

Linking Jesus With The Holy Feasts Of God

'The heavens and the earth were finished and their entire vast array. On the seventh day God completed His work of creation and He rested on the seventh day from all the work He had done. God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as His own. He made it holy because He rested from all the work He had created and made' (Genesis 2:1 to 3). 'This is what the Lord has spoken "Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Shabbat to the Lord"' (Exodus 16:23).

The Shabbat/sabbath is a holy day to the Lord. It is a day where Abraham's descendents were to set aside for God. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding between Jewish people and Christians, resulting in both sides wondering what connection there is between us. These views are based on a lack of knowledge of the truth of our shared heritage. Jesus the Messiah (in Hebrew, Yeshua HaMashiach) was an Orthodox Jewish Man Who was born and lived within a vibrant Jewish community in the holy land of Israel. He obeyed the Laws of Moses, prayed, attended the Temple and preached in Synagogues around the nation of Israel. Jesus/Yeshua was full of faith and clearly had a close, loving relationship with God our Creator. He called on other Jewish men to follow Him as the Messiah, the Anointed One sent from God; the One Who fulfilled the hundreds of Messianic prophecies written throughout the Old Testament. Every one of the holy feasts, holy holidays and holy celebrations are all 'active prophecies' or 'prophecies in action' foretelling the coming Messiah. The original disciples, twelve in number, grew to include many more men who all continued to express their faith and followed the rules of Judaism long after Yeshua died. Many Christians do not understand the Spiritual significance of the richness of Judaism. For Christians to claim to be the adopted children of Abraham, they need to fully understand the basis of his faith. Abraham expressed his faith in the coming Messiah when he shared breaking of bread and drank grape juice with Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18), representing the body and shed blood of Jesus. Then Abraham told Isaac, God would provide a ram for an offering before symbolically offering his only legitimate son Isaac, for a sacrifice (Genesis 22:7 to 13).

All Christians need to know Christianity is not a 'new' religion. Yeshua/Jesus was a dedicated Orthodox Jewish Man so Judaism and the Old Testament are the foundation of Christianity and the New Testament. Most of the New Testament was taken from the writings of the prophets, who wrote what God had told them to record. That makes Christianity the continuation or extension of Judaism. The apostles built on that same faith based heritage. All Christians need to study and understand our Jewish roots. Without Judaism, Christianity would not exist. Without Christianity, Judaism thrived for thousands of years. One way to understand the Jewish faith is to understand the Holy Feasts of the Lord, given to His chosen people for His purpose, which is to actively foretell the coming of our Messiah, the Son of God. When we choose to celebrate the Lord's Feasts, which are the holy days (now called holidays) we are acting out the ancient prophecies. God's unique plan of salvation for humanity is illustrated through His holy days and feasts as He revealed them to the Children of Israel. To understand exactly when the feasts and holy days occurred, we will briefly look at the Hebrew calendar.

Each of these feasts has a Hebrew title. The Hebrew word for feast is 'Moed' which also means 'an appointed time'. This study will be easier to follow if we know what month each of these feasts occurred. Some of the months have two names. The spelling of each month can vary according to how the word is translated from the written character and spoken accent of both the ancient and the Modern Hebrew language, into the English script and phonetic sound. According to the Lord's unshakeable command, the Hebrew New Year falls in their month of **Nisan** also called **Abib** or **Aviv** – mid March to mid April in the Western calendar. 'This month will be to you the beginning of months, the first month of the year to you' (Exodus 12:2). Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the counting of the barley harvest or omer occurred in this first month of their year. The seven-week Feast of Firstfruits began. Nisan was the season for the latter rains.

Iyar or **Ziv** – April/May, is the second month (1 Kings 6:1). The Feast of Firstfruits ended during Ziv.

Sivan – May/June, is the third month (Esther 8:9).

Tammuz – June/July. This month is not named in the Scriptures, but is called only 'the fourth month'.

Av or **Ab** – July/August. This month is not named in the Scriptures, but is called only 'the fifth month'.

Elul – August/September, is the sixth month (Nehemiah 6:15).

Tishrei, **Ethanim** or **Etanim** – September/October, is the seventh month (1 Kings 8:2). The Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Celebration of the Torah occurs during Ethanim. This month was the season for the early rains.

Cheshvan, **Marchesvan** or **Bul** – October/November, is the eighth month (1 Kings 6:38).

Kislev or **Chislev** – November/December, is the ninth month (Zechariah 7:1). The Feast of Dedication also called the Festival of Lights and Hanukkah happens during Kislev.

