together for celebration and worship as they recalled the common origin and experience of the people. They were commemorative in that they kept alive the story of what God had done in the exodus and during the sojourn. They were theological in that the observance of the

festivals presented the participants with lessons on the reality of sin, judgment, and forgiveness, on the need for thanksgiving to God, and on the importance of trusting God rather than hoarding possessions. They were typological in that they anticipated a great fulfillment of the symbolism of the feast. It is not surprising that each of the major feasts is in some way alluded to in the New Testament.”

What do these festivals mean to the Christ-follower?

The festivals that we have studied are mainly for Jewish worshippers; however, many Messianic Jews and other Christian believers celebrate the feasts as well. In celebrating these “appointed times,” we can acknowledge and celebrate that what God did for the Israelites in the Old Testament, He is still doing for believers today. His preservation and protection of His chosen people extends to Christ-followers as well. We can rejoice knowing God’s preservation and protection of Israel eventually brought the blessed Savior to the world.

With its emphasis on the blowing of the trumpet, many believe Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of the Trumpets, points to the Rapture of the Church when Jesus will break through the clouds at the sound of a loud trumpet. Christians will leave their work and rise from the earth. Just as the trumpet called the Jewish nation to turn to God in repentance and to get ready for the Day of Atonement, so we are reminded one day the trumpet will call from Heaven, announcing the return of Jesus and warning the world of coming judgment. *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*

At Rosh Hashanah, the Jews take time to seriously consider their fate and speculate if their names will be written in the Book of Life for another year. As believing Christians we understand the call to repentance and belief in the full salvation Christ provided us. Ours is a beautiful assurance of eternal life knowing with

complete confidence our names are listed in God's Book of Life.

And here at this point, we realize the satisfaction we receive from our salvation in Christ. What the Israelites did in the Old Testament was a temporary satisfaction...simply rolling their sins ahead for a year and trusting in their good works to make them right with God. Christ's blood sacrifice on the Cross fully satisfied the penalty for all sin, past, present, future. His sacrifice was, "once for all" (Romans 6:10), the permanent solution. Belief and submission to God in faith and through Christ's death and miraculous resurrection, we are blessed with eternal life.

For the Day of Atonement many believe that day denotes the Second Coming of Christ. For the remnant of Jews who will *"look upon Him whom they have pierced,"* (Zechariah 12:10b), it will be a time of repentance of sin and receiving Jesus as the Messiah.

The Feast of Tabernacles is believed to express the idea of Jesus 'tabernacling' with us, a sign of God's faithful presence with His people. One day, Jesus will dwell with man forever in His physical kingdom (Revelation 21:3).

Something to consider:

Should believing Christians today observe the Jewish Festivals of the Bible? Why, or why not?

When you consider all seven God-given Festivals, what do you see as their overarching theme or purpose? What does this tell us about God and His love towards us?

God purposely set up times for His people to focus on Him. Have you set up times in your own life when you totally concentrate on Him? If so, share with your group.

Knowing God created the Sabbath for rest and fellowship with Him, does that change your approach to how you view your Sundays?

Is there a particular lesson or application you have learned from studying these Festivals?

As I researched and studied for this Festivals' topic, my heart was deeply stirred with the idea the very Creator of the universe expressed His interest and compelling

desire to spend time with His people. He even set up holidays with activities and commanded them to 'stop' and 'rest' and celebrate! He also established specific ways to acknowledge Him with their special gifts. Who could comprehend the depth of God's love for His people? These annual events presented tangible ways God was demonstrating His love. The Sabbath and the seven feasts were times He proposed for them to rest from the daily grind and focus on the holy and experience His love. God was continually trying to re-create the 'Garden of Eden's perfection' as a gift to His loved ones. He longed for the communion and conversation and fellowship again He had experienced with Adam and Eve.

Today, God loves His people (Christian believers) with the same indescribable depth He loved in Old Testament times. Replete with examples, the Bible clearly reveals where God's actions cry out to us from Heaven shouting how much He loves us and desires to personally fellowship with us, only asking us to recognize the depth of His love and respond with full submission and reliance on Him. This study has caused me to think about how much God deeply loves me, and how He longs to commune with me. Do you want to respond to that beautiful love calling us to spend more time with Him? I certainly do! 

About the Writer:

Dari Goodfellow lives with her daughter, Jill, and family in Gilbert, Arizona. She is the proud mother of three children and 'Marmie' of nine grandchildren.

Research and study resources:

<https://www.bibleproject.com>

<https://www.britannica.com>

<https://www.chabad.org>

<https://www.hebrew4christians.com>

<https://www.1517.org>, *40 Minutes in the Old Testament*

<https://www.gotquestions.org>