

Why Should the Jewish Feasts Be Meaningful to Christians?

As the Jewish fall feasts are once again upon us, it reopens the debate on whether or not they should be meaningful to Christians. Rosh Hashanah, or the beginning of a new year on the Jewish calendar, just ended on Sept. 8. Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, begins next Wednesday, Sept. 15, and ends the following evening. Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, a celebration of the harvest and God's protection during the exodus from Egypt, is from Monday, Sept. 20 to the following Monday, Sept. 27.

My mother was Jewish, but I didn't know it until I was an adult, around the time of her death. She was 20 years old at the end of the Holocaust, so she never wanted anyone to know. So I knew absolutely nothing about Jewish traditions or feasts. I shouldn't tell this on myself: When I was in the fifth grade, the Dodgers and Yankees were playing in the 1963 World Series. I asked a friend if Koufax was pitching that day, thinking it should be his turn in the rotation. He said, "No, he's not pitching because of Yom Kippur." Although I knew the Yankees' lineup like the back of my hand, I thought he must be talking about a new player and asked, "Is he a dangerous hitter off Koufax?"

On Christmas 2019, I surprised my wife with a trip to Italy. Obviously, that wasn't something I could actually gift wrap, so, I decided to wrap something symbolic to present to her. I superimposed a picture of her appearing to be sticking her head out of a window of an American Airlines' 777 (in flight) and waving. Yeah, I know ... kind of corny, but she loved it.

The sheet of 8.5 by 11-inch photo paper with the silly picture on it couldn't get my wife and me one nanometer closer to Italy. However, it had significant value because it was a

representation of something far greater that was to come, which *could* get us to Italy. And it could not only get us there, but also allow us to experience the most amazing espresso shops on earth, a gondola ride in Venice and looking up at Michelangelo's work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Hebrews 10:1 (TPT) says, "The old system of living under the law presented us with only a faint shadow, a crude outline of the reality of the wonderful blessings to come." I would say an image of waving out of a window of a 777-in-flight-would qualify as a "crude outline of the reality." But on a serious note, this verse makes it clear that the "shadow" is not the "reality" but a forerunner to the reality. If you see a person's shadow coming around a corner, you know there's a real person about to come around that corner.

You've probably figured out that our trip to Italy was cancelled because of COVID, but we'll eventually get there. And I would argue that after we go and get back home, the silly picture will still have value—maybe even more so—because it will bring to mind all the wonderful memories we'll have as a result of embracing the wonderful reality.

Likewise, I believe after meeting the reality of Jesus Christ, there's value in recognizing the feasts because instead of seeing it as a "crude outline," it will now be fully "colored in" with Jesus Himself. Let's not forget that Jesus is all through the Old Testament and not only in "Christophanies," (as the fourth man in the fiery furnace). On His walk to Emmaus with two of His followers, Luke 24:27 (NKT) tells us, "Jesus took them through the *writings of Moses and all the prophets*, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning *Himself*" (author's emphasis).

The Old and New Testaments are quite different and yet inseverable. You've probably seen hotel swimming pools that are part indoor and part outdoor. They are basically two pools

with vastly different attributes, the same body of water placed in two completely different environments. However, you can freely swim from one to the other and back again. I see the Old and New Testaments like this. We Christians can “swim” to the outside pool and benefit greatly. But oh, how traditional Jews could benefit by “swimming” over to our inside pool.

Many of these traditional Jews think it’s an “American Jesus” in the New Testament. I think Bible translators are partly to blame. We have somewhat Westernized the New Testament in many ways. I highly recommend Ron Cantor’s book, *Identity Theft*, which does a good job of exposing the seeming stripping of the Jewishness from the New Testament and Jesus Himself. For example, we call it “The Last Supper,” although it was a group of Jews celebrating a Jewish Seder meal at Passover. We’ve even given the disciples nice Western names like Peter, James and John, instead of Shimon, Yohhanan and Ya’akov (transliterations can vary).

Some Christians think it’s ludicrous to follow Jewish customs of the Feasts. They would never eat honey on Rosh Hashana to usher in a “sweet” new year. “That’s not biblical,” they assert. But I’ll bet many of those same people wouldn’t dare skip the black-eyed peas on New Year’s Day.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are widely accepted as types and shadows of the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ, respectively. Rosh Hashana is also referred to as the Feast of Trumpets, which will sound at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17, 1 Cor. 15:52). And the most common traditions associated with Yom Kippur are fasting and making amends with anyone you have sinned against or offended. What’s your beef with that? Those are also New Testament concepts (see Matt. 6:16, Mark 11:25 and Matthew 5:23). Also, on Yom Kippur, the Jews offer up prayers that they be sealed in the book of life. The book of life is Old Testament (Dan. 12:1) and New Testament (Rev. 21:27). So, these feasts are actually forward-looking. And

even Sukkot is, in part, to thank God for the harvest. So giving thanks to God is about as New Testament as you can get (Col. 3:17, 1 Thess. 5:18).

All that said, as Christians, recognizing the feasts is certainly not required. Colossians 2:16-17 (NLT) says, "Don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for *not* celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths." But neither are you required to follow the dietary restrictions of the Law of Moses either. You like pork? Knock yourself out. Bacon for breakfast, a ham sandwich for lunch and pork chops for dinner. But be advised, you might get to see Jesus a little quicker. Nutritionists today agree that everything that was lawful to eat is healthy. Imagine that.

But neither is a Christian required to *abstain* from participating in the feasts. Romans 14:5 (NKJV) tells us, "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." And the last time I checked, Romans is in the New Testament. {eoa}

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