

The year 5775 will begin on the Hebrew Calendar at sunset on September 24. According to Jewish tradition, this represents the 5,775 years since Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day of Creation.

September 25-26 will bring the celebration of *Rosh Hashanah*, “the head of the year,” or the Jewish New Year. Sometimes called “The Feast of Trumpets,” *Rosh Hashanah* begins Ten Days of Penitence, which end with *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

Taken together, *Rosh Hashanah*, the Days of Penitence, and *Yom Kippur* are known as the “**High Holy Days**,” during which, according to one Jewish source, “Sincere prayer and meditation help us to experience the reality of God and to dedicate ourselves anew to the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth—the reign of freedom, justice, and peace.”

Then on October 9, the Feast of *Sukkot* (or “shelters” or “tabernacles”) begins. This is a harvest festival that celebrates God’s provision and protection. As we approach these High Holy Days of our Jewish friends, I thought it might be good to say a word or two about “the festivals of the Jews.”¹

While different sources present the list with some variation, there appear to be seven primary festivals in the Hebrew Calendar. One of these, the **Sabbath**, occurs every week, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. Of the remaining six, three occur in the spring and three in the fall. Because Israel was primarily an agricultural culture at the time these festivals were inaugurated, four of the festivals have some connection with the normal flow of an annual agricultural cycle.

Spring Festivals

Passover² (also called *Pesach* or The Feast of Unleavened Bread) commemorates Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, when the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts caused the Angel of Death to pass over the Israelite homes. Jesus was crucified on Passover, as the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins . . . forever.

Firstfruits was a ceremony that was to take place when the first grain harvest of the year occurred. Farmers were to bring a sheaf of the first grain harvested and present it to the Lord with other sacrifices as an expression of gratitude.

The Feast of Weeks (also called *Shavuot* or Pentecost) occurs on the fiftieth day following Firstfruits (hence “Pentecost”) as an expression of gratitude to God at the end of the spring harvest season.



¹ The most concise summaries of the festivals may be found in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28.

² Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were the Three Pilgrimage Festivals during which all Jewish men who lived in Judah were supposed to be present at the Temple.

Fall Festivals

The Feast of Trumpets (also called *Rosh Hashanah*, which literally means “the head of the year”) celebrates the end of one agricultural/calendar year and the beginning of another. This festival begins the Ten Days of Penitence that lead up to the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement (also called *Yom Kippur*) is the holiest day in the Hebrew Calendar. It was on this day, and on this day alone, that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the nation. In the New Testament, nearly the entire book of Hebrews is devoted to the development of the thesis that Jesus is our High Priest who “*entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption*” (Hebrews 9:12).

The Feast of Tabernacles (also called *Sukkot*) comes at the end of the fall harvest and remembers God’s provision for Israel during their forty years in the desert. This feast appears in Zechariah’s eschatological vision of the End Times: “*the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles*” (Zechariah 14:16).



There are certain groups of Christians today who affirm that these feasts and festivals should continue to be observed by followers of Jesus as well as by Jews. Often calling themselves “Hebraic Christians,” these groups point out that Jesus, the Disciples, Paul, and the Jerusalem Church continued to observe these festivals, setting an example that we should continue to follow today.³

While Jewish folk do indeed continue to observe these festivals with utmost seriousness, it seems to me that the arguments of the Hebraic Christians fail to do justice to the evidence of the New Testament. While it is quite true that Jesus observed these Jewish festivals, as did the Disciples, Paul, and the Jerusalem Church, the reason for this observance is quite straightforward: they were all Jewish, and they took their Jewish faith seriously.

But as the Church quickly welcomed Gentiles by the thousands to faith in Jesus, **it seems quite significant that those same persons** (Paul, the Disciples, and the Jerusalem Church) **did not enjoin observance of the Jewish feasts on Gentile believers when they had every opportunity to do so.** To the contrary, at the great “Jerusalem Conference” recorded in Acts 15, those Jewish Christian leaders wrote these instructions to the Gentile believers in response to the specific question of whether or not Jewish law and custom applied to Gentile believers, and if so, to what extent:

³ “Hebraic Christians” are to be distinguished from “Messianic Jews,” which are persons of Jewish faith and/or ethnicity who affirm Jesus of Nazareth as God’s promised Messiah. The most frequently-cited verses in support of Christians keeping the Jewish feasts are Leviticus 23:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; and Colossians 2:16-17, but I think there are better ways to understand each of these passages. See John D. Garr, *God’s Calendar: Reminders of Grace and Faith*, www.hebraiccommunity.org.

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things” (Acts 15:28-29).⁴

There was no word here about circumcision, the Sabbath, or about any of the other festivals and customs of the Jews, and *it appears to me that our “Hebraic Christian” friends are making the very mistake that the decision of the Jerusalem Conference was intended to prevent.* While it is certainly true that Christians need as much understanding as we can muster of these Jewish celebrations, in that they do in large measure prefigure what God has done in Christ, we do well to remember that it was Paul himself who told us that **“the entire law is fulfilled in keeping *this one command*: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”** (Galatians 5:14).

Well, whatever we make of these historical-theological questions, as our Jewish neighbors prepare for and experience their High Holy Days this year, I encourage you to express your support, friendship, and prayer for their journey. Pray, too, that they might discover, in God’s own time, the joy of knowing their Messiah, whose Name is above every name, and who is the *“source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”* (Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 5:9).

And one other way in which we, too, might observe these Holy Days would be to re-read the book of Hebrews, so that we may remember with joy that *“we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Dave

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week thirty-five: A New Beginning

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16).

God is always the God of newness. The Bible continually refers to the fact that it is never too late for a new beginning. To Isaiah, the Lord said, *“Behold, I will do a new thing”* (Isaiah 43:19). To Ezekiel He said, *“I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within them”* (Ezekiel 11:19). The author of Hebrews spoke of *“a new and living way”* (Hebrews 10:20). And in the Apocalypse, John reported, *“He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’”* (Revelation 21:5).

The words of our text today have become immortal. Ruth’s familiar words constitute the formula for us when new things come and we cling to Christ in such a manner. When personal renewal comes to our own heart, it brings several new things.

⁴ Many have noted similarities between these instructions and what are known as the Noahide Laws, laws that Jewish tradition maintains were given by God to Noah prior to the covenant with Abraham that established the Hebrew people. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Laws_of_Noah

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DETERMINATION

When Ruth said, “*Entreat me not to leave you,*” she was declaring that even though her sister-in-law, Orpah, had turned back, she, with a new determination, would cling to Naomi. Ruth’s decision came when all influences were against her—Naomi’s insistence she leave, Orpah’s example, and the religion of her childhood, to name just a few. Yet Ruth was determined to do the right thing and follow Naomi.

When new things come to us, they can bring a new determination. We say to our Lord what Ruth said to Naomi, “*Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you.*”

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DIRECTION

Ruth continued, “*For wherever you go, I will go.*” In other words, she was saying, “This will be my life’s direction.” She had never been that way before.

A new direction is always a telltale sign of genuine renewal. We begin to become interested in the things in which Jesus was interested. As Ruth was to Naomi, so shall we be to Christ when personal renewal fills our heart. This kind of relationship brings a new determination and a new direction. Christ becomes the way we follow.

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DEPENDENCE

Next, Ruth declared, “*Wherever you lodge, I will lodge.*” Ruth’s determination instilled in Naomi a new dependence on God, and she would later instill this same dependence in her children and grandchildren. Later, in Bethlehem, she would meet and marry Boaz, the lord of the harvest. They would have a son named Obed, who would have a son named Jesse, who would have a son named David—the shepherd, the psalmist, the king.

Ruth knew that home was in the middle of God’s will. When personal renewal comes, it is accompanied by a new degree of trusting the Lord to meet our basic needs.

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DESIRE

“*Your people shall be my people*” was Ruth’s next declaration. Following Naomi brought a new desire in Ruth to embrace Naomi’s people as her own. It is impossible to fellowship with God and refuse to fellowship with His people. Among all the new things He brings at the point of our salvation is a new desire to say to Him, “*Your people shall be my people.*”

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DEVOTION

Then Ruth confessed to Naomi, “*Your God shall be my God.*” She was saying, “I am not only taking your people as my people, but your God as my God.” In Bethlehem Ruth would be an exile from all she had ever known; but Ruth knew Naomi, and when she watched Naomi repent and set her face as a flint toward the right path, Ruth found not only a new direction and desire, but also a new devotion. Personal renewal brings a new devotion to our lives.

PERSONAL RENEWAL BRINGS A NEW DEDICATION

The next verse continues: “*Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried*” (Ruth 1:17). Ruth was saying not even death would separate Naomi and her. Ruth was not coming back, even if things did not turn out as she thought they should.

We need the same dedication in following Christ. It costs us our life. Ruth would eventually die, as we all do. But first she would marry Boaz, and today she lives on in history and in heaven as an example for us all.

What a wonderful picture of you and me when we truly say to Christ what Ruth said to Naomi: “*Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; . . . Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.*” Yes indeed, He has a way of making “all things new” (Revelation 21:5).