

"Celebrating the Lord's Feasts in the Church" by Richard Booker <sup>1</sup>

(an article from Return to God Magazine, Volume 1 Number 3, page 4). Richard Booker has an international teaching ministry and is the author of numerous Christian books, some of which are on the "Jewish Roots of Christianity." He travels extensively ministering in churches and is a regular speaker at the Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, Israel

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It has always been God's intention to unite both Jew and Gentile as one with Him through the Jewish Messiah, who would also be the Savior of the Gentiles (Isaiah 11:10, 42:6; Acts 2:39; Ephesians 2:11-18).

In the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) God provided a written record of the Messiah to enable the Jewish people to recognize Him when He appeared. Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be this Messiah and proved it by fulfilling in Himself the very Scriptures that spoke of the Messiah. Yet, even though many Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the powerful Jewish leadership rejected Him for themselves and the people of Israel.

Ironically, the Gentiles embraced Jesus. As the apostle John wrote, "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:11-12). These Gentile followers of Jesus experienced a spiritual new birth and became part of a company of people called "the Church."

#### THE GREAT DIVIDE

As the Church became more "Gentilized," Jews and Christians began to go their separate ways. It wasn't long before the Church was flooded with unbelievers who embraced the Christian faith but never received Jesus personally as their Lord and Savior. These people brought their hate against the Jews with them into this new Christian faith. About the same time, some of the genuine Christian leaders developed a faulty theology that created an anti-Semitic mentality in the Church that further divided the Christian world from the Jews. These early anti-Jewish declarations laid the foundation for the tragic future of Jewish-Christian relations that would see the Church lose sight of its Jewish roots and persecute the Jews down through the centuries.

#### GOD IS DOING A NEW THING

But in these last days, God is doing a marvelous thing. He is breaking down the walls of hate and misunderstanding that have divided the Jews and Gentile believers. He is sovereignly pouring out His Spirit on thousands of Jews to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. At the same time, God is stirring in the hearts of Christians a holy love for the Jewish people and awakening them to the Jewish roots of their Christian faith.

Many Christians are realizing that the origin of our faith is Jerusalem, not Athens, Rome, Geneva, Wittenberg, Aldersgate, Azusa Street, Springfield, Nashville, Tulsa, etc.

As a result, Christian Churches around the world are reaching out to the Jewish people in their communities, singing songs from the Old Testament, rediscovering their Jewish roots and celebrating the Jewish Feasts as fulfilled in Jesus. It is clearly God's appointed time to reconcile Jew and Gentile, binding us together by His Spirit in the Messiah.

**CELEBRATING THE FEASTS** Because of the prophetic season in which we are living, Churches are realizing that it is proper, good and pleasing to the Lord to celebrate the Jewish Feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles as fulfilled in Jesus (Romans 14:5-6).

There are a number of benefits Churches are experiencing by celebrating the Jewish Feasts. Some of these are: 1. Better understanding of the Bible 2. Rediscovery of the Jewish roots of Christianity 3. Fuller comprehension of God's plan of redemption 4. Deeper revelation of Jesus 5. Greater insights into God's prophetic seasons 6. Clearer and more powerful teachings through visual aids 7. Discovery of the Biblical Church calendar.

What Church that desires more of God would not want these benefits! You can realize them in your own congregation by celebrating the Feasts.

#### GETTING STARTED -- THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

Historically, Passover marks the national liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. Pesach, the Hebrew name of the feast literally means "the lamb". God instructed each family to take an unblemished year-old male lamb to their home on the tenth day of the first month, Nisan. This corresponds to the months of March and April. They were to examine the lamb for four days to see that it was perfect. On the fourth day at twilight (the beginning of the fifth day), they were to kill the lamb and take some of the lamb's blood and place it on the two doorposts and the lintel of their house. On the first Passover, the avenging angel of God killed every first born male throughout the land, from Pharaoh, to slave, to camel. The angel would "Passover" those homes that protected themselves by placing the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and lintels.

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<sup>1</sup> C:\My Documents\bible\FeastsTabernacle\Feasts2.doc

Today the Feast of Passover is celebrated by Jewish people around the world with a Passover Seder which commemorates the liberation from Egyptian slavery. The Passover Seder is a meal with special foods, practices and Scripture readings. The Passover Seder commemorates the liberation from Egyptian slavery, in accordance with God's instructions (Lev. 23:1,4, Exodus 12:14,24-27)

**JESUS AND THE FEAST OF PASSOVER** "...For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" -- 1 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV). The Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits are a picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He sacrificed Himself on the Feast of Passover, was buried on the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was resurrected on the Feast of First Fruits. When one recognizes that these Feasts symbolize Jesus' redemptive work, the practices of these Feasts become a valuable teaching aid.

**CELEBRATING PASSOVER** Begin to plan now. In the calendar year of 1995, the Feast of Passover is April 15. Easter Sunday is April 16. What a timely opportunity to have a Messianic Jewish organization come to your Church to give a Passover presentation. Or you could have a special teaching from a guest speaker who is knowledgeable on the subject. You can have a communion celebration that relates the Old Testament ritual to Jesus with practical application to the believer's life. Your church could conduct a Passover Seder that teaches Jesus' fulfillment of the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits.

**THE FEAST OF PENTECOST** The Feast of Pentecost is celebrated on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. This corresponds to the months of May and June on the Gentile calendar.

Historically, the main activity on the Feast of Pentecost was the presentation of a wave offering to the Lord, two loaves of baked bread with leaven (Lev. 23:15-21). The wave offering expressed the Hebrews' dependence on God for the harvest and their daily bread. This was a thanksgiving offering.

Later when the Jews were dispersed among the nations, the Feast of Pentecost lost its primary significance as a harvest festival and was celebrated as a memorial to the time when God gave the law at Sinai. This is because the Jews have traditionally believed that God gave the law to Moses on the Day of Pentecost (Ex. 19:1,11).

**JESUS AND THE FEAST OF PENTECOST**

The Day of Pentecost did not originate with Christianity, but it is the Jewish feast day that God chose to send the Holy Spirit as proof that Jesus had been glorified as Lord. This was the day when the Jews would be in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast and the giving of the law.

From Luke's account in Acts 2 we see the marvelous timing of God. Thousands of Jews had journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. It was then that the followers of Jesus waiting in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit. They then began to worship God in foreign languages that were spoken and understood by the Jewish pilgrims. There was such a loud noise accompanying this experience, that it attracted the attention of the Jewish visitors who went to see what the commotion was all about. Peter then stood up and preached a bold sermon to this Jewish crowd. About 3,000 responded to Peter's sermon by accepting Jesus as their Messiah and Lord.

This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was taking place on the very day when the Jews were offering the two wave loaves to God and celebrating the law symbolizing their dependence on God. One wave loaf symbolized the Jews and the other the Gentiles who would also receive the Holy Spirit in like manner as recorded in Acts 10.

**CELEBRATING PENTECOST** Gentile believers consider the outpouring of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts 2 as the beginning of the Church when God wrote His laws on the fleshy tablets of the disciples' hearts. Now we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior and call upon the Holy Spirit to fill us with His power for Godly living. What better way to corporately express our thanksgiving to God and dependence on Him than by celebrating the Feast of Pentecost as fulfilled in Jesus and realized in our own lives.

The Feast of Pentecost in the calendar year of 1995 is June 4. This would be a perfect time to plan a Summer Jesus Festival on that day at your church. It would be appropriate for the Minister to give a sermon based on Acts 2, including an explanation of the Old Testament background of this Feast. Or you could have a special teaching from a guest speaker who is knowledgeable on the subject. This could be followed by a time of thanksgiving and praise, calling on the Holy Spirit to fill all those present as He did on the Day of Pentecost.

Three thousand responded to Peter's message and were baptized that day. So, this would be a good day to baptize new converts following the service.

Since Pentecost was also a harvest festival, it would be appropriate to bring bread and canned food items to give to the church pantry for the needy as a wave offering to the Lord. The people could actually wave these to the Lord as they presented them. An outdoor concert, with a Messianic music group and church picnic, could be planned for after the service. These are just a few suggestions to serve as "thought starters" for you in developing your own ideas.

**THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (SUKKOT)** The last major feast on the Jewish calendar is Tabernacles. It is celebrated in the Fall in the Jewish month of Tishri, which corresponds to the month of September/October on the Gentile calendar.

The Feast of Tabernacles came at the final ingathering of the harvest season. The fruit of the land had been reaped so the people could rest from their labors. It was a time of great rejoicing and was celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. Then on the twenty-second (the eighth day), there was a special Sabbath which was a day of rest characterized by further rejoicing (Lev. 23:33-41).

The primary activity during this feast is the building of booths or shelters (Sukkah). God commanded the Hebrews to build shelters to live in during the Feast as a reminder of how He cared for them during their wilderness wanderings and

the fact that they were pilgrims passing through this life (Lev. 23:42-44). The shelters were loosely constructed and decorated and the roof covered with branches. This allowed the Hebrews to see through the roof into heaven and be reminded of an even greater rest and rejoicing when Messiah would rule on the earth. Thus, the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the Messianic age.

**JESUS AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES** Jesus is the perfect tabernacle or dwelling place of God (John 1:14; Col. 1:19). He will ultimately fulfill this feast at His second coming. Then there will be a literal rest for the earth and all its inhabitants.

This period of time is known as the Millennium, from the Latin words which mean one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-6). It will be a time of great rejoicing (Isaiah 51:11). Until then, we can experience God's rest in our souls through a personal relationship with Jesus, while looking forward to His return (Mt. 11:28-30; John 15:11).

**CELEBRATING TABERNACLES** The Feast of Tabernacles has such universal significance in God's redemptive program, that He requires all nations to go to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast during the Millennium (Zeh. 14:16). Many thousands of believers are doing so as a sign of the prophetic season in which we are living.

For those who are not able to go to Jerusalem, you can celebrate the Feast in your church. The Feast of Tabernacles for 1995 is October 9-15. You can begin the activities on Sunday, October 8 and celebrate through Sunday, October 15.

It would be good to build a booth and display it during the services. The men of the church can do the "heavy work" of building the frame (three sides and roof). Construct the roof open enough to see through. A lattice or trellis roof works fine. The fourth side is the door. The women can "finish" the booth by nailing colorful bedspreads or sheets to the sides. The children can participate by decorating the booth with streamers or edible goodies, etc. You should cover the roof with leafy branches, pine boughs, palm branches, etc. Set the booth on the platform before church services on Sunday, October 8 and leave it there until after your services on October 15.

Tabernacles is a time of great joy and pageantry. Along with a teaching to the congregation, it would be good for the people to be involved. One way of doing this is through the use of banners (Psalm 20:5). Those who have the talent can make beautiