

The Festivals of Israel

and their

Spiritual Meaning

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Festival	Month	Dates
Passover	1	14
Unleavened Bread	1	15-21
Waving of first sheaf	1	
Weeks (Pentecost)	3	
Trumpets	7	1
Day of Atonement	7	10
Tabernacles (Booths)	7	15-22

believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from his inner being.’

Jesus speaks of a source of life located right inside us. This is the direct consequence of him indwelling us. No longer will we need to take people to some other source for their blessing. How often have we pointed people to meetings and conferences and places and books and tapes from which they may receive spiritual life. Alas, the source of life in us was insufficient for their needs.

In the early stages of our walk with God, we are like the moon. We reflect a glory that is not ours. We pass on the light of the sun, as we have no real light of our own. Moonlight is better than no light at all, but it is nothing compared with the full clear light of the sun. The sun has its own light, and gives out warmth and healing as well.

Jesus spoke of **rivers of living water flowing**. Flowing is something that happens all the time. Rivers flow night and day continuously and never stop. Flowing is an inbuilt part of their nature. I believe there was a continuous unbroken flow of living water from Jesus to all around him who were in any way capable of receiving it. That is his promise to those who follow him to the Festival of Tabernacles.

When this river of water of life flows out in full strength from the sons of God, John’s vision of the river of life in the last chapter of Revelation will be fulfilled. The time will have come for the healing of the nations.

Conclusion

We have viewed the seven festivals that God gave to Israel through his servant Moses in consecutive order as separate experiences through which we must pass. That is partly true, but not wholly. The larger the building, the firmer its base must be. As we continue our walk with God, our foundation will not remain static, but will grow stronger and stronger. We will never outgrow the Passover. We will continue to grow in depth of understanding and wonder in the knowledge that we are redeemed and belong to God. Pentecostal gifts, rather than having disappeared, will have been consolidated into a continuous experience of God.

We must press on in the knowledge that the greater glories and manifestations of God lie ahead. We must not strive to recreate the glories of the past. We must not even cling to the good things of the present. We must let go of the good that we may receive the better and the best. We must press on, as Paul did, to receive the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

the summer's heat. Signs are never of value in themselves. Their value is in what they point to. They are signs that the full fruit will come. We must endure the heat of the summer that is necessary for the ripening of the fruit.

Tabernacles

At the Festival of Tabernacles the two themes of harvest and national remembrance unite. It was celebrated for seven days 'after you have gathered the produce of your threshing-floor and your winepress' (Deut 16: 13). The work of harvest was over, and it was time for celebration. The method of celebration (still observed in a modified form by Jews today) was unusual. God told the Jews to take branches from palm trees and poplar trees and make shelters in which they were to live for seven days. They did this to remind themselves that for forty years they lived in tents while they wandered in the desert.

The word tabernacle means a temporary dwelling rather like a tent. In scripture it is used as a picture of the human body, reflecting the shortness of our time in this world. Paul refers to our earthly bodies as tabernacles. John states, 'The word was made flesh and tabernacled among (or in) us.' Jesus came to take up temporary residence in a human body. There is strong evidence to show that he was actually born at the Festival of Tabernacles. All of this indicates that the glories of the Festival of Tabernacles are to be fulfilled in this life. God will dwell in his people while they are still in their mortal bodies. This festival does not speak of glories in a future heaven, but of what will take place here on earth. Our future state after we leave these mortal bodies will certainly be wonderful far beyond our present imagination, but the Festival of Tabernacles speaks of glories that are for those who enter the fullness of sonship while still in their fleshly bodies.

Soon before his death Jesus told the disciples that he and his Father would come to them and make their dwelling in them. The ultimate experience in God is that he should dwell in us and we in him. This is a total oneness as when two liquids mix and lose their identity in each other. They can no longer be distinguished. When you put milk in tea, is the milk in the tea or the tea in the milk? You cannot say because they are completely lost in each other. That's how it will be with Jesus and us. When people see us they will see him.

