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The Fall Feasts of Israel

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The rhythm of life in ancient Israel revolved around the weekly Sabbath and a series of annual feasts. There were four feasts in the spring—Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Weeks (Pentecost). In addition, there were three fall feasts—Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and Tabernacles (Ingathering). Each feast carried historical and cultural connotations and each feast presents some prophetic or typological element as well. The spring feasts had their typological fulfillment during Jesus' first advent. The fall feasts look ahead to His second advent. It's these fall feasts that are the focus of this article.

The Feast of Trumpets

The Feast of Trumpets, described in Leviticus 23:23-25, took place on the first day of the seventh month of Israel's calendar. The seventh month, called Tishri, is approximately equivalent to September/October. Since the ancient calendar was based on the phases of the moon, precise correspondence with modern calendars varies. The Israelites were to set aside the first day of Tishri as a special day of rest and a day to present special offerings to the Lord

(Numbers 29:1-6). The day was announced by the blast of trumpets. "For the Israelites, the blowing of trumpets represented God calling to His people (cf. Nm 10:1-10) to prepare for a holy assembly. God regularly calls His children away from their labor and into His holy assembly where they may worship Him."¹ In a way, this one-day feast was preparatory for the upcoming Day of Atonement. It came to mark the beginning of a new religious year and came to be called Rosh Hashanah, "the head of the year."

The blast of a trumpet will, in the future, announce the return of Jesus Christ for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). For this reason the Feast of Trumpets is a type of the future rapture of the church and the subsequent assembling of Israel. "Trumpets (Lev. 23:26-32) speaks of the regathering of Israel to its home land after the out-gathering of the Church. Matt. 24:31 speaks of the Son of Man at His Second Advent sending His angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect (of Israel) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."²

The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 23:26-32 describes the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as taking place on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri), that is, ten days after the Feast of Trumpets. It was a day set aside for solemn reflection and sacrifice. Leviticus 16:1-34 gives extensive instructions for celebrating the Day of Atonement (compare Numbers 29:7-11). Central to this feast was the sacrifice of a goat and the application of its blood to the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies of the Temple by the High Priest. This act of atonement for the nation of Israel was followed by the release of a "scapegoat" into the wilderness, symbolic of carrying away Israel's sins. "The two goats thus symbolized both propitiation for sins by death and complete removal of the sins for which atonement was made. Many a person today who suffers from what is called a guilt complex could profit by a study of this ritual for the atonement and

removal of sin.”³ As a result of these actions God’s people once again acknowledge the holiness of their God.

As a type of Jesus’ return, the Day of Atonement looks ahead to the national restoration of Israel upon its recognition of Jesus as its atoning sacrifice. “Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32) envisions Israel’s national cleansing from sin (Rom. 11:25) and refers to the time when a ‘fountain will be open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness’ (Zech. 13:1). It portrays their future conversion as a nation at the Second Advent of Christ (Zech. 12:9-14).”⁴

The Feast of Tabernacles

The final fall feast of Israel, the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorated the completion of the fall harvest and was sometimes called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). Leviticus 23:33-43 says that this feast was to last for seven days beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the month of Tishri. It was to be a joyful celebration of God’s provisions and it required a journey to Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:13-17). “In contrast to the fast and repentance of the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booths was an occasion of joy—a thanksgiving day. Indeed, it is clear that when the Puritans proclaimed their Thanksgiving Day in New England, they had in mind the OT harvest festival.”⁵ The Feast of Tabernacles involved a period of rest and the presentation of special offerings spilling over into the eighth day. Numbers 29:12-39 describes that which was to be offered each day. In addition to presenting offerings, the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters—tabernacles or booths—to remind them of their sojourn in the wilderness after leaving the slavery of Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43). The New Testament records Jesus’ participation in the Feast of Tabernacles, at the end of which He invited all who are thirsty to receive spiritual refreshment in Him (John 7:1-39).

Some see Peter’s suggestion to build three shelters on the Mount of Transfiguration as an anticipation of Jesus’ Messianic kingdom (Matthew 17:4).

“The antitype of this feast has not yet appeared. Peter anticipated it, however, on the Mount of Transfiguration What Peter desired, the dwelling of heavenly and earthly people on the earth, was not possible in that age but will be possible in the conditions of the mediatorial Davidic kingdom.”⁶

Therefore, the prophetic type that the Feast of Tabernacles anticipates is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth. “Several prophets borrowed imagery from this feast to relate it to the coming reign of the Lord (cf. Is 52:7-13; Mc 5:1-4). This feast will be celebrated during the millennium (cf. Zch 14:16), presumably as a remembrance of God’s deliverance through the Messiah.”⁷

The fall feasts of Israel commemorate the gathering of God’s people, the necessity of atonement, and the subsequent joy of celebration. They typify the future calling of God’s church to heaven and the gathering of the Jews, the recognition of Jesus as the redemptive sacrifice for His chosen people, and the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

¹ John Jelinek, “Leviticus,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, Editors. (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 2014), 208.

² Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 363.

³ R. Laird Harris, “Leviticus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2. Frank E. Gaebelin, Editor. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 588.

⁴ Unger, 363.

⁵ Harris, 629.

⁶ Unger, 363.

⁷ Jelinek, 209.