

***The Feasts
of Israel:
God's Plan of the Ages***

Volume One

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The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages

Volume One

An adult Bible study showing how a proper understanding of the major themes of the Old Testament is essential to understand and appreciate the New Testament.

(If you don't feel up to a Bible study, feel free to proceed directly to the story, starting with Volume Two (Old Testament) or Volume Five (New Testament).

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Other versions of the Bible were compared and analyzed, but not directly quoted.

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Preface and Disclaimer

God is infinite. I am very limited. God has all wisdom and knowledge. I am just a learner. God's Word is Truth. I make mistakes. I define a mistake as anything at all that does not line up under the authoritative and inerrant Holy Bible, the written Word of God. It is a fearful task I have undertaken, trying to 'rewrite' the entire story of the Bible, while knowing of a certainty that I will introduce errors into the holy Word of God. I am deeply sorry for them, and I apologize in advance.

On the other hand, there are many things in this study that do not line up with the current religious and theological Bible interpretations according to the doctrines of churchmen. I do not apologize for this; rather, it is intentional. My goal is to question all the doctrines which we have received from our forefathers – not necessarily to reject them, but at least to evaluate whether or not they are actually Scriptural! In too many places I have found that the Reformation did not go far enough. Doctrines we hold dear are actually perversions from the early Catholic church. They deliberately twisted and paganized every Scriptural truth which could have set 'their' people free to walk with God by His Spirit, resulting in the 'Dark Ages.' Intentionally sacrificing truth for power and control, they brutally tortured and killed millions of those who continued to insist upon truth. I consider myself a Protestant, and I vigorously protest any mixture of the Holy with the pagan and the profane.

"Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies..." (Jer 16:19) ...many lies. Lies about the nature and character of God and Jesus, lies about the nature of the Word of God, lies about the nature of heaven and hell, time and eternity, and even our own created purpose in life. These lies have cost us, dearly, to the point where some even refuse to study the 'Old' Testament, preferring the God of loving kindness and mercy of the 'New' Testament as if He were a different God! There will probably be some areas in which you disagree with my 'corrections.' I would enjoy a good debate with you on these things. We may both learn some things if we can debate them in a spirit of love and understanding, using the truth of Scripture as our foundation.

In my effort to understand (and thus help you understand) the Old Testament, I have spent a lot of time (and chased a lot of rabbits) in presenting Old Testament history, culture, and chronology. Though I have done a lot of research, actual facts from 3 to 7 millennia ago are rather limited and conflicting. So I have tried to fill in the gaps with speculation. Some things I say are controversial, which I don't mind at all, unless it starts to become divisive. That, to me, would be tragic. Please, just hear me out, give me your best argument if you disagree, but neither believe nor disbelieve me at all – I am not the authority here! Take it to the Lord in His holy Word and "Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so." Believe only what the Holy Spirit confirms.

In particular, I have spent hundreds of hours attempting to fit the history of the world into a reasonable chronology, which is used throughout this study as if it were fact. In recent history, I believe I am pretty accurate, but prior to 701 BC it is just guesswork. Once you get into the Catastrophic Era, there are so many variables, so many unknowns, that, literally, 'God only knows.' I always hope that God will 'inspire' me to 'get it right,' but He may have chosen you for that task. So I invite you to challenge me on any of my dates if you have better information than I. My best guess is that God created the universe no later than 5106 BC and no earlier than 12,000 BC. I will use the latest date until I find more data to push it back.

This study is not an exegesis of the Word of God. Good pastors use exegesis to bring out what is hidden within the Word, so that all may partake of its treasures. They limit themselves to what is actually there, correctly believing that God has put there all we need for salvation. But my study is an eisegesis. That means that I am reading into the Word things that are not there, things from history, from archaeology, astronomy and other sciences, from legend, from ancient Jewish Talmudic tradition as recorded in their 'Midrashim,' and from pure speculation.