Living Water

The Festival of Tabernacles is mentioned just once in the new testament in John chapter 7. At the beginning of that chapter Jesus refused to go up to Jerusalem for the festival in spite of pressure from his brothers, telling them that the time had not yet come. Half way through the festival he appeared in Jerusalem, and on the last and greatest day of the festival, he made this amazing proclamation, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever

Introduction

Feasts and festivals are a feature of all major religions. Most people who call themselves Christians observe Christmas and Easter. Some keep various other holy days as well. Hindus have large numbers of festivals, and Buddhists and Muslims certainly have a few.

When we turn to the Bible we find plenty of material on the subject of Jewish festivals and absolutely nothing on the so called Christian ones. This is because Christmas and Easter are not really Christian festivals at all, but pagan festivals in disguise. I have written a separate article on that subject. In this article I want to discuss the positive subject of Israel's festivals and their spiritual significance for us.

I have decided to use the word *festival* rather than the word *feast*. Most Bible translations use the word *feast* for the Jewish celebrations. However in modern English usage the word *feast* implies a few people getting together for a big meal, whereas *festival* means a large gathering of people often from all over the country, not particularly for eating. The word *festival* is therefore a much better description of what happened at the various Jewish celebration times. They were not primarily times of eating, but were times of national assembly to celebrate great events in their history and times in the agricultural year.

Before we consider individual festivals, we must ask why we need to study the festivals at all. The same question can be asked about many other passages of Scripture. Why study the tabernacle? Or the Levitical offerings? Or why study the long history of the people of Israel? The apostle Paul gives us a direct answer: 'these things happened as pictures¹ for us' (1 Cor 10: 6). The festivals and ceremonies of the old covenant, as well as the history of the Jewish people, are all pictures for us of spiritual truth. The whole scripture points firstly to Jesus himself, and secondly to our own lives and experiences as we seek to follow and become like him.

The seven festivals of the Jewish law are tabulated on the front of this booklet. Other festivals were added later, such as Purim at the time of Esther and Hanukkah at the time of the Maccabees. These seven however were the original festivals of the *torah* or law of Moses.

¹The Greek word used is *τυπος*, literally type. It can also mean *figure, image or example*. I think *picture* gives the best sense in this context.

The main scriptural references to the festivals are:

Exodus 12	Passover
Exodus 23: 14-17	Summary
Leviticus 16	Day of Atonement
Leviticus 23	All the festivals
Numbers 28:11-29:40	All the festivals
Deuteronomy 16:1-17	All the festivals

Agriculture and national history are the two main themes that run through most of the festivals. The Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread and Festival of Tabernacles are historical and commemorate the deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness journey. The Waving of the first sheaf, Pentecost and again Tabernacles are all observed at different stages of the harvest. Thus Tabernacles, which is the climax of the festivals, brings these two themes together as we will see later in more detail.

The festivals occur in three groups that, like so much else in scripture, form a pattern. There were three festivals in the first month, one in the third month, and three in the seventh month. The first three form the Passover group and speak of the beginnings of our spiritual experience. The festival of Pentecost in the third month is a further phase. The three festivals of the seventh month are the Tabernacles group and speak of spiritual maturity. Seven is the number of spiritual perfection, and the Festival of Tabernacles, which is the seventh festival and occurs in the seventh month, speaks of the perfection of our walk with God. All Israelite males were commanded in the law to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem three times a year for these three main festival seasons. Even today airline bookings to Tel Aviv from round the world are more expensive and less available at these times.

Leviticus chapter 23 begins by speaking of the weekly sabbath. It was a day when the Israelites should cease from their normal work. It was a day set apart for God. All the festivals were also regarded as sabbaths when no normal work should be done.

The law also required that offerings should be made at all the festivals. Especially the festivals of Passover and Tabernacles were times when large numbers of sacrificial offerings were made.

These two requirements of rest and sacrifice teach us a fundamental truth. We can earn nothing by our own work for God. All the blessings of all the

God. They are like spikes in an electricity supply when the voltage momentarily shoots up far above its normal level and then quickly comes down again. In Jesus this never happened. It was not necessary. He lived in God. Those precious gifts of the spirit are not God's best. They are a gracious provision for those who are immature and have not yet the mind of Christ dwelling in them.

