

Should Christians Follow the Hebraic Calendar?

Note: As I said last month in Dan Juster's article for Reconnecting Ministries, I am beginning a new focus with The Reconnection; to bring this issue in God's family to the forefront of the church by interviewing many of its leaders, both from Jewish and Gentile perspectives; where they will be free to express their views and beliefs.

But, what will this spiritual reconnection between Jew and Gentile actually look like in the church as it begins to take hold and develop amongst us? I truly believe that the full revelation of this new unity in the family of God will only develop as more of His love and forgiveness flows between both groups. In my mind, this will naturally broaden our tolerances of how each of us practice our faith in Jesus/Yeshua, with some overlaps I might add that will become wonderfully enriching to us all.

Papa Don Finto, as I call him, who is one of my mentors in the faith, pastored Belmont Church in Nashville, Tennessee for over 30 years. More recently over the last 10 years, God called him out to help father and mentor Messianic leadership in the church, which is so greatly needed. Papa Don overflows in the Spirit with the Father's love and runs a ministry with Tod McDowell known as Caleb Company, which is training church leadership to refocus on Israel. Don Finto has a great love for Israel and the church and has written 2 books on the Reconnection, which lay a wonderful foundation for Christians first discovering and embracing the Israel piece, a phrase he has devised and one that I use regularly in my sermons and teachings. "Your People Shall Be My People," is one of the titles. So here's what he has to share with us (Grant Berry, Reconnecting Ministries).

We have been robbed of a significant part of our godly heritage through a calendar that was intentionally removed from the biblical one. The early believers in Jesus were all Jewish. Not until Cornelius were the Gentiles received into the fellowship without converting to Judaism. But even these early Gentile followers observed the biblical feasts as a prophetic statement of their newly found faith in the Jewish Messiah who is also Redeemer of the nations. When Paul wrote to the predominantly Gentile believers of Corinth, he spoke of "Christ, our Passover lamb (who) has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival ..." (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The biblical feasts had become the feasts of the Gentile believers as well.

Paul's special assignment was to Gentiles (see Acts 9:15), yet he never lost his passion for the Jewish people and remained an observant Jew all his life, always going first to synagogues with the message of the gospel, before going to Gentiles (see Acts 13:5, 14:14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8). Late in life, Paul told the Roman commander, "I am a Jew" (Acts 21:39), and to the Sanhedrin, "I am a Pharisee" (23:6).



As Gentile believers increased and Jewish persecution, including the destruction of Jerusalem that followed, the church began to lose touch with the Jewish roots of their faith and turn against their Jewish brothers and sisters. By the time of Emperor Constantine in the early 4th century, the estrangement had become so severe that Constantine called the bishops together in the Nicene Council in order to finalize the church's separation from these "polluted wretches" who had killed Jesus.

They needed a resurrection day other than Passover. Passover was too Jewish. At the conclusion of the Nicene Council, Constantine had his way. The Roman calendar had conquered. The annual celebration of the Lord's resurrection would now have a

new name—Easter—strangely similar to Eostre, the Teutonic goddess of spring, dissimilar to Pesach or Passover. The Roman calendar, named after Roman gods and Caesars, replaced God's calendar, and for the next 16 centuries, both the church and the synagogue agreed that Jewish people who became followers of their Messiah must relinquish all their Jewishness and get on the non-biblical calendar. If they refused, they were persecuted and often killed. Can you honestly believe this? But it is sadly true of our church history.

The prophet Daniel had envisioned four great beasts and a king that would "change the set times and the laws" (Dan. 7:25). In his insistence that the church change the calendar of God, Constantine became a foreshadowing of another world ruler who is to come. And the church was further divorced from her roots and her spiritual "parentage."

Our Roman/Gregorian solar calendar has no biblical significance. God's calendar is based on lunar months with a solar year. The sun and moon are to "mark seasons and days and years" (Gen. 1:14). The first day of the new moon following the vernal equinox in the spring is the beginning of God's year (See Ex. 12:1). Months always begin with the new moon. The 14th or 15th of the month will always be a full moon. The days begin in the evening (see Gen. 1:5).