Tevet, **Tebet** or **Tebeth** – December/January, is the tenth month (Esther 2:16).

Shvat or **Shebat** – January/February, is the eleventh month (Zechariah 1:7)

Adar – February/March, is the twelfth month (Esther 8:12). The Feast of Purim was held during Adar (Esther 9:18 to 32).

The Feasts and holy days teach us about God's plans for mankind and hold important lessons for God's children. The feasts are not antiquated tangents of faith but they are legitimate models of God's truth. For example, the Shabbat was God's way of celebrating His creation, plus He is telling all humanity, we need at least one day of complete rest each week and so do our livestock. There are many new truths waiting to be discovered through participation in the holy feasts. These feasts fit perfectly within God's salvation plan for mankind. These feasts are not to be taken lightly nor are we to believe they are no longer relevant. Yes Yeshua did fulfil their symbolism but we need to realise Yeshua Himself observed all of these feasts. He worshipped on the Shabbat (Luke 4:16), proclaimed His Messiahship during Hanukkah (John 10:22 to 30), participated in every Passover and offered 'living water' to the Jewish people during Sukkot (John 7:37 to 39). Yeshua's earthly life and ministry revealed a continuation of the feasts. His birth did not bring their end. The apostles also continued with the feasts. In fact it was during Shavuot the first believers gathered to worship and proclaim the risen Messiah (Acts 2:1 to 39). Honouring the feasts is not to bring believers into legalistic bondage but to enhance our knowledge of our Hebraic roots. 'The set feasts of the Lord which you will proclaim to be holy convocations, are My set feasts' ... 'These are the set feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you will proclaim in their appointed season'" (Leviticus 23:2 & 4).

Beginning with Shabbat, the God appointed day of rest. 'God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He rested in it from all the work He had created' (Genesis 2:3). "Six days will work be done but the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You will do no manner of work. It is a Shabbat to God in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:3). The Shabbat is so special, it is the only feast that is held every week. The other feasts are seasonal. Shabbat is the first feast mentioned in this passage of Leviticus. The word, 'Shabbat' in Hebrew means 'to rest'. In God's infinite wisdom, He told His creation to rest. We are refreshed after a break. We all know how good we feel after a holiday. For six days God worked hard at creation. We can see God's amazing, incredible, imaginative creative mind when we see the vast array of animals, birds and vegetation. Think of the deep-sea creatures, animals that live in the dark depths of the oceans but are able to create their own light. We take for granted birds can fly but has anyone ever thought about how they do it? God created the idea then created the birds to match His idea. Consider the corals and how they catch food, their unusual but very effective way of reproducing, plus what they actually consist of. They are animals with no flesh, blood, brain or bone but are very much alive. Humans are incredible the way every part of the body goes with every other part of the body and we are the only creation made in the likeness and image of God (Genesis 1:26). God made the earth a perfect place but sin has almost destroyed it. The whole of creation was made for mankind so literally, the universe revolves around us. First He made light without the sun being there, then day and night. Air and water was created next and distributed all over the earth. Then He made all of the vegetation, trees and plants of every kind. On the fourth day He created the sun, moon, planets, stars and everything in the universe. After that came the vast array of animals, sea creatures, birds, reptiles including dinosaurs, animals that would become livestock and every other form of flora and fauna and lastly He created Adam and Eve. After that God rested.

God did not rest because He was tired. That is a human situation. God rested because His astounding work of creating the perfect earthly setting for the sole purpose of creating mankind in His likeness and image was completely finished (Genesis 2:2). Jesus said, "The Shabbat was made for mankind, not mankind for the Shabbat" (Mark 2:27). The Shabbat was to be a perpetual reminder of God's creative power. Based on the creation narrative, one day was from sundown to sundown. 'There was evening and morning, one day' (Genesis 1:5). Sunday was never called the Shabbat in the Bible, it was called the 'First day of the week' but it was the day when Jesus held the very first meeting of His new movement that came to be known as Christianity (John 20:19 to 22). It was on Sundays when the early church paid their tithes and offerings, celebrated communion (breaking bread) and fellowshiped together (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), which has resulted in the modern world enjoying two rest days every week; Saturday and Sunday. While the initial Shabbat celebrates creation, Sunday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, hence the breaking of bread on Sundays. That rite began with Abraham as he shared communion with King and Priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18). Communion has continued through the centuries and Jesus asked for it to continue right up to the day He returns to earth (Luke 22:19 & 20). That is because Shabbat is symbolic of the return of Jesus to earth when the entire earth will observe the One Thousand Years of peace and rest, with Jesus Himself ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. 'There remains a Shabbat rest for the people of God' (Hebrews 4:9). However, all feasts days are counted in relationship with the Scriptural Shabbat, the day we call Saturday. We were never told to keep Sundays holy but the Shabbat was to be kept holy. An important part of Shabbat is collective worship. Gatherings in the ancient Tabernacle and Temples and later in the Synagogues are the fulfilment of the Lord's instruction to join together in a holy convocation or sacred assembly to remember the Lord, the Creator of everything plus the Creator of Israel itself (Isaiah 43:1 & 15).

A detailed account of the Shabbat ceremony was recorded in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus revealed He was the Messiah all Jewish people had been waiting for. 'Jesus taught in their Synagogues being glorified by all. He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. He entered, as was His custom, into the Synagogue on the Sabbath Day and stood up to read. The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because God has anointed Me to preach good news (the Gospel) to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant. He sat down. The eyes of all in the Synagogue were fastened on Him. He said, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:15 to 21). The response in the Synagogue was mixed. 'Everyone spoke about Him. Some wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth' ... 'They were filled with wrath in the Synagogue as they heard these things. They rose up and threw Him out of the city' (Luke 4:22, 28 & 29). So, just like today, some people 'spoke well of Him' and others were 'filled with fury'. Some of us accept Him at His word and others reject Him. Jesus worshipped on the Shabbat in the Temple and Synagogues every week. He was born Jewish and lived His life consistent with the Laws of Moses and the depth of Judaism. The disciples and apostles also continued with Judaism throughout their lives.

Rosh Chodesh, the celebration of the New Moon was related to the Shabbat, to remind us all of the cyclic nature of the earth and seasons (Genesis 1:14). Each month in the Jewish calendar starts with the New Moon. 'Blow the shofar (trumpet) at the New Moon, at the full moon on our feast day' (Psalm 81:3 & 4). "It will happen, from one New Moon to another, and from one Shabbat to another, all flesh will come to worship before Me", says God (Isaiah 66:23). God ordained all of the feasts of the Lord but this celebration was by choice. 'Let no one judge you about what you eat, what you drink, with respect to a feast day, a New Moon or a Shabbat, which are a shadow of the things to come but the Body (of Believers) belongs to Yeshua' (Colossians 2:16 & 17).

Pesach, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The holy days of Pesach/Feast of unleavened bread and Shavuot/Latter First Fruits occur within a fifty-day time frame from March to June during the northern hemisphere spring season. The Hebrew word, 'Pesach' means to 'pass over'. Passover is significant to our salvation because Jesus was our Passover Lamb Who was slain (Revelation 5:6). God said to the Children of Israel, "The blood will be to you for a token on the houses where you are and when I see the blood, I will pass over you and there will be no plague be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt (in judgement for their extreme idolatry, Exodus 12:12). This day will be to you for a memorial and you will keep it as a feast to Me throughout your generations and you will keep it as a feast by an ordinance forever. Seven days you will eat unleavened bread. On the first day you will put away yeast out of your houses ... On the first day there will be to you a holy assembly and on the seventh day a holy assembly when no manner of work will be done during them, except for what everyone must eat and only that may be done by you. You will observe the Feast of unleavened bread for on this same day have I brought you out of the land of Egypt, therefore you will observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance forever. On the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you will eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days there will be no yeast found in your houses ... You will eat nothing leavened. In all your habitations you will eat unleavened bread." Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Take lambs according to your families and kill the Passover. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood in the basin and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin and none of you go out of the door of their house until the morning. God will pass through to strike the Egyptians and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, He will pass over the door and will not allow the 'destroyer' to come in to your houses to strike you. You will observe this thing as an ordinance to you and to your children forever" (Exodus 12:13 to 24). Leaven or yeast is symbolic of sin so all symbols of sin had to be removed from the houses and this ingredient was not to be eaten during the holy week of Pesach. Just like today, there is one way out of severe judgement for sin and that is by accepting the 'Passover Lamb' of God, Jesus our Saviour. In our day, accepting the shed blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus, we can escape the severe judgement of God for our sins. Jesus is the only way out just like the sacrificial lamb was the only escape for the Israelites. Passover symbolises our Messiah's cruel death, burial and His resurrection. 'Jesus/Yeshua took (unleavened) bread and when He had given thanks He broke it, and gave to them saying, "This is My body which is given for you. Do this in memory of Me." Likewise, He took the cup after supper saying, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you"' (Luke 22:19). The Passover was still considered Spiritually important because Yeshua told us to continue with the symbolic (always unleavened) bread and wine (fruit juice from any vine fruit, not necessarily from grapes) 'until He comes again'. If your church celebrates communion, the bread should always be unleavened or baked without yeast and the 'wine' should be non-alcoholic and juice from any vine fruit. The word English speakers use as 'wine' is in Hebrew 'vin' and it means fruit juice from a vine. It does not mean the alcoholic beverage. Black currant juice, liana nectar, passionfruit juice or grape juice are all acceptable.

As the Christians in the early Roman Church moved away from their Spiritual Judaic roots about 360AD, they lost touch with the understanding of our faith, which is based on Judaism. The church wanted to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, yet do away with everything to do with Jewish people. Anti-Semitism became the norm for the church at that time. When the Jewish people could no longer see any connection with their true beliefs, they pulled out of fellowship with the church, which was become increasingly corrupt. The Council of Nicea made the edict, the Christians were forbidden to celebrate Passover but would have a celebration named Ishtar (Easter) after the goddess of fertility, hence the Easter eggs and bunnies. The new celebration would take place after the Northern Spring Equinox. That has resulted in millions of Christians being unaware of the intimate connection between the holy Feast of Passover and the resurrection of Jesus. The early church merged their pagan celebration with the most extreme event that has happened in human history – the crucifixion, death and resurrection of the Saviour of the world. The sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus has been greatly minimised to a four-day public holiday when a few people go to church but most people enjoy a few days off work and school. With the interference of the early church, it is little wonder so many Christians are unaware of the connection we all have to God's holy feasts and our Jewish connection.

Sfirat HaOmer, the Early First Fruits or Yom HaBikkurim, meaning 'the counting of the sheaf'. This feast immediately follows Passover. This is the harvest of barley. God said, "When you have entered the land which I give to you and reap its harvest, then you will bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He will wave the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for you ... On the day you wave the sheaf, you will offer a male lamb without blemish a year old for a burnt offering to the Lord ... You will count from the next day after the Shabbat, from the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven Shabbats will be completed to the next day after the seventh Shabbat you will number fifty days and you will offer a new meal offering to God" (Leviticus 23:10 to 16). This feast is to acknowledge God's provision. There is a vital link of this feast to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was the first to ever rise from the dead and inhabit His new immortal body and by doing so He was the actual fulfilment of the Feast of Firstfruits. 'Jesus has been raised from the dead. He became the Firstfruits of those who have died. Death came by man (Adam) and the resurrection of the dead also came by Man (Jesus). Just as in Adam we all die, so in Jesus all (who accept Him) will be made alive but each in his own order. First Jesus the Firstfruits then those who are His will rise at His (second) coming' (1 Corinthians 15:20 to 23).

Jesus said, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit ... If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself" (John 12:23, 24 & 32). The resurrection of Jesus is perfectly symbolised in the wave offering of the Firstfruits and this parable was spoken to Jesus' Jewish disciples just before Sfirat HaOmer. There is another connection between the resurrection of Jesus and this feast. The timing of this holiday verifies the fulfilment of this 'prophecy in action'. Jesus celebrated His last feast with His disciples in the evening during the month of Nisan (March/April) on a Thursday night and was arrested by the Romans that same night. He was crucified at 9am on the Friday, died at 3pm that same day just before everything closed for the Shabbat and His body was quickly buried in the tomb. Although the Western world cannot work out how the Bible says He was three days and nights in the tomb when He was buried on Friday and rose on Sunday. In the Western calendar that is two days. We need to consider the Hebrew calendar. Remember, the Hebrew days are from sundown to sundown. Jesus was buried before sundown on Friday so that was considered one day. He was in the tomb all during the Shabbat, the second day. He rose on the Sunday morning, the third day. Jesus died during Pesach and rose during Sfirat HaOmer Firstfruits to fulfil ancient written prophecies.

Shavuot, the Latter First Fruits occurs during the wheat harvest, almost two months after the barley harvest. The holy days of Pesach/Feast of unleavened bread and Shavuot/Latter First Fruits occur within a fifty-day time frame from March to June during the northern hemisphere spring season. Shavuot is designed as a day of thanksgiving for the harvest, acknowledging the fact it is God Who provides our needs and that includes food. This feast is known by two names, Shavuot and Pentecost. Jewish people called this holy day Shavuot, meaning 'weeks' because it occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the harvest. 'You will count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. You will keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you will give as the Lord your God blesses you' (Deuteronomy 16:9 & 10). Shavuot was the day Moses received the Law after the Exodus from Egypt. The early church called this day 'Pentecost' (fiftieth) and that name is still used among Gentiles after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the upper room fifty days after Jesus' last Shabbat. 'When the day of Shavuot/Pentecost had fully come, the apostles were all assembled together in one place when suddenly there came a sound from heaven like the rushing of a violent wind blast and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared to them tongues resembling fire, which were distributed and settled on each one of them. They were all filled throughout their souls with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other (foreign) languages or tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them clear and loud expression in each language' (Acts 2:1 to 4). This was a fulfilment of prophecy. God said, "It will happen in the latter days, I will pour out

My Spirit on all flesh (all believers). Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. Also on the servants and on the young women in those days, I will pour out My Spirit. I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, fire and pillars of smoke" (Joel 2:28 to 30).

Imagine how the Jewish people who were in Jerusalem at that time felt. Some people lived there but some had travelled a long distance to attend the yearly Passover in Jerusalem. Imagine the thousands of Jewish worshippers leaving the Temple after the morning service when suddenly the manifestations of the Holy Spirit appeared before their eyes. That event would have been shocking for them. No wonder they were amazed by the wind and fire! They were also amazed when the apostles spoke in their various languages, praising and glorifying God. 'There were then residing in Jerusalem Jews, devout and God-fearing men from every (known) country under heaven. When this sound was heard, the multitude came together and they were astonished and bewildered because each one heard the apostles speaking in his own particular dialect ... "We all hear them speaking in our own native tongues and telling of the mighty works of God!" They were beside themselves with amazement and were puzzled and bewildered, saying one to another, "What can this mean?" (Acts 2:5 to 12). The Jewish pilgrims who had come from all over the area were hearing the impossible, but nothing is impossible for God. The Galileans were speaking in their dialects with such precision the crowds saw it as a true miracle. Once God had attracted their attention through these miracles, Apostle Peter was able to give a strong message of salvation and over 3,000 individuals opened their hearts to salvation that day. This would have been the very first Messianic revival (Acts 2:16 to 24). We are now seeing a latter-day Jewish revival as more and more Jewish people are coming to believe in Yeshua as our Messiah.

Nisan is the start of the Hebrew New Year as ordained by God. Rosh HaShanah is the Spiritual New Year, a time of repentance and soul-searching, a time to make necessary changes to ensure sins are forgiven. Yeshua was baptised and started His earthly Spiritual ministry at this time of year. Jesus/Yeshua gave us the greatest Spiritual message that has ever come to the world; the hope of salvation and the ultimate goal of living forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Creator God came to earth in the form of a Man. 'Keep this in your mind, which was in Yeshua/Jesus, Who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God a thing to be proud of but He emptied Himself taking the form of a Servant, being made in the likeness of men, being found in human form He humbled Himself becoming obedient to death, yes the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:5 to 8). Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement are very closely linked. Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur continue to declare the reality of Yeshua's future return to this earth to rule and reign for one thousand years. The feasts are designed by God to teach all believers, Jewish people and Gentiles, more about God and His plans for the world. As we study the Feasts of the Lord we can see the parallels between the feasts and the holy days. Major holy days are in two groups in two different times of the year. Sfirat HaOmer, Shavuot and Pesach occur in spring, early in the Hebrew year (March, April), while Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot the Feast of Tabernacles occur in September or October during autumn. The ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are called 'Yomim (days) Nora'im (of Awe) when Jewish people look inwardly to see how they can be more pleasing to God. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement is one of the holiest days in the Hebrew calendar. It was on Yom Kippur when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies within the Temple to make atonement for the entire nation. Two goats were prepared for the sacrifice to atone for sins. One goat was sacrificed but the other was 'forgiven' and set free, literally an 'escape goat' or 'scapegoat' and this is where the term originated. In Spiritual terms, Jesus was the slain sacrifice while those who accept Jesus as our Saviour, are forgiven and set free, escaping from eternal judgement. This was the day of atonement, self-evaluation, repentance and forgiveness, which still stands today among Jewish people. After the Temple was destroyed in 70AD, the Jewish people had to change the way they celebrated Yom Kippur. Rabbis in the first century AD made substitutions so they could still continue the concept of Yom Kippur. Prayer, repentance and charitable work replaced the sacrificial lambs and goats. The reason animal sacrifices had to stop, was because Jesus our Saviour and Messiah was the ultimate atoning sacrifice (Romans 3:25). Some Orthodox Jewish people have a desire to see a new Temple built but Scripturally, the new Temple is not built with human hands but is the 'building' of dedicated people as a Spiritual Body. All those who accept Jesus, accepts God our Creator (Luke 10:16) and we will collectively be the 'new Temple' (1 Corinthians 6:19). 'You are of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Himself being the Chief Cornerstone in Whom the whole building, fitted together grows into a holy Temple in the Lord in Whom you are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:19 to 22).

Yom Kippur is the only Scripturally mandated food-fast day and it is strictly only for adults over the age of thirteen. Anyone who is younger than thirteen, ill, infirm, pregnant or breastfeeding are all exempt from fasting. Other fasts mentioned in the Bible are by choice. Fasting sensitises our hearts to the Holy Spirit and to the heart of God. Apart from the collective one-day fast of Yom Kippur, fasting is only good for us when we do so in secret so only God knows we are fasting (Matthew 6:16 to 18). The Yom Kippur fast begins after the

evening meal eaten before dark and lasts for only one day, but it a complete fast – no food, no water, no luxuries of any kind, no sex, no entertainment and no unnecessary bathing. They focus on the need for atonement and forgiveness, the very tasks Jesus did so well on the cross, paying the price for our sins, the fulfilment of what Yom Kippur is all about. The break-fast meal is enjoyed after sundown, just one day after the fast began. When Yeshua read out from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 61:1 to 11, (Luke 4:16 to 22) He did that reading on the Shabbat Day during Yom Kippur in His local Synagogue in Nazareth, and revealed to His listeners, He was their Messiah, the Anointed One. Nazareth means 'Branch' and Yeshua is 'The Branch'. 'They (Mary, Joseph and Yeshua) lived in a city called Nazareth so it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, "He will be called a Nazarene"' (Matthew 2:23). 'A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse and a 'Branch' out of his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of God will rest on Him, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Might, the Spirit of Knowledge and of the (holy, reverential) fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord' (Isaiah 11:1 to 3).

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles is when Jewish people built temporary huts to dwell in for eight days. It is a reminder of the time when the Children of Israel lived temporarily in makeshift accommodation while wandering through the wilderness. Sukkot can loosely be translated as 'habitation'. God dwelt with His people during their forty-year camping trip, providing them with everything they needed – food, water, clothing, shelter, warmth, shade and protection. God provided for them and made the Tabernacle His habitation for that time. God dwelt among His people. Hundreds of years later, Yeshua came as the manifestation of God and dwelt among His people. 'The Word became human flesh and lived among us. We saw His glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Sukkot was the time for the autumn harvest when the Israelites would thank God for His provision and prayed for rain to produce the next crop. A priest would take a pitcher of fresh water to signify rain and pour the water out at the Temple altar. People would shout and sing for joy in anticipation of good rain. This act was a 'prophecy in action' to illustrate the days when the Messiah had come and after His death and resurrection the cleansing 'Water' of the Holy Spirit was poured out. With this historical knowledge, we can appreciate a very special Sukkot day recorded in the New Testament. The word 'salvation' in Hebrew is Yeshua, our Saviour's Hebrew name. That links in with the Scripture, 'Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and will not be afraid for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and song and He has become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation' (Isaiah 12:2 & 3). Then this happened. 'On the last and greatest day of the Feast of Sukkot, Jesus/Yeshua cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to Me and drink! Those who believe in Me as the Scripture has said, from within them will flow rivers of living water." He said this about the Holy Spirit, which those believing in Him were to receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Yeshua was not yet glorified' (John 7:37 to 39). As usual, the words of Yeshua caused controversy because He was saying in a poetic way, "Do you genuinely want the waters of the Holy Spirit? Do any of you understand the true significance of this Feast? If anyone wants this, let them believe in Me for I am the Messiah Who will send the Holy Spirit to Israel." In the end, the Feast of Sukkot will be fulfilled for the final time. 'Behold, God's dwelling is with mankind and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them as their God' (Revelation 21:3). We cannot live with God for eternity in the Kingdom of God unless we wholly accept the Son of God Yeshua, and His amazing sacrifice made solely for us by the grace and mercy of God. This salvation is God's ultimate plan for humanity. Jesus/Yeshua was born in late autumn during the Feast of Tabernacles (September/October), His ministry began at age 30, lasted 3½ years and He died during Passover (March/April) aged 33½ years old.

Purim, the Feast of Lots was a day when the destruction of all Jewish people was decided by casting a 'lot' similar to flipping a coin, and that 'lot' was to determine the timing of the wicked plan to annihilate all Jewish people in Persia. Men, women, children, babies and the elderly were all to be murdered then their goods plundered. Casting lots is where we get the word, 'lottery'. It is gambling. In ancient Hebrew, the word 'Pur' meant 'lot', and plural in the Hebrew language is 'im' so we get the word 'Purim' meaning 'lots' ... they cast 'lots'. In ancient Persia, one wicked man named Haman hated the Jewish people so much he wanted to eradicate them all. Iran is modern-day Persia and Iran still wants to eradicate Israel and all Jewish people, however that will not happen because God will never allow it. He loves the Jewish people and will never allow their annihilation no matter how hard wicked men may try. Haman was gambling with the fate of the Jewish race. In spite of wicked Haman's best efforts, the entire Jewish population in the Persian Empire was delivered on the 14th and 15th of March 473 BC due to the brave efforts of Jewish Queen Esther (in Hebrew, Hadassah). The day appointed for their destruction became the day of their miraculous deliverance. To commemorate that event, the Feast of Lots or Purim (also known as Mordecai's Day) was celebrated every year. Initially, the feast was attended by local Jewish people in a non-religious setting. Gifts were given and received but over time the feast became universal. By the time Jesus came, the feast was much more ceremonial and now holds a distinct day of celebration in the Hebrew calendar. The full story of Purim can be read in the ten chapters of the Book of Esther.

The Book of Esther does not include dates nor does it contain the after-effects of Esther's bravery. Her marriage to King Xerxes (aka Ahasuerus, ruled 485-465 BC) brought great prestige to the Jewish people. Xerxes was one of the most illustrious monarchs of the ancient world. The Book of Esther records an extremely important historical event, it is not just a story. Without Esther's intervention, many thousands of Jewish people could have been murdered. Esther knew God had raised her up for that very moment in time. 'Who knows if you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this' (Esther 4:14). This wise, beautiful young Jewish woman paved the way for Yeshua our Saviour to come to earth to deliver all who accept His Sacrifice. Esther became Queen of Persia in 478 BC. Five years later, Esther bravely saved the Jewish people from a massacre in 473 BC. Xerxes died thirteen years later. His son, Esther's stepson Artaxerxes then reigned. Shushan or Susa the Palace was about 400 kilometres east of Babylon and was the winter palace for Persian kings. On one wall of the palace an inscription written by Artaxerxes II (405-358 BC) reads, "My ancestor Darius (Ezra 4:5) built this palace in former times. In the reign of my grandfather (Artaxerxes I) it was burned, I have restored it." The palace was the residence of Darius, Xerxes husband of Esther and Artaxerxes I. Esther lived far into the reign of her stepson Artaxerxes I, and as queen-mother was a person of influence.

Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication or the Festival of Lights was not one of the feasts ordained by God. It came about when the Jewish people won a resounding victory over their enemies about 160 years before Yeshua was born. The history of this celebration is not included in the Bible but it is mentioned in the Gospels (John 10:22). Looking back in history to 167 BC, the Jewish people were living under oppression. Alexander the Great ruled until his death then his Hellenistic Empire was divided between four of his generals. Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), took control of Judea. He insisted he be called Epiphanes meaning 'god manifest'. However, the Jewish people called him 'Epimanes' meaning 'crazyman'. Antiochus enforced a policy of assimilation into the Greek culture and beliefs. Many Jewish people adapted to the Hellenistic way of life but a significant number of Jewish people refused to accept the Greek false religion, their corrupted language and their promiscuous behaviour, choosing instead to remain pure and adhere to the Bible and most importantly, they continued to speak Hebrew. An ultimatum was sent to the genuine Jewish people – give up worshipping God and all aspects of Judaism or die. To prove he was serious, Antiochus desecrated the Temple and everything was defiled or torn down. Antiochus who violently hated the Jewish people, made a furious and determined effort to annihilate all Jews and their religion. He devastated Jerusalem in 168 BC. He defiled the Temple, offered a sacrificial sow on the altar, erected an altar to Jupiter, erected an image of the Greek god Zeus making it the new point of worship in the Temple, prohibited Jews from worshipping in their Temple, forbade circumcision of boys on the pain of torturous death, sold thousands of Jewish families into slavery, destroyed all copies of Hebrew written Scriptures he could find, murdered anyone in possession of the Bible and resorted to every conceivable means of torture to force Jews to renounce their religion. Many Jewish people gave up Judaism. Antiochus formed a plan to force the Jewish people to participate in a religious ceremony, the highlight of which was to consume the flesh of a sacrificed pig. This led to the Maccabean revolt, one of the most heroic victories in history.

Enter Mattathias, an elderly priest devoted to Yahweh. He was chosen to lead the pagan ceremony. When Syrian soldiers came to get Mattathias, he and his five sons, Judas (nicknamed Maccabee - hammer), Jonathan, Simon, John and Eleazar reacted with holy indignation. They had had enough! They strongly believed the God of Israel is true and faithful and they trusted Him to help them win a victory. Mattathias was a man of great patriotism and courage. These six men were heroic and warlike. They killed the Syrian soldiers and started a revolt against their oppressors. They gathered a band of loyal Jewish men and raised a standard or flag of revolt. When Mattathias died, his mantle fell onto his eldest son Judas Maccabee, a seasoned warrior of amazing military genius. Overwhelmingly outnumbered and greatly undersupplied, the tiny army of the Maccabees relied on the knowledge of the surrounding area, employed guerrilla warfare and had surprising success and proved that with God, the impossible could happen. Judas' army won battle after battle against unbelievable and seemingly impossible situations. They drove out the Syrians. They recaptured Jerusalem in 165 BC, then purified and re-dedicated the Temple. The menorah (golden candlestick) was broken. It symbolised the Light of God. It was important to them it be restored. They restored the menorah and tried to light it but there was not enough purified oil to last more than a day. It would take at least eight days to purify more oil so they decided to light the menorah anyway to bring God's Light. To their amazement, the menorah continued to burn for eight days until the new oil was ready. The Temple was restored and rededicated to the glory of God and an eight-day festival was established. They called the new festival, 'Hanukkah' meaning 'dedication'. Every year this two-fold miracle is celebrated. The miracle of the military victory and the miracle of the oil burning in the menorah for eight days. This incredible victory paved the way for Yeshua to be born in Israel and was the origin of Hanukkah. Judas united the priestly and civil authority, establishing the line of Asmonean priest-rulers who governed Judea independently for the next 100 years until the Romans conquered them in 63 BC.

The Maccabean victory was spoken about in prophecy in great detail by Daniel approximately five hundred years before the Maccabees war. 'The rough male goat is the king of Greece (Alexander) and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. As for that which was broken, in the place where four (generals) stood up, four kingdoms will stand up out of the (Greek) nation, but not with his power (they were much weaker). In the latter time of their kingdom when the transgressors have come to the full, a king of fierce face and understanding dark sentences (Antiochus, a wicked man) will stand up. His power will be mighty but not by his own power (evil forces). He will destroy thoroughly, will prosper and do his pleasure. He will destroy the mighty ones and the holy people (Jewish people). Through his policy he will cause wickedness to prosper in his hand and he will magnify himself in his heart (calling himself Epiphanes), and in their security will he destroy many. He will also stand up against the prince of princes (Judas Maccabee) but he will be broken without hand' (Daniel 8:21 to 25). This wonderful victory became a holy day for Jewish people and was celebrated by Yeshua in the very same Temple that had been cleansed and rededicated. Hanukkah is a celebration of deliverance.

With all of the holy Feasts of the Lord, there are Spiritual lessons to be learned. Yeshua was the complete fulfilment of every prophecy written about Him in the Old Testament. Every one of the feasts have aspects regarding our Messiah's first appearance on earth and also His second coming yet to take place. We are reminded by the feasts we live in a constant cycle of seasons that do not stop but continue year after year, providing us with food, clothing, shelter and other needs, all provided by God. He truly is our Provider. 'Lord, You visit the earth and water it. You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide them grain for so You have ordained it. You drench its furrows. You level its ridges. You soften it with showers. You bless it with a crop. You crown the year with your bounty. Your carts overflow with abundance. The wilderness grasslands overflow. The hills are clothed with gladness. The pastures are covered with flocks. The valleys are clothed with grain' (Psalm 65:9 to 13). 'Blessed are those who do His commandments. They have the right to the Tree Of Life and may enter in by the gates into the holy city ... "I, Yeshua have sent My angel to testify these things to you for the Assemblies (Synagogues, churches, gatherings). I am the root and the offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." The Holy Spirit and the Bride (all true believers both Jewish and Gentiles) say, "Come!" Those who hear (and believe) let them say, "Come!" Those who are thirsty (for God) let them come. Those who desire to, let them take the water of life freely ... Yeshua who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes, come Lord Yeshua. The grace of the Lord Yeshua our Saviour be with all the saints (believers) Amen' (Revelation 22:14, 16 & 17, 20 & 21).

Amen and God bless you.

www.bibleabookoftruth.com