When Paul said, 'Now we see obscurely (Greek: ἐν ἀνίγμῳ – in an enigma) in a mirror, but then face to face', he must have been thinking of God's words about Moses. 'When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles.' (Numbers 12: 6-8).

Moses had moved on from the inspirational gifts of the spirit into a deeper knowledge and experience of God. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, it appears that he knew he had not reached the place with God which Moses did. It was certainly one of his earlier letters and twenty years later he might well have written something different.

What he wrote to the Philippians from prison was similar: 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus' (Phil 3: 12-14).

Some people may think it approaches blasphemy to suggest that we can go further in spiritual experience than Paul. But we must ask, are Bible characters perfect? Did they know everything? Did they make the all-time spiritual records that can never be beaten? God is a God of growth and progress. Paul himself was dramatically converted on the road to Damascus. That experience was the start of a walk with God. From that day he grew in wisdom and understanding and knowledge of God. More than that he grew in love and joy and peace. We can trace this growth through the book of Acts and then on through his letters. He grew to be a great and wonderful man of God who served his generation and then millions more through the letters he wrote. Still God is a God of growth and progress and unfolding revelation. It is only logical to believe that there will be saints in times to come who go further than Paul. This is not blasphemy, but simple common sense.

I believe that Jesus is the only character in the Bible who made the all-time record for an unsurpassable life of continuous and perfect communion with God.

Pentecost is the realm of gifts and signs. It comes at the beginning of the summer. Gifts are very different from fruit. Gifts are instantaneously given. Fruit takes a long time to mature and ripen. It reaches perfection only after enduring

A king of kings is a king even when among kings. A Lord of lords is a lord even when among lords. A jubilee of jubilees as we have seen was quite exceptional even among jubilees. So the glory of the Festival of Tabernacles will make the glory of the other festivals seem pale in comparison.

From this we may see that we are moving on towards the grand climax of God's purposes. God is not fighting a losing battle in struggling to restore the church to its original purity against competition from materialism, modernism, communism, and other religions. He is moving forward to something that is much greater than all that has gone before.

Here we must compare the Festival of Tabernacles to the Passover. At the Passover the Jews remembered their time in Egypt. They had been slaves to the Egyptians and through Moses God set them free and made them an independent people. They were contrasting freedom with slavery. At Tabernacles they remembered their time in the desert. In the promised land the Israelites lived in houses, owned land and had a regular supply of food. In the desert things were very different. They moved from place to place as nomads and depended on God for the manna that he sent them from heaven. Which was better? Was it better to live in the desert and feed on manna sent from heaven? Or was it better to live in the fertile land of Israel, given to them by God, and live on its bounty? We can only give one answer. It is better to live in the promised land.

The miracles of the desert, the thunder of Sinai, the water gushing from the rock, the manna and the quails were wonderful provisions from God. It was a unique privilege to see and experience them. However they were a temporary provision for a passing time. Everything was far better than their bitter time of slavery in Egypt, but still the desert was not what God planned for his people. It was a place through which they had to pass.

When the Israelites reached the promised land the manna from heaven ceased. The time of miracles in the desert was over. What is there in spiritual experience that corresponds to this? What is there in the New Testament that we are told will cease?

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see obscurely in a mirror, but then face to face (1 Corinthians 13: 8-12).

Paul clearly says that when perfection comes, the gifts of the spirit (tongues, knowledge and prophecy) will pass away. Gifts of the spirit are like sudden inspirations that lift us temporarily out of our spiritual poverty into the realm of

festivals come from the offering and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us. Everything is from him. We can earn nothing by our own efforts.

They teach us another truth. We must make sacrifices in the natural realm, and set aside time that could be spent on profitable work or pleasure and give it to God. We sacrifice the material to gain the spiritual.

The festivals are like a map charting our spiritual progress in God. Our journey begins at the Passover with the shedding of the blood of the Lamb. It goes on to Pentecost with its outpouring of the Holy Spirit and foretaste of the full inheritance. Its final goal is the Festival of Tabernacles, of which we will be speaking in detail later.

The scriptures have other maps to help us reach our spiritual destination. The journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land is the best known. Like the Israelites we must cross the Red Sea, fight the Amalekites, pass through the wilderness and cross the river Jordan before we can conquer the spiritual land of Canaan that is to become our Israel.

