

JESUS, ISRAEL & PROPHECY

Week 3 – God’s Appointed Times: End Times as Seen in the Feasts of Israel

God, Who is above time and space – created time – the sequence of events – to serve as the arena where the heavenly, the eternal, meets the temporal, the temporary – where God meets man!

In the creation of time, into which God has placed us, God gave the children of Israel a holy calendar. He gave them appointed times which are the feasts of Israel, which we find in Leviticus 23. It is through this calendar of feast days that the Jewish people were to recognize that God is the Lord of every moment and that He must rule over every second of their lives! Is that our mindset in Scottsdale, AZ in 2013? How is God ruling our time? Are we allowing God to rule over every second of our lives?

Following His resurrection, when Jesus spoke “. . . of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3) before He ascended into heaven, the disciples asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The disciples were referring to a physical, material, earthly kingdom to Israel.

“Restore” – to what they previously had. Indeed a physical, material, earthly kingdom.

Daniel 2:44 speaks of the Kingdom of God – in comparison to the Gentile empire/political kingdoms. And the Kingdom of God will crush all the kingdoms that have come before. Isa. 9:6 – “Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders! Yes, God promised Israel such a kingdom – a material/physical kingdom on earth – with table fellowship (Matt. 8:11), community (Assyria, Egypt and Israel will join ranks), culture (Sabbaths and the feasts of Israel are spoken of during the Millennial Kingdom), economics (the Gentiles will bring their wealth to Jerusalem – Isa. 60:5), agriculture and animals (Isa. 11), worship (Zech. 14).

How did Jesus answer the disciples’ question about the kingdom? “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.*” Jesus did not deny the establishment of a physical, material kingdom of God on earth. Jesus warned the disciples against inquiring into aspects of the timing of God’s kingdom, because those things belong to God the Father alone. It was wise for Jesus not to outline His plan over the next 2,000 years. How do you think the disciples would have felt if they had known that the kingdom they wanted to see right then would not be coming for over 2,000 years? At the same time, Jesus did not say that there was to be no restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He simply said that speculation into the definite times was not proper. It wasn’t the priority. What’s the priority?

Mark 13:32-36 - “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*”³³ *Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.*³⁴ *It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.*³⁵ *Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—*³⁶ *lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.*³⁷ *And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*”

What's the priority? WATCH! Be alert – for Jesus' coming. When we're watching for something, guess what? We're focused on that something.

Watchfulness means being expectant. Do we really expect the Lord to return someday – and possibly soon? What does “expecting” look like? Have you ever waited at a bus stop – esp. as a little kid? Sometimes as adults too – we look expectantly for the bus – we look craning our necks – to get a glimpse of that bus off in the distance. Are we craning our necks for Jesus? When we are expectant – we believe with confidence that an event will happen in the future. When we say we believe Jesus will come again, it's not an event without precedent. It's an event that has a rock solid foundation – the Word of God in Scripture and Jesus' words when He was on earth at His first coming.

If we are truly expecting the Lord to return, it should make a difference in our priorities and in the way we live. It doesn't mean that we don't use common sense or that we don't plan for the future; however, it means that we order our lives with the understanding that our plans could be interrupted at any time. An old Gypsy saying warned about pilgrims making their tents too permanent: “Don't drive your stakes too deep; we may be moving in the morning.”

Watchfulness means being spiritually awake. We need to be alert to what's happening around us. The Apostle Paul told the believers at Thessalonica that when it came to spiritual matters, we should be awake rather than asleep (I Thess. 5:4-6). There have been times when the Church as slumbered. This is esp. true w/ respect to the doctrine of the Second Coming. The early believers felt a sense of urgency about the Second Coming. The predominant view in the early Church was that the prophecies of a coming, earthly kingdom would be literally fulfilled. But gradually, over the ensuing centuries, the Church's prophetic fervor began to wane. The Church went into a deep slumber. Theologians like Augustine abandoned their belief of a literal fulfillment of prophecy. They came to regard premillennialism (Christ returning before the Millennial Kingdom) as a “Jewish fable.” It has only been in the last couple of centuries or so that the evangelical world has begun to recapture some of that first-century expectancy and zeal for the Lord's return. The passage of time does not dilute or diminish God's promises in any way. Jesus promised to return, and that promise is just as valid and just as binding as it was 2,000 years ago. II Peter 3:8-9 – Peter warns us here not to mistake God's patience for an inability to keep His promises. The delay has been purposeful. It has provided an opportunity for more people to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Watchfulness means being informed. In Daniel 9:23 Gabriel is sent by God to Daniel to give him, Daniel, skill in understanding the prophecy that Gabriel was about to lay out. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom; spiritual things are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:10-16). In Matt. 16:2-3, Jesus tells the religious leadership that they should be able to look around them and recognize the developments of the day that may be prophetically significant. A child of God should not be taken off-guard by major prophetic developments. Of course, that means that we need to know Scripture.

Watchfulness means being protective. In ancient Israel the watchman was stationed on a city's walls so he could keep an eye out for approaching enemies. If he saw a threat, he would blow the shofar as a warning of impending danger. It was a serious responsibility. People's lives were entrusted to the watchman. If he fell asleep and failed to sound the alarm, and people died as a result, the blood of the victims was required at the watchman's hand (Eze. 33:6). Today God has called some of us to be watchmen on the "walls" of western civilization. We see the enemy advancing and we are sounding the alarm.

Watchfulness means being discerning. In Acts 20 we read about an emotional meeting between the Apostle Paul and the elders of the Ephesian congregation. He knew that his martyrdom was approaching, so he was preparing them for his departure. Read Acts 20:29-31. Paul told the Ephesians that many false teachers would arise from among themselves! That's a sobering thought. The greater danger today is not posed by heretics who make no pretense of espousing the historic Christian faith, but by pretenders who stay "under the radar" and operate from within our own ranks. They try to leave the impression that they're kosher (doctrinally), but they're not. They are deceptive and duplicitous (double-dealing; dishonest). Paul tells the Ephesian elders to be vigilant. It's critical that we exercise spiritual perception so we can tell the difference between good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

Watchfulness means being ready at all times. The NT exhorts us to be ready for the Lord's return at all times. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the Lord said the 5 virgins (or bridesmaids) who were not prepared for the bridegroom's arrive were "foolish" (v. 3). These 10 bridesmaids were abruptly awakened in the middle of the night by a shouted warning that the bridegroom and his entourage were approaching. They quickly jumped up and sprang into action, straightening their clothes, and trimming the wicks of their lamps so they would burn brightly on the trek through the dark night back to the bridegroom's house. That's when the 5 foolish bridesmaids realized that they hadn't brought enough oil with them. Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Their lamps were already flickering and about to go out. So they asked their wiser counterparts if they could borrow some oil. But there wasn't enough oil to go around, so the 5 foolish girls scurried away into the night to try to buy more (vv. 9-10). While they were gone, the bridegroom arrived to pick up his bride and her party. Then, the entire procession returned to his house in a jubilant parade. The 5 foolish bridesmaids missed out because they weren't ready to go when the bridegroom and his party arrived (vv. 10-12). The point of this story, then, is not that the bridesmaids should not have been sleeping. Instead, it's that they should not have gone to sleep without making adequate personal preparation for the bridegroom's coming. And furthermore, they should have anticipated a possible delay and been ready for him whenever he might arrive. The application for us is obvious. If we are truly ready for His coming at any time, there is no need for us to know exactly when it will be! The 5 wise bridesmaids were prepared – so it didn't matter to them when the bridegroom might show up.

God gave the Jewish people seven feasts while they were wandering in the wilderness. All seven feasts point to the Lamb – the Messiah. They were to be watching for the Messiah. They were to be anticipating the Messiah’s coming.