Passover (Pesach) is always on the 14th day of *Nisan*, also called *Abib* (meaning *barley*). God told Moses to "tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb" (Ex. 12:3). The lambs were to be "year old males without defect" (v. 5), and were to be sacrificed on the 14th day of the month (v. 6). Israel was to "take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses" (v. 7). "The blood will be a sign ... when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (v. 13), was the Lord's assurance.

John's gospel indicates that Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem took place on the 10th day of Nisan (see John 12:1 and 12), the day the lambs were selected. All the gospel writers tell of the questions and scrutiny that Jesus endured over the next four days as He was brought before Caiaphas, Annas, Herod and Pilate. On the morning of the 13th of Nisan, after being carefully examined by Pilate, Pilate declared, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4, KJV). In other words, "This lamb is flawless and ready to be sacrificed." Jesus was taken to the execution site and nailed to the cross. At 3:00 in the afternoon (See Luke 23:44-46), after three hours of darkness, and at the exact time when Passover lambs were being slaughtered for the evening feast, the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus, and redeeming Blood flowed from His side.

HaBikkurim

A relatively unnoticed "first fruits" festival (HaBikkurim) occurred three days later when the priest was to waive a barley sheaf as a celebration of the harvest that was to come (see Levi. 23:9-14). Paul calls Jesus' resurrection from the dead the first fruits of all those who are to follow (see 1 Cor. 15:20 and 24).

Shavuot

Fifty days after Passover was the festival of Pentecost (Shavuot). Pentecost is not just a "Christian" festival, but a biblical feast of harvest that also commemorates the giving of the law on Sinai. This is the day God chose for the initiation of the "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), a day when Joel's prophecy that "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17) began to be fulfilled. Pentecost is one of the "appointed feasts of the LORD" (Lev. 23:2), and always arrives on the 6th day of the 3rd month, the month of Sivan.

Yom Teruach, Yom Kippur, Sukkot

After the spring festivals, there is a long season of growing and harvesting before the autumn festivals that celebrate the final harvest. Jesus compared Himself to a master who entrusted talents to his servants, went on a journey, then “after a long time” (Matt. 25:19) returned to hold his servants accountable. There is “a long time” between the spring and the autumn feasts.

Three feasts take place in the fall: the Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruach) on the 1st day of the seventh month of Tishrei, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) on the 10th day of Tishrei, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) from the 15th to the 22nd days of Tishrei. Jewish tradition calls the first day of Tishrei *Rosh Hashana* (“head of the year”), and celebrate this day as the beginning of the civic year, but the beginning of God’s year is in the spring, on the first day of Nisan.

The fall festivals are important for us because they have yet to come into their full prophetic significance. If Jesus used God’s calendar for the spring festivals, we can well assume that He will do the same with the fall feasts. In Paul’s letters to both Corinth and Thessalonica, he refers to a trumpet call that will resound at the second coming of Jesus. The Day of Atonement is a day of introspection and judgment. Tabernacles looks forward to the time when we will “tabernacle” together with God.

But there is more! Jesus calls Himself “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 22:13). He often begins and ends at the same place. He left from the Mount of Olives and He is to return to the Mount of Olives. There seems to be biblical evidence that Jesus will not only return during the fall season, but that He was born during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Zechariah “belonged to the priestly division of Abijah” (Luke 1:15), serving in the Temple in the eighth rotation, thus the

later part of the fourth biblical month (See 1 Chron. 24:10). Mary's pregnancy occurred six months later when "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth (v. 26), thus the later part of the 10th biblical month. This would mean that Jesus was born nine months later, in the later part of the 19th month following Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah, thus in the later part of the seventh biblical month at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. No wonder John said that "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14, Amplified). It's fascinating, don't you think?

We've been robbed of our heritage and our connection to our roots, which is why Grant Berry burns the trail to help reconnect us spiritually with his ministry focus. God has a calendar; we have a calendar. He will never get on ours, but it's best we get on His!