The tabernacle is another map. We must journey through its three courts. There was an outer court where all the people could come with their offerings. There was a holy place where only the priests could go. Finally there was a Holy of Holies into which only the high priest could go, and he only once a year. The Holy of Holies was the very presence of God. These three courts correspond, I believe, to the three groups of festivals.

Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. We know him first as the Way. After that we know him more deeply as the Truth. Finally we know him as the Life. A way or road hasn't any use or meaning apart from the destination to which it leads. Even truth is not a goal itself, but only helps us reach our goal. Life is the great goal and climax of our journey. Death is separation from God. Life is union with him. We will find that the Way, the Truth and the Life also correspond to the three groups of festivals.

These are all maps to help us in our pilgrimage. The map will be of no value to people who do not want to make the journey. There is a cost and a sacrifice involved. We sacrifice what our natural eyes can see to gain those things that are revealed to the eyes of faith.

Some people experience the Passover in their lives. They know that the Lamb of God died for them. They rejoice in the forgiveness of their sins, but through unwillingness or ignorance fail to go on to Pentecost, and often oppose those who want to go further with God. Others have a desire to go beyond their initial experiences of God, and press on to Pentecost and into the baptism and power of the Holy Spirit. Sadly however many of those who experience Pentecost believe there is nothing more and settle with what they have. They remain in the

wilderness and never cross the river Jordan that lies between them and the land of promise. Happily there are also those who want to cross the river Jordan and press forward for the 'high calling of God in Jesus Christ'. These are those who experience the festival of Tabernacles.

The main emphasis of this writing will therefore be on the three festivals of the seventh month, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. They are the festivals that we must now discover and experience for ourselves.

The Passover

The festivals of the first month were centred on the Passover. This festival recalled the dramatic events that took place when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. In Egypt they were slaves. Cruel taskmasters forced them to work hard. Generations of Israelites lived and died without knowing happiness or freedom. At last God heard their cry and sent a deliverer to set them free. Moses led them out of Egypt and eventually to the land of Israel.

On the night of their departure the angel of the Lord killed the firstborn son in every Egyptian family. The Israelites were instructed to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doors of their houses. When the angel of the Lord saw the blood he passed over that house, and the firstborn son was not killed.

Jewish families observe the Passover festival every year to this day. We who follow Jesus observe a spiritual Passover. For us Jesus is the Lamb of God who died to save us from our sins. Our death sentences have been cancelled. We are freely pardoned and forgiven. The Lamb of God has carried our sin for us with all its dreadful penalty. Like the Israelites of old we are a redeemed people.

This festival is the starting point of our experience in God. Through the blood of Jesus we are redeemed or bought back to God. We initially belong to God by right of creation. He made us. We are lost to him through sin that separates us from him. Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered himself, as represented in his life blood, to purchase us back for God. On that basis we now belong to him and are his property. This is a fundamental fact that underpins all our spiritual experience. We have been bought back for God and we belong to him. We are his people and he is our God.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread

The day after the Passover the Festival of Unleavened Bread began and ran for seven days. It also had its origin in the departure from Egypt. Leaven or yeast is a substance that causes flour to swell. When the Israelites left Egypt they had no time for the leaven to swell their bread. They had to eat it unleavened.

labour of sowing and watering and removing weeds would be a complete waste of time. So it is with God, whom Jesus described as **the** Farmer. People who do not believe in a harvest have difficulty in understanding God's purposes. Nothing seems to make any sense.

This is so in our personal lives. Many things happen that we cannot understand. They seem like unnecessary frustration and suffering. When the fruit has not yet come there is nothing in which to take pleasure. When our personal time of harvest comes, all will be different. We will rejoice with great joy as we understand the purpose of the trials we have been through.

The same is true at the wider level of the church. We look at God's people now and we see much confusion. Partly this is in fulfilment of Jesus' words, **'Let both (the wheat and the weeds) grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn''** (Mat 13: 30). All too often when the Lord's people assemble believer and unbeliever sit side by side. We ourselves also are too often a mixture of faith and unbelief.

At the still wider level of the world at large, we see even more confusion. Many unbelievers will point to the bloodshed, famine and distress and question whether there can be any God. Again we may say that God's purposes and plans will all be hidden until the harvest. The time will come when according to Zechariah (14: 16) even the gentiles will go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. **'The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God'** (Romans 8: 21).

The Festival of Perfection

The Festival of Tabernacles is the seventh festival, and it occurred in the seventh month. It lasted also for seven days, (though an eighth was added onto the end for a solemn assembly). Thus it is heavily marked with the number seven, which is the number of spiritual completeness and perfection. It is the fullness of the harvest of which Pentecost was the beginning. We must see it therefore as representing the perfection of our spiritual experience in Jesus.

Each festival is a time of rest or sabbath. The seventh festival is therefore the sabbath of sabbaths or the festival of festivals. Just as the Holy of Holies was holy even compared with the holy place, so the Festival of Tabernacles is a festival even when compared with other festivals. Compared with it they are like ordinary times.

Each festival is announced by the blowing of trumpets. So important is the Festival of Tabernacles that its blowing of trumpets is a separate festival in its own rights.

Jesus made it plain to his disciples that they must not expect popularity. **‘They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God’**, he told them (John 16: 2). Opposition and rejection were to come from those of their own society who seemed the keenest to serve the very God they themselves worshipped.

Suffering and humiliation will definitely come to all who seek to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. To each the outward form of this suffering will be different and the intensity may be more or less. God knows what he is doing and will tailor his work exactly to what each one of us requires. We must not therefore be discouraged by our afflictions or compare our lives with others who seem to have an easier or different pathway. Rather we must welcome them as we would welcome the surgeon’s knife that removes a life threatening cancer. They are sent by a heavenly Father whose one purpose is the good of his children. Our inward sin must be removed, and our omnipotent Father has no other way of doing it.

We must add another thought to our theme of suffering. The day of Pentecost was one big party with 120 people in an upper room looking much as if they were drunk. On the Day of Atonement the high priest went *alone* into the Holy of Holies. Joseph, Moses and David were *alone* in their sufferings. Jesus, as he poured out his soul in death cried out, **‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’** At Pentecost our fellowship is largely with man. On the Day of Atonement we walk alone with God.

This solemn day in which the Jews had to fast and humble their souls ended in the most wonderful release. They were not only forgiven but also cleansed from all their sins and set totally at liberty. This was the preparation for the joyful festival that was to follow. Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning and travailing as it waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. These sons of God are those who have passed through the purging and liberation of the Day of Atonement and entered the Festival of Tabernacles.

The Festival of Tabernacles

The Festival of Harvest

The Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths in some Bibles) is also called the Festival of Ingathering. It is the complete harvest festival and thus the climax of God’s purposes.

A farmer’s work is worth absolutely nothing if he doesn’t have a harvest. He contemplates his growing crops with pleasure because he knows that when harvest time comes he will have fields full of food. Without the harvest, all the

Jesus said to his disciples, *‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees’*. The Pharisees were teachers of the law of Moses that was given by God. However they had added all their interpretations and traditions to it. The result was something swollen far beyond its original size, and having totally lost its purity. Paul wrote to the Corinthians *‘Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’* (1 Cor 5: 8).

For Paul the law was a *‘school teacher (pedagogue) to lead us to Christ’*. Utterly unable to meet its demands he saw his own sinful nature and cried out to God for mercy. In Jesus he found forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit he became able to meet the law’s demands.

For the Pharisees the law was a means of holding their position and authority. They took each command and added all kinds of further detail to its meaning. They made exact rules for what was work and what was not work on the sabbath. They insisted on tithes being paid of the smallest vegetable growing in the field. Exact observance of more and more laws was for them the way of earning God’s favour. The burdens of their law became heavier and heavier. Jesus by contrast said that his burden was light.

So also now the way of religion is to insist on obedience to more and more external laws that God has never given. The way of Jesus is an internal heart change that makes us keep his laws of love because it has become our inward nature to do so.

The Waving of the Sheaf of First Fruits

The day after the Sabbath following the Passover was the Waving of the Sheaf of First fruits. This festival was a forward look to the Festival of Weeks (or Pentecost) that occurred seven weeks later. The Israelites were told, **‘bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted for you’** (Lev 23: 10,11).