Though I have bathed it in prayer and done my best to ensure it does not contradict the inerrant Word of God, **this still makes it a work of fiction**, a 'hypothesis,' if you will. Historical fiction takes facts from a time period and weaves a fiction story around them. In the same way my book takes facts from the Scriptures and weaves the story of God's plan of redemption around them, but it is still just a story. It is my limited understanding of God's incredible Plan of the Ages. It must not, therefore, be taken as 'gospel' or used to 'prove' anything to the non-Christian. I titled this work *The Feasts of Israel, God's Plan of the Ages*, since one purpose of the Feasts is to portray for us God's plan for time.

This study is not light reading. It will not be read by those of the 'me' generation who live high on sugar and have a 6 second attention span. It is for the mature Christian, who is curious to know how God may have done it, and who is interested in possible ways of resolving the many seeming conflicts in Scripture. For example, in Genesis 11 we have a list of the generations of Shem, which says (v 12) that Arphaxad became the father of Shelah. But in Luke 3:35 - 36 we see that Shelah was the son of Cainan, who was the son of Arphaxad. Why is Cainan skipped in Genesis? The Bible has many such 'contradictions,' as well as things which seem impossible to our rational minds. Where did God get the water to flood the earth to the tops of the mountains? Where did all that water go after the flood? There isn't enough water left in the world to flood the entire earth. How did God pull off the Red Sea crossing after the Exodus, and where and when did it happen? How did the sun stand still for the space of a whole day, or how did it go backward 10 steps on Hezekiah's sundial? Do myths such as the sinking of Atlantis fit in to the Bible story?

Are you at all curious? The answers to these and many other questions are not found in Scripture. Some Bible scholars say, "Don't worry about it. God is all powerful. Just chalk it up to another miracle." But that seems like too much of cop out. This study attempts to find some answers, and in the process I believe it will teach us more about God's ways, and help the holy Word of God come alive to thinking believers.

You see, many Christians have been raised in a vacuum. The scientific world (and the rest of the world, too) looks on with a mixture of ridicule and disgust, despising us for being so narrow-minded. We need to start thinking outside the box! We need to climb out of the playpen and grow up a little. We need to come out of the Scriptural Dark Ages. Traditional interpretations of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, do NOT in fact match with science (especially archaeology). We need to be able to give a reason for the hope that lies within us. Scripture is actually very reasonable; it is just our understanding of it that is lacking. Scripture always precisely complements good science, but we cannot afford to say, "Wherever science does not match the Scriptures it must be bad science." Consider the possibility that our understanding of the Scriptures may be at fault.

It sounds wonderfully spiritual to say, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it!" But that is the very attitude that turns away many thinking non-Christians in disgust. They believe the Bible to be a bunch of fables. If we want to reach those people, we need to be able to say, "God said it, I believe it, and this is how and why He could have done it." God did not give the Israelites the Feasts, for example, just to keep them busy. Once you understand what they portray, the gospel starts to become real, living, and even exciting. So yes, in this study I do think outside the box – way, way outside the box! Some of you will not like that, and dis-believe what I say. That is OK, as long as it gets you to thinking, praying, and searching the Scriptures for wisdom and understanding.

I have quoted a lot of Scripture in this study – I dare say some Scripture passages which you have never 'seen' before. Preachers insist, "Don't quote long passages; it puts people to sleep." Well, I quote long passages at times, and if you fall asleep so be it. My goal is to find out what God's Word says, and you can't do that unless you get the context. In the process, I have discovered many passages of Scripture that I had never 'seen' before, even though I have read the Bible from beginning to end several times. May you be as delightfully surprised as I was, and may you grow to love and appreciate God's holy Word even more as a result. We have been lied to, you and I, and the best way to counter lies is to rehearse, even immerse, ourselves with the truth of Scripture.

Though this is an adult Bible study, covering many difficult Biblical subjects, I have tried to lighten it up a bit by interspersing stories here and there. I've tried to tell these stories from the Hebrew perspective, using what I've learned in this study to make the story more accurate. I enjoyed the storytelling so much, that I have now written out a fictionalized 'history' of most of the Bible. Though I'm sure you already know the story, yet did you know that there are discrepancies between the four Gospels? Could they be inspired if they disagree with each other? Also, there are tantalizing questions as to why things happened the way they did. For example, why did the people shout Hosanna to Jesus when he came into Jerusalem on a donkey? What was special about that day, and why were they all gathered there anyway? Who knew of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He sweated great drops of blood and prayed, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will but Thine be done."? The disciples were all asleep. Is there any significance to Jesus' last words on the cross, "I thirst!" and "It is finished!"? How did Peter, an uneducated fisherman, write the books of 1st and 2nd Peter? Who taught him letters? Did he write anything else in the Bible? Did the apostle Paul ever meet Jesus before the road to Damascus? The Bible is full of delightful mysteries, and I love to dig for them as for hidden treasure. I have found interesting answers to these and more.

Non-believers dare to claim that some portions of the Gospels cannot be inspired, due to the conflicts and unanswered questions. I believe in word-by-word inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures in their original languages. I further believe that understanding the Old Testament helps us to sort out the seeming conflicts in the New. Therefore I've tried to re-tell the Gospel story from the Hebrew perspective, rearranging the narratives around the Feasts of Israel, and harmonizing the Gospels in such a way that the apparent conflicts are reasonably if not delightfully resolved. Though my narrative must be classed as 'historical fiction' yet it 'fits' the Scriptures better than anything else I've seen. (This New Testament portion of my story is now in Volume Five.)

In reading my book you will discover some unconventional capitalization. Please don't be offended – I do it for a reason. For example, Jesus claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (Jn 14:6) Notice the capitals? I sometimes do it with other things, too, like King and Word and Law. Not always, but I do it when I want to emphasize that they are divine, pertaining to The Holy, far above our kings and words and laws.

Speaking of offending people, I have something in my book to offend just about everyone. For example, I hit the Catholic church pretty hard for their wrong doctrines developed during the Dark Ages. My goal here is to finish the Reformation! I cannot afford to be wishy-washy on it! Yet the Reformation has transformed the Catholic church, too, and I know that God has many precious saints in it. He always has! I hope that they will forgive my stirring up their painful history. It needs to be exposed so we can correct our own wrong doctrines that we blindly inherited from them.

Another example is those who believe in some form of the theory of evolution. Again, I hit their faith pretty hard, as it denies the truth of the Scriptures and is used by Satan to destroy the tender faith of many young people in our system of public schools. Please understand that I do not hate the evolutionist! He is simply deceived. He believed what he was taught, and has not yet had the opportunity to discover almighty God the Creator. One of my goals in this book is to open his eyes to Truth with a capital T.

This brings up a very touchy subject nowadays – racism. Evolutionists must also be racist. They secretly like to think that their own race is more 'evolved' than all the others. In my mind, the most racist of all is the one who always goes around accusing others of racism rather than correcting their own issues. Those most strongly trying to defend the abortion of the innocents and the destruction of the traditional family structure are all evolutionists. Their hidden agenda here is to wipe out the Aboriginal and Negro races, which they consider inferior, though they are not honest enough to admit it anymore. But what nobody talks about is that the only real solution to racism is true faith in the Creator God who brought forth all peoples and nations from one man, Adam, and who loves each one of us equally, infinitely, and unconditionally.

Many evolutionists are uniformitarians. They claim that the gradual processes of the present are the key to interpret the past. Thus all we see in archaeology “must have happened millions and billions of years ago.” That turns the Bible story on its head! So I tell the story of the cataclysms which caused the Flood and the Ice Age, rearranging the landscape to the jumble of sedimentary layers we see now. It makes a fun story, if you can keep an open mind and not take offense at my ‘hypothesis.’ It’s just fiction, you know.

Another big group I pick on is Islam and the Muslims. I almost hate to, as the vast majority of them are more Christian than some of us Christians. Yet they are bound in a religion that rules by fear and lethal force, and seeks the purity of their faith by simply killing any who won’t convert. I hope and pray that this book will help to set them free to meet the God of love and truth, who rules not in fear and force but in mercy and grace.

I will no doubt also offend those with a strong Christian faith, who tightly hang on to the doctrines they were taught. We’ve been lied to! It’s almost impossible to shake us free from those deep-seated lies which form the foundation of our religious kingdoms. Trust me, I’m in the same boat. It hurts to see our pet beliefs come crashing down. But I must do everything I can to shake whatever does not line up with the holy Scriptures, “...in order that those things which cannot be shaken will remain.” (Heb 12:27)

One last group I’ll mention here is the biggest and the most sensitive of all, and I’m sure to offend them throughout my book. I have to, because our eternal destiny depends upon this group discovering the truth. I am intimately familiar with this group, as I have been part of it, even immersed in it, all my life. This is the group which God calls ‘sinners’ and which every one of us joined in infancy. The good news is that while God vigorously hates our sin, He passionately loves us anyway. But the bad news is that God cannot forgive us of our sin until we are willing to at least see it, acknowledge it, and repent of it. To help us do that, I talk about it, a lot, often in very direct and offensive ways. So please be forewarned. **This is an adult book.** I try to ‘keep it clean’ as much as possible, but some of mankind’s descent into depravity cannot be sanitized. I am not only trying to reveal the ways of God, but also the ways of Satan. We should not be ignorant of his schemes, that he gain no advantage over us. (2 Cor 2:11) If it is any consolation, the Bible is pretty direct about sin, too, and that has always been my pattern as I write.

Though I try not to single out any one type of sin over others, some moral vices such as infidelity, adultery, divorce, sexual perversion, sodomy, lust, pornography, and the like have become so prevalent now (and so destructive) that they do sometimes get emphasized. Yet from God’s perspective even a ‘little white lie’ is still heinous and worthy of death. We don’t see sin the way God does. His love for us is so great that His hatred against the sins that are destroying us must be just as great. So if I happen to rag on some of the secret sins of which you are guilty, please don’t be offended too much. I may not be guilty of the same sins, but my own sins are every bit as offensive to the God I serve. He will bring me through the purifying fire no less than you, because He loves me just like He loves you, dear Reader – and so do I.

Our God is a personal God. He revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Friend and Brother as well as our Savior, High Priest, Judge, Master, and King. He gave us His inerrant Word as our sure foundation. But more than that, He gave us His Holy Spirit to reveal His truth to our hearts so that we can come to know Him intimately. His greatest desire is to have a close love relationship with us, and we with Him. That is my desire as well, and I trust that this study will be another step for each of us toward that goal. But face it, that can only happen when we begin to see ourselves as He sees us, and allow Him to cleanse us, transform us into His own sinless nature, and teach us His wisdom and His ways. God is our Father. No matter how mature we may seem to us, to Him we are like little children. As with an earthly father, our heavenly Father helps us in the maturing process – including the occasional ‘spanking’ when it is needed. I believe He loves to have us ask questions as a little child and wrestle with Him for the answers, as I have done here. Thus we draw close and learn to think as He thinks and act as He acts.

Let’s do that together.

The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages – Volume One

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The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages

Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu, melekh ha'olam, asher kidshanu bidevaro uvishmo, anakhnu madlikim haneyrot shel yom tov.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has set us apart by His Word, and in whose name we light the festival lights.

Thus begins the first of the *mowadim* YHWH (solemn assemblies of Jehovah, or more literally, appointments with Jehovah) first given to the descendants of Israel about 3500 years ago.

Our story of these Feasts goes back beyond the writing of the Torah, before the first written records, back to ancient Hebrew traditions, back before old man Noah, back to Adam and Eve and their first sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and yes, even back to the seven days of creation. That is because the story of the Feasts of Israel is the story of God's plan of redemption, woven into the very fabric of the universe, portrayed even in the stars, and beautifully told and ceremonially rehearsed year by year in such a way that no one could possibly miss the coming of the Redeemer. *Or could they?*

The modern Christian church has all but ignored these Feasts. After all, they were given to the Jews under the Old Covenant as part of the ceremonial and sacrificial laws given through Moses. Now, God has given us the New Covenant. The Old is becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear. (Heb 8:6-13)