The structure of the feasts of the Lord given to Israel:

The Feasts were given to commemorate an event in Israel’s history where God moved on their behalf – He provided for them. Several of the feasts surrounded a harvest time – demonstrating, again, God’s provision for the Jewish people.

All of the feasts were PROPHETIC – which means they looked ahead to a fulfillment, to the rest of the story. All the feasts find their fulfillment in the Messiah - Jesus. These are Jesus feasts! As we study the Feasts of the Lord which He gave to Israel – we get a greater understanding of God’s plan – including end times.

Themes to consider when studying the feasts and how they relate to end times:

- God’s desire to dwell with man
- Worship

Israel was a nation in waiting. For Whom were they waiting? THE MESSIAH.

In Lev. 23:2, 4 - God tells us that these feasts are His appointed times – they’re fixed – they are not going to change – as God doesn’t change. In Malachi 3:6 we read, “I am the Lord, I change not.” These appointed times – the seven feasts that God gave to the children of Israel - present His entire plan of salvation FOR THE WORLD – and that plan will never change!

The three fall feasts - Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkes/Sukkot) – will be fulfilled in Jesus’ Second Coming. Within this lesson we are going to focus on the flow/sequence of these feasts – not the exact timing of the fall feasts. The flow/the sequence is crucial to understand because the flow truly speaks to God’s program for end times!

All the fall feasts occur in the 7th month. The #7 – completion. How fitting. The Hebrew name for this 7th month - is Etanim (I Kings 8:2) which means “steady flowings” taken from the fall rains that would come during this month. Etanim signifies PERMANENCE/ENDURING. These fall feasts in the seventh month look forward to the everlasting Kingdom of God.

The Fall Feasts are unique among the appointed times of the Lord. The lessons they teach form a spiritual progression:

- The Feast of Trumpets teaches repentance
- The Day of Atonement teaches restoration
- The Feast of Tabernacles teaches rejoicing

It is necessary to repent and be restored in order to experience the joy of the Lord – in order to rejoice.

The flow that we'll be discussing as it relates to end times:

- The Feast of Trumpets finds its fulfillment in the Tribulation
- The Day of Atonement finds its fulfillment in the physical Second Coming of Jesus
- The Feast of Tabernacles finds its fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom

Rabbis teach that at Rosh Hashanah the Jewish community is assembled for judgment. They are called to come before the King of Kings. They are called to repent at Rosh Hashanah. They are called to look ahead to restoration which they may receive at Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement – but there is no assurance that they will receive restoration.

We know this feast, Rosh Hashanah, Biblically as the Feast of Trumpets in the 7th month on the Jewish RELIGIOUS calendar.

Lev. 23:23-25 – “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.’”

Biblically speaking – this festival is **Yom Teruah** – the Day of Blowing which became the Day of the Trumpets – better known as the Feast of Trumpets. The blowing of the trumpets became the distinguishing characteristic of this holy day. The trumpets called the people’s attention to the festival which was to follow – Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – the most solemn day within the Jewish year.

On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish people gather to begin a time of repentance – for the year. The Feast of Trumpets as we see in Scripture is a holy day of gathering.

What’s the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets? What’s the rest of the story? Who was to observe this feast? What is God pointing to in giving the Jewish people the Feast of Trumpets? How does that work out in God’s timetable – in His end times calendar?

God has been gathering His people into the land of Israel - for a time of repentance. What is that time of repentance? The TRIBULATION – the time of Jacob’s Trouble (Jer. 30:7) – which is yet to occur. I’m suggesting that the Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled in the Tribulation.

Eze. 20:33f & Eze. 22:17ff speak to God gathering the children of Israel back to the land (in His fury) to purge them -- to refine them – and ultimately to restore them. You should know that the Bible then speaks of a SECOND gathering of Jewish people for blessings in the Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 24:31; Isa. 27:13).