This festival speaks very clearly of Jesus. His resurrection took place on this very day of the year. He became in Paul’s words the **‘first fruits of them that slept’**. Jesus is the first fruit, and a very wonderful first fruit. But equally wonderful is the implication that there will be more fruit. There can only be a first fruit if there is more to follow. First fruits are not of a higher quality than the fruit that follows. Simply they are ripe before the others are. A farmer would be very disappointed if the first grain to be ripe was top quality, but what followed was scarcely fit to eat.

It is vital to see that God planned that Jesus should be **the first born among many brothers**. He did not want Jesus to be an only child. He wanted him to have

many younger brothers and sisters. In childhood an elder brother is generally much bigger and stronger and cleverer than his younger brothers and sisters. However as they all grow to maturity the differences become smaller and smaller and eventually disappear. God's plan as revealed in scripture is that this should happen with Jesus and us.

May God give us eyes to see this great truth and faith to believe it!

The Festival of Weeks (Pentecost)

Fifty days or seven weeks and one day on from the Waving of the First Sheaf is the Festival of Weeks. In the New testament this festival has the more familiar name of Pentecost from the Greek word *πεντακοσιοι* meaning 50. Thus this festival, as we have seen, is the fullness or completion of the Waving of the First Sheaf. Then there was one sheaf waved before the Lord. At Pentecost two loaves were waved before the Lord. Jesus is no longer alone. The head is joined by the body.

Yet as we study the scriptures we find that Pentecost itself is also called a festival of first fruit (Lev 23: 16). Its own fullness or completion is the Festival of Tabernacles in the seventh month. How can there be two festivals of first fruits and two fullnesses? Simply that is the way God works. An end is not an end but the beginning of something greater. A seed when it has grown multiplies itself by producing more seeds, and each new seed multiplies itself by producing more seeds again.

Each new dimension is the fullness of a lesser dimension. Compared with a point a line is a fullness. Compared with a line an area is a fullness. Compared with an area a solid is a fullness. So we move from glory to glory and from the Holy Place to the Holy of Holies. Each fresh blessing is the seed of a further blessing.

Fifty days after the first Passover in Egypt, the children of Israel came to Mount Sinai. What God did there was hardly less dramatic than what he had done in Egypt. He descended on the mountain in fire. There were thunderings and earthquakes and a voice like the sound of a trumpet. All this was a prelude to the giving of the 10 commandments to Moses.

The day of Pentecost in the book of Acts had many similarities. The two events were obviously connected. There were the sound of a rushing mighty wind, tongues of fire, and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The events at Sinai were the beginning of the old covenant and relate to the people of Israel. The day of Pentecost was the start of the new covenant and relates to the spiritual people of God.

This truth is very great and hard for us to grasp and believe. The following facts bear additional witness to it¹. An extra year was added to the 49 years of jubilee, which were therefore considered as 50 years. A jubilee of jubilees (or 50 times 50 years) is thus 2500 years. Guess what happened at the jubilee of jubilees (2500 years) from the fall of Adam. It was exactly the exodus of Israel from Egypt. That was, in the natural, the greatest setting free of slaves in all history. Exactly 80 jubilees or 4000 years from the fall of Adam something even greater happened. Jesus died on the cross to set creation free from the bondage into which Adam's sin had plunged it.

Suffering and Humiliation

How may a man or woman be set free from sin? Paul answers, '**He who has died is freed from sin**' (Rom 6: 7). Physical death totally separates us for ever from everything to do with this world. Dead men do not sin. Some people say that we will only be free from sin when we physically die, but Paul says otherwise. In Romans 6 he speaks of freedom from sin by being dead, buried and risen with Christ. That is the death that sets us free and the Day of Atonement speaks of it. The Festival of Tabernacles is the resurrection.