We Gentile Christians place our faith, hope, and trust in Jesus Christ alone as the mediator of the New Covenant, written upon our hearts and minds by His Holy Spirit. (8:10) This New Covenant saves not by animal sacrifice, but by His own blood, shed only once to redeem us all. (9:11-28) "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17)

The Old Covenant was imperfect. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The law, since it is only a shadow of the reality in Christ, can never, by repeating the same sacrifices year after year, bring into perfection those who draw near to God. (Heb 10:1-4)

But Jesus the Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, offered one sacrifice for all sin for all time. His death fulfilled the ceremonial law and perfected all those who are washed by His blood, even to the cleansing of the conscience from dead works. (10:10-14) "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there no longer needs to be an offering [sacrifice] for sin." (10:18) All who place their trust in Him are set free from the bondage of the law of sin and death, and are taught by the Holy Spirit to walk by faith, in harmony with the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, written on our hearts. (Rom 8:1-12)

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that we are no longer under law, but under grace. (Rom 6:14) We have died to the law through the body of Jesus Christ, released from the law by death to our flesh nature to serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Rom 7:4-6) No man is justified through works of law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, in whose death I died to the law. I now live by faith in the Son of God. If righteousness came through law, Christ died in vain. (Gal 2:16-21)

Christ redeemed us from the law's curse. (Gal 3:13) Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, *until Messiah should come.* (v 19) "For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law... therefore the law has become our tutor [lit. pedagogue, guardian to ensure the student's safety on the way to his teacher] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [guardian]. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew [law] nor Greek [lawless] ... neither slave nor freeman ... neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:21-29)

"But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. [The Feasts!] I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. (Gal 4:9-11)

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery... you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace... For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal 5:1-18)

The entire Old Testament system of moral laws, civil laws, ceremonial laws, and dietary laws, including the laws regarding the Feasts of Israel, was never intended to be a final objective. God intended it to be a temporary picture, a "shadow of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1), pointing us to the true reality, Jesus Christ, fulfilled by Him, in and through Him by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Now that we have the full revelation of God in the New Covenant, the Old Covenant is fading away. (Heb 8:13)

So why, if I believe this (and I do), would I ever write a book or teach a class on the Feasts of Israel? I'm glad you asked that question. Please allow me to give you seven answers, straight from Scripture.

First, God does not call these the Feasts of Israel, as in my title, and as they are commonly known. He calls them the solemn assemblies of Jehovah or appointments with Jehovah (mowadim YHWH – Lev 23:2), sacred sacrificial processions to Jehovah (khawg YHWH - v6), and holy convocations, readings, and rehearsals. (miqra - v3) They are not really Israel's Feasts; they are YHWH's (Jehovah's), which He gave to help us understand great spiritual truths and to prepare us for what was (and is) to come. This places them in a higher and more important category than the cultural celebrations we tend to think of when we hear the term 'feast.'

Second, the meaning of the word 'feast' (khawg in Hebrew) tells us it is important. We think of a feast as a culinary banquet and evening of entertainment. That is not the Hebrew concept at all. They understood the word to mean a festival in celebration or commemoration of something. The eating and drinking which accompanied it were of secondary importance. Though the word does suggest gala attire, parades, singing, and dancing, it also implies a sacred festival, an expression of worship. The word 'feast' means a public dramatization of an important historical event or religious concept, for the purpose of passing on the traditions, beliefs, and culture from one generation to the next.

Third, God commands the Feasts to be perpetual statutes throughout all the generations of Israel. (v 14, 21, 31, & 41) That means either God made a mistake and changed His mind, or the generations of Israel today are just as obligated to celebrate them as before Christ.

The methods of their celebration are clearly changed by the fulfillment of Christ, the Lamb of God. There now can be no more substitute lamb sacrificed on the altar of the temple, which only pointed forward to Christ, the perfect fulfillment. But that doesn't do away with the celebrations. It only causes them to come alive, making them meaningful and satisfying.

Fourth, Scripture (Ex 23:14-17) puts the keeping of the Feasts on par with the Ten Commandments and other laws following Exodus 20, and even calls them the Ten Commandments. (Ex 34:14-28) They are an integral part of Torah. We'll deal with this subject more later; for now, be aware that there is a deep significance even for us Christians who walk by the Spirit in the New Covenant written on our hearts and are thus no longer bound under Torah. Torah, which we usually think of as merely Old Testament laws, is actually far more. It is the first codified instructions from the Creator of the universe explaining to His children how the universe runs. It was not just a bunch of arbitrary rules to keep them out of trouble.

Torah is not just the law. It is a way of life. You don't 'break' Torah. You either live in harmony with it or you break yourself over it. True, we who walk by the Holy Spirit are freed from its obligations, restrictions, condemnations, and judgments; but that is only because walking by the Spirit is living in harmony with all of the natural and spiritual laws which God wove into the universe from the beginning of creation, of which Torah is but a simplified statement of the most-basic, outward ones.

Fifth, they were not just for Jews, but for all who had embraced the God of the Jews. This is in line with God's commission to the Jews to be a 'light to the nations.' (The Gentiles, pagans – Isa 42:6; 49:6) It is also in line with the metaphor God uses to describe us Gentile Christians: wild olive branches grafted into the Jewish Root who is Christ. (Rom 11:17) In fact, we Christians are called the Israel of God (Gal 6:16), Sons of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29), the true circumcision (Phil 3:3), the children of God's promise to Abraham (Rom 9:8), and even Jews: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom 2:28-29) Being called a Jew is not bad. In Hebrew, the word for Jews is 'Yah-hudim' meaning 'God glorifiers' (from 'Yah' for 'YHWH' and 'hod' for 'glory').

Sixth, although we who are led by the Holy Spirit are indeed free from the Old Testament law, that does not mean the law is taken away. Jesus Himself said that not a "jot or tittle" of the law would pass away until it all was fulfilled, and roughly a third of it remains to be fulfilled. We are only free from the law to the extent that we have died to that which held us captive to it – our sin. Whenever we turn away from the leading of the Holy Spirit back to our sin we instantly put ourselves right back under the law. (Rom 6; Gal 5:13-25) We had better understand the importance and power of the law, so we will think twice about putting ourselves back under it! God's promise that the first Covenant is "becoming obsolete and growing old... ready to disappear" (Heb 8:13) is conditional upon the New Covenant taking over: "I will put My laws into their minds and I will write them upon their hearts..." (Heb 8:10)

In fact, the word used for the 'New' Covenant in many such passages as Matt 26:28, Mk 14:24, Jn 13:34, and I Cor 11:25 is 'kainos,' meaning new in the sense of being refreshed, renewed, or restored, as opposed to 'neos' which just means new. Similarly for the 'new man' (Eph 4:24), the 'new Jerusalem' (Rev 21:2), and the 'new heaven and the new earth' (Rev 21:1), it is always 'kainos' and not 'neos.' "...there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl 1:9) The 'New' Covenant is in reality a renewed form of the Old Covenant, with the shadow pictures replaced with the realities to which they pointed. If we don't learn from the old, how can we hope to understand the new?

Seventh, although the blood sacrifices are clearly fulfilled in Christ, nowhere in the New Testament does God tell us to forget about the Feasts. Just the opposite. Many New Testament passages assume an understanding of the Feasts, and cannot be understood apart from the Old Covenant. We Christians are called “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), priests to God (Rev 1:6), and a “temple of God.” (1 Cor 3:17) “...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual temple for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 2:5) We are told to “offer a sacrifice of praise to God.” (Heb 13:15) We are called “the firstfruits among His creatures.” (James 1:18) The church is even encouraged to celebrate the Feast of Passover, though in a new and different way: “... Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed for us. Let us therefore celebrate the Feast, not with the old leaven, or with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Cor 5:8)

In fact, the “Oracles of God” in Hebrews 5:12 (“...you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the Oracles of God...”) specifically refers to the Feasts! The apostle Paul felt that this was one of the greatest benefits of Judaism: “What advantage has the Jew?... First of all [most important], that they were entrusted with the Oracles of God [Feasts of YHWH].” (Rom 3:1-2) In Stephen’s defense in Acts 7, he told what everyone there already knew, that at Mount Sinai, Moses “...received living oracles to pass on to you.” (v 38) He was not talking about the law, which can only condemn and kill the lawbreaker. He was talking about the living oracles, the Feasts and the tabernacle, which portray in a living, graphic way the coming of the Messiah and the redemption that He brings. He says, “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘God shall raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brethren.’” (v 37)

Stephen’s listeners understood him, because they knew the Feasts. But we don’t! Here is how his listeners heard Stephen’s words: “Moses told you that God would raise up a great Prophet, a great Leader who would be like himself. You thought he was just talking about Joshua. But he was actually speaking of a man much greater than Joshua, of whom Joshua was just a picture. You can see Him portrayed in the tabernacle and the Feasts, the Living Oracles which Moses has passed on to you. Yet just as your fathers killed the prophets before you, you have now killed that Righteous One of whom he spoke.” (see v 52)

How can we hope to understand this if we have no comprehension of the Jewish system of priests, temple, sacrifices, and – the Feasts? In beautiful, clear precision the Feasts present a picture of God’s plan of redemption from beginning to end in all its glory. Serious theological errors and heresies crept into the church during the Dark Ages. We failed to discern them because we neglected the Feasts. I hope to correct that in this study.

“Do not think [as some were accusing] that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest dot or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.” (Jesus, in Matt 5:17-18) To a Hebrew, saying, “the Law and the Prophets” was tantamount to saying the entirety of Scripture, which to us would be the Old Testament. Has it all been fulfilled? No. Much (roughly a third) refers to the victorious return of Messiah in power and glory to establish His Kingdom and rule the nations with a rod of iron for a thousand years. At least until that occurs, according to Jesus Himself, not the smallest dot or stroke can pass from the Law.

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law...” (Rom 7:7) The law still has its place. God is Spirit, and as much as we would like to think that we walk only by the Spirit and not by the flesh, the fact remains that we still do the majority of our living in this fleshly realm. We go about our business barely sensitive (or totally insensitive) to the realm of spirit. Yes, at times I think even we Christians still need that tutor (guardian) who disciplines us when we go astray and brings us safely back to Christ. (Gal 3:24)

I like to think of the Ten Commandments as ten little glimpses into the nature and character of God. No, we are neither bound by nor under the curse of the law of sin and death, but that only applies as long as we are walking by the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:2) It is only those who walk by the Spirit who are not under the law. (Gal 5:16) How can we ever learn to know God, to walk by His Spirit of Life, if we don’t first learn from these “copies of the things in the heavenlies?” (Heb 9:23)

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free... do not be subject again to a yoke of bondage.” (Gal 5:1) In Christ I am free to do whatever I please; only, in Christ my old ‘pleaser’ is dead and buried with Christ, and my new ‘pleaser’ is transformed into a new creation in Christ Jesus, so that I can only ‘please’ what pleases Him. The old law, which was a burden because no one could fulfill it, now becomes my joy and delight, as the Holy Spirit first teaches me how to obey the true spiritual principles behind it, and then proceeds to actually fulfill it, in me! The old picture is indeed obsolete (Heb 8:13), because now the reality, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, has taken over our minds, our hearts, and our lives.

I believe the Jewish ceremonial laws are the same. No, we don’t have to obey them to be saved, but neither should we forsake them. We have much to learn about God and His realm through them. Learning of the Feasts could even be a significant protection, guarding us against common presumptions and misunderstandings regarding the New Covenant.