As we read about the time of Jacob’s Trouble in Scripture, we see at the end of 7 years of Tribulation, a time of national salvation and national restoration for Israel, following their repentance. Scripture teaches that repentance MUST precede restoration!

Zechariah 12:10 says that God will pour out His Spirit upon the house of David and they will mourn for their sins. . . AND then Jesus will return.

In Matthew 23:39 Jesus told the Jewish people, “You will not see Me again until you say blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.”

According to Zech. 13:8-9, two thirds of the Jewish people will die during the Tribulation. God will pour out His Spirit on the one-third of the Jewish people who are left – and they will all be saved.

The Tribulation is for the purging of Israel (Malachi 3:1-3; Daniel 12:1-3). I’m suggesting that the Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled during the Tribulation – after which time all Israel – those who are remaining – will be saved.

Ten days following the Feast of Trumpets is Yom Kippur/the Day of Atonement when Jewish people cry out for forgiveness.

Lev. 16 tells us that each year Israel offered a blood sacrifice on that day to cover – to atone for - the nation’s sins corporately. Yom Kippur was observed each year for a cleansing of the NATION – the sins of the NATION were covered - so that God could continue to dwell in their midst. REMEMBER, God’s desire was to dwell with them (Ex. 28:5). REMEMBER – God walked with Adam (Gen. 3:8). We have a personal God. We have a God Who is transcendent – above time and space – Who is also immanent – near!

Aaron, the High Priest, first sacrificed a bull for his own sins and for the sins of his house. He sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat in the holy of Holies. The Lord’s goat was then killed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies. Only once a year could the High Priest go into the Holy of Holies. Then the High Priest placed his hands on the scapegoat and confessed over it the sins of Israel as a NATION. The scapegoat was then led into the desert – and escorted to a precipice over which it fell to its death. That was a picture of Israel’s sins – as a NATION - being covered – through the blood that was shed.

There is a Jewish tradition that states that a scarlet ribbon was tied to the horn of the scapegoat and a scarlet ribbon was also tied to the Tabernacle/Temple door. The Rabbis wrote in the Talmud (Rabbinic commentary) that as the scapegoat was led into the wilderness, that ribbon turned white. The Talmud also states that approx. 40 years before the Temple was destroyed (30 AD-ish) – the ribbon stopped turning white! The ultimate sacrifice, Jesus had been given.

Lev. 17:11 – God required blood for the atonement of sin. And, God does not change! Where is the blood today in the observance of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, within the Jewish community? There is no Temple (70 AD), no altar, no sacrifice, no blood. Therefore, there is no atonement in Rabbinical Judaism today – because the way of forgiveness through the blood of the Messiah is ignored. While Yom Kippur speaks to restoration – there is no restoration in Rabbinical Judaism today without the blood.

What about Israel? Jewish people, on an individual basis, are coming to faith in Jesus! What about the NATION of Israel? There will be a future salvation for the nation of Israel. Yom Kippur will be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Jesus, when Israel as a

NATION repents and God pours out His Spirit, and they mourn for Jesus and He returns and comes to dwell with them!

The Feast of Tabernacles is the last feast on the Jewish religious calendar. It is also called the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Ingathering, the Feast, and the Season of Our Rejoicing. . . . Jewish people call this feast – Sukkot/Sukkes.

We've seen Israel go through the tribulation, the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7). God purges Israel through the tribulation. One third of the Jewish population that is left at the end of the tribulation is saved. God pours out His Spirit on them (Zech. 12:10) and they repent. Jesus returns and establishes His kingdom and Israel is restored and rejoices! Because of Israel's restoration – they will rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles.

What is the message of the Feast of Tabernacles? In Ex. 25:8 God told the Jewish people He desired to dwell with them. The Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus, Who is God, will dwell with man – when Jesus will rule and reign for 1,000 years from the throne of David in Jerusalem (Rev. 20).

How was the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in Biblical times?

God instructed the children of Israel in the wilderness to dwell in booths called sukkas (woven) for 7 days. The sukkas were temporary dwellings. Branches were placed on top of this three-sided temporary dwelling; the roof was entirely made of branches. These flimsy booths symbolized man's need to depend upon God for EVERYTHING! These booths were a reminder that God would shelter His people.

The Feast of Tabernacles finds its fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom. The Feast of Tabernacles celebrates the final harvest of the Jewish year – the ingathering of the final crops. This feast is known by several names – including the Season of Our Rejoicing (harvest is a time of abundance and joy) AND – the Feast of INGATHERING! It was appropriate in Biblical times that, when the full ingathering of the crops had been accomplished, a harvest feast of thankfulness and of gladness unto the Lord should be enjoyed. After Jesus establishes His Kingdom, what will occur? Matt. 8:11 tells us that many will come from the east and the west and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Redeemed Jews and redeemed Gentiles will be together. We will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb (Isa. 25:6).

The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29; Deut. 16) is the final feast. It lasts seven days, and it takes place within the seventh month. And, the burnt offerings were divisible by the number 7 (70 bulls, 14 rams, 98 lambs [Num. 29:12-32])

The Talmud, Rabbinic commentary, states that these sacrifices during the Feast of Tabernacles/the Feast of Ingathering were offered, not for Israel, but for the nations of the world. “There were 70 bulls - to correspond to the number of the 70 nations in the world.” Where are those 70 nations found in Scripture? In Genesis 10.

Deut. 32:8 – God set the boundaries of the people – the nations – according to the number of the children of Israel. God ordained a plan whereby the number of nations (70 in Gen. 10) would correspond to the number of the children of Israel that entered Egypt (Gen. 46:27). Seems as if Israel has significance to the nations of the world.

What does all this mean? God had originally chosen the Jewish people to receive the law and to function as custodians of the law, to serve as His witnesses to the nations of the world – to tell them about the one true God (Isa. 43:10), to be the channel through whom the Messiah would come, and, because of all these God-given tasks. Israel was chosen to be the instrument of blessing for the world (Gen. 18:18).

Has Israel been faithful to God's calling? Other than being the channel through whom the Messiah would come – NO! But God's plan cannot be thwarted. God doesn't have Plan B. His plan is always Plan A. During the end times, God is going to pick up where He left off with Israel. God will seal 144,000 male Jewish virgins (Rev. 7:1-8; Rev. 14:4) who will function as God's witnesses to the nations. After we read about the sealing of the 144,000 in Rev. 7, we read of the results of their evangelistic work in Rev. 7:9ff. We see the redemption of a great multitude from the nations before the Lord. That multitude - no one could number. What do we have? A GREAT INGATHERING of the nations – of the Gentiles during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:9ff) and during the Millennium. In Zech. 8:23 we read that during the Millennial Kingdom, "Ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, 'Let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you.'" We can truly say that Israel is the epicenter of God's plan of redemption – that Israel is the instrument of blessing for the world.

Rom. 11:15 – when Israel is restored – when the nation of Israel will be saved – it will be as life from the dead for the world – because it will be at that time that Jesus will return and the Millennial Kingdom will be established – and the curse from the earth will be removed – the earth will be restored!

The Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled in the Millennium. We will celebrate the Messiah's dwelling among men AND we will worship God! Zech. 14:16 – "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

THE STORY. . .TO BE CONTINUED. . . .

QUESTIONS:

Is understanding the fall feasts of Israel helpful in seeing God's sequence/flow re: His end time plan?

What did you understand? What did you NOT understand?

How are you impacted by the truth of Jesus' Second Coming?

How are you living your life now because Jesus is returning?

Do you get involved with talking about end times with people who are not believers in Jesus?

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

Go over the chart of the feasts and look up the Scripture references.

Write down what you don't understand about the feasts.

Write down what you do understand about the feasts.

Continue to observe the themes/threads that run through Scripture as you enjoy your personal study time and devotional time with the Lord. Journal those themes.