What does this death mean in our experience? As you study the lives of the great men and women of God, you will see them passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Joseph's youthful dreams were shattered when he found himself unjustly accused and thrown into a dungeon in a foreign land. He had to suffer before he could rise to the right hand of Pharaoh to deliver his people from starvation and death. Moses also had to experience the death of his plans and ambitions as he moved from the highest position in Egypt to the despised labour of a shepherd in the barren and inhospitable wastes of the Sinai desert. This suffering and humiliation was the path to the greatest physical display of God's power recorded in the scriptures, and the greatest revelation of his will ever expressed in human words. Before David could sit on the throne of Israel he had to hide in caves from the wrath of Saul and share his life with a company of down and outs. He even had to leave the land of Israel and live with his people's enemies the Philistines before God exalted him and made him the most famous king in history.

These men and others like them suffered before their time of blessing and exaltation. Their sufferings were not pointless or purposeless, but God used them to bring an end to their pride, their ambitions and their self-will. Something in them died. Their lives were no longer their own. The world lost its claim on them. They belonged totally to God and became fully available to him. Their very death to the world was their qualification to rule over it in righteousness and impart to it God's blessing.

¹These facts are taken from the works of Arthur Ware and Frank Paine on Bible chronology. I have written an introduction to this subject in another article.

The Day of Atonement differed from other festivals in being the one absolutely compulsory festival in the year. According to the law, anyone who didn't observe it was to be 'cut off from among his people'.

It was also different by being neither an agricultural festival, nor a festival of national remembrance. It was related to the serious subject of sin. It was a time of fasting and repentance.

In Jewish tradition the ten days from the Festival of Trumpets to the Day of Atonement are days of preparation. They are a time for self examination. The Jewish new year occurs at the Festival of Trumpets and so the Day of Atonement is a time for blotting out all the sins of the previous year.

Just once every year on the Day of Atonement the high priest went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for himself and for the whole people of Israel. On this day their sins were cleansed. To quote Leviticus 16: 30, 'because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.'

Freedom and Deliverance

Cleansing from sin is the necessary preparation for the greater blessings of the Festival of Tabernacles. At the beginning of our relationship with God we recognise that we have sinned and offended him. With great relief of mind and conscience we see that the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us for our redemption and forgiveness. With joy we go on to experience the provision of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Then comes shock as we gradually discover a sin principle that still rules and dominates our lives. Paul acknowledged that the good he wanted to do he could not do, and that the evil he did not want to do he did. We need more than forgiveness. We need inward cleansing. We need deliverance from the power of indwelling sin. Its grip on our lives must be broken. That is what we find at the Day of Atonement.

This thought of total forgiveness and restoration is emphasised by what happened every 7th year on the Day of Atonement. Every Hebrew slave was set free. The 49th or Jubilee year was even more important. In that year on the Day of Atonement *every* slave was set free, and any land that had been sold returned to its previous owner. This was all a marvellous provision for the ancient Jewish people and the foreigners who lived among them. However in picture language it pointed to something infinitely greater, which Paul describes in Romans chapter 8. There he tells us that *the whole creation is groaning and travailing in bondage waiting to be set free into the perfect liberty of the sons of God* (vv 18-22). The sons of God will be the first to be set free into this wonderful liberty. The whole creation is then to follow. The Hebrew slaves picture the sons of God who are set free first. The foreign slaves correspond to the rest of creation, whose freedom eventually follows.

Pentecost is strongly associated with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. On that day for the first time, as far as we know, people spoke in tongues. In the following days, wonderful healings took place, words of knowledge revealed hidden sin and prison doors were miraculously opened. It was a glorious time of divine manifestation. God's hand was visible among his people.

As well as gifts there were ministries. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, speaks of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. Today we have both true and false versions of these ministries. What a blessing they are when they truly come from God! Paul makes it plain that they are vital for a sound foundation in God's people. He states their purpose in Ephesians 4: 12-14, '*.. to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*'

Happy is the church or fellowship that has God-given ministries and God-given gifts, and does not rely on the world's techniques and business methods and entertainments to keep itself from collapse and disintegration.

The Festival of Trumpets

The Calendar

In the Jewish calendar there were no festivals between the third month and the seventh month. In the seventh month came the Tabernacles group of three festivals. The first of these, on the first day of the month, was the Festival of Trumpets.