The writer of Hebrews (probably Apollos, about 68 AD), after spending four chapters telling us how the old law is "... only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very form of those things..." (Heb 10:1) concludes: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and 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." (Heb 10:19-25)

You may think you understand this passage, but I assure you that you cannot understand it without understanding something of the Feasts of Israel. In fact, the entire book of Hebrews (written as it was to the Hebrews) cannot be understood without understanding something of the Hebrew culture and faith, which centered around the Feasts of Israel. We Christians tend to take verse 25 out of context and try to make it say: "You gotta get to church every Sunday!" But it was written to Jewish Christians who had a centuries-old ingrained habit of keeping the Sabbath holy. It is telling them not to forsake something, as was the habit of some. That 'something' was definitely not their weekly Sabbath gatherings. In their fervency for Jesus they gathered often, even "...daily breaking bread from house to house..." (Acts 2:42-47) But what were some of them getting into the habit of forsaking?

The assemblies! "*Forsake not the assemblies.*" To the average modern Christian, that has little meaning, but to the Jews it meant everything. Three times a year all Jews were commanded to assemble together in Jerusalem to celebrate a Feast to YHWH. (Ex 23:13-17) These were called solemn assemblies, or just 'the assemblies.' The entire Jewish culture revolved around them! But Jewish Christians had been despised and cast out of the Jewish culture. The Jews hated them, persecuted them, and tried to kill them. They were not welcome in the synagogues or at the temple. Especially at the Feasts, which they had seen firsthand fulfilled in Christ, they now felt shut out. Partly in retaliation, and partly out of zeal to move on to the 'real' of which the Old Covenant was but a shadow picture, they began forsaking anything that 'smelled' Jewish. And what could smell more Jewish than the Feasts of Israel?

The writer of Hebrews was saying: "Yes, we are no longer bound by the old law with all its ceremonies and sacrifices, but still, don't forsake the assemblies! You need to learn from these old shadow pictures, especially as 'the day' (of the Lord) approaches. Rehearse them, keep them fresh in your mind, so the day won't catch you unaware."

The purpose of this study is to do just that. The Spring Feasts were all beautifully fulfilled in our Savior Jesus Christ, down to the smallest detail, but the Fall Feasts have not yet been fulfilled. I believe that they likewise will be fulfilled, down to the smallest detail, at the return of our Savior in power and glory. I also believe that a study of the Feasts of Israel will help us to be prepared for His soon returning, throughout Scripture called "the day of the Lord" or "the day of YHWH" or simply "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10). Is it possible that, without a familiarity with the Feasts of Israel, we might be in danger of being as unprepared for Jesus' return as were the Jewish leaders for His incarnation?

The book of Hebrews must have had some effect on the first century Christians, because we have strong Christian evidence in the way the Jews now keep their feasts. Those Jews who have not yet received their Messiah cannot understand them or explain them, but Jewish Christians can easily see Jesus woven beautifully throughout the traditions of their feasts ever since His death. I think a lot of first century Christians had a hand in modifying the traditions of their feasts to include new insights they received from Jesus Christ Himself. (For example, Jesus' Last Supper influenced the Passover Seder.) They had to have been keeping the Feasts for them to have modified Jewish traditions to include Jesus in their own feasts!

The Feasts rehearse the story of God's Plan of the Ages, focusing on the redemption of His people. In the Jewish mind, each Feast looks forward to the coming Redeemer. So this study will focus on the **coming of the Redeemer** in the past, historically, in the present, intimately and personally, and in the future, prophetically.

Jesus came (past tense) as a suffering servant to pay the price of our redemption; He is now coming (present continuous tense) in the hearts of all who believe by the filling of His Holy Spirit to personalize our redemption; and He will come (future tense) in power and glory to complete our redemption by gathering us to Himself, so that we may rule with Him over His creation.

The grand theme of the Old Testament is, "*Messiah is coming!*" Every prophet of ancient times looked forward through the ages to the Coming One. The New Testament changes this theme slightly to "*Messiah has come! Repent and get ready, for He is coming again!*" Thus the entire Bible centers around the person of One who was to come, who did come, and who is coming again. I could almost affirm that the entirety of Scripture was given us for the dual purpose of announcing His coming and preparing us to meet Him when He comes. John the Baptist, called by Jesus the greatest of all those born of women, had one ministry: to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah.

Clearly, preparing us to meet Him is a top priority in God's mind. This is nowhere more clearly portrayed than in the Feasts of Israel.