Trumpets were sounded before each individual festival and at the beginning of every month. The Festival of Trumpets is therefore a very special blowing of trumpets additional to these two requirements. It is itself a festival, but it is also a preliminary to two greater festivals. It is followed by the Day of Atonement on the 10th day of the 7th month, which in turn is followed by the Festival of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd. These two festivals are so important that they require the Festival of Trumpets to announce them. The Festival of Trumpets calls us to advance into these two festivals that follow it.

The Jewish religious year began in the spring, but they also had a civil or agricultural year that began in the autumn. (In England, of course, our academic year begins in September and our tax year begins in April.) This civil year began on the first day of the seventh month of the religious calendar. This means that

the Festival of Trumpets was at the start of the civil year¹. This makes it a time of fresh beginnings for us in God.

For people of the world, the new year is often a time of making resolutions to improve their habits or way of living. These resolutions seldom last for long as human will-power is usually too weak to sustain them.

For the people of God a new year can be a time of repentance for the past and rededication for the future. The Day of Atonement, on the 10th of the 7th month, was a time for forgiveness of sin. The trumpets therefore are a call to repentance and heart-searching in preparation.

Assembly

Trumpets in ancient times served several purposes. The most important of these was to assemble the people. Church bells in many European countries served the same purpose in times past. Before the days of modern inventions, a trumpet blast was the loudest noise that could be made. It would have been audible throughout the Israelite camp in the desert, or throughout a village or town when the Israelites reached the promised land.

All through the Bible we find the use of trumpets to assemble the people. In Numbers chapter 10, God told Moses to make 2 silver trumpets. Their first purpose was for calling the people together. Gideon blew a trumpet to summon the people to fight against the Amalekites. Saul used trumpets to gather the people to fight against the Philistines (1 Sam 13: 3,4). Trumpets were blown before all the festivals to bring the people together. Jesus will send his angels with a loud trumpet call to gather his elect from the four winds (Mat 24: 31).

God wants his people to come together, but where and how? Should they meet in church buildings, or public halls, or in their own houses? Should they form one super-denomination of all true believers? What sort of coming together is in his mind?

Under the old covenant there was only one acceptable place of assembly. When the Israelites were in the desert, the trumpet blast called the people to assemble before Moses *at the entrance of the tent of meeting*. This tent of meeting was where God was. When the Israelites reached the promised land, God chose a special place to 'put his name'. 'But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go' (Deuteronomy 12: 5). That place was the temple in

¹ We find indication of this in Exodus 34:22 - "Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year" and possible in Joel 2:23 if we accept the KJV translation. Also the start of the 50th year in the 7th month of the 49th year as described in Lev 25:10 (mentioned later in this article) gives further evidence.

Jerusalem. Three times a year, at the three main festival seasons, all adult Israelite males were required by the law to go up to Jerusalem.

Where did Jesus instruct his disciples to gather? '... where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst' (Mat 18: 20). He established a new gathering place in the spirit. He didn't say, 'Go to church'; he said, 'Come to me.' He said, '.. you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem .. the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (John 4: 21).

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the 'presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him' (2 Thes 2: 1). The fundamental principle of gathering in the new covenant is that we don't gather at a place. We gather to a person. We assemble to Jesus.

This principle no doubt holds for every spiritual festival that God has given us to enjoy. However it is especially true for the festivals of the seventh month. We must come out of our own houses and tents and gather to Jesus.

A Festival for Now

I believe this festival has a special message for today. God is now working in new ways and he is drawing our attention to it. The trumpets are sounding.

Before God manifested Jesus to the world he sounded a trumpet in the land of Israel. He sent John the Baptist to call the people to repentance and prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist was a trumpet. The voices of prophecy and revelation had been silent for over 400 years since the time of Malachi. The trumpet sounded to arouse God's people and call them to advance. A totally new stage in God's purposes had come.

So now again the trumpets sound. God is calling his people together and he is calling them to advance. I believe we are entering a new year with God.

The Day of Atonement

Background

The Day of Atonement (known to many by its Hebrew name Yom Kippur) was the most solemn festival of the calendar, and it was followed by the most joyful festival. Minds attuned to the ways of God easily recognise this pattern. The pangs of labour must come before the birth of a child. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Jesus had to suffer and die before he could rise and ascend to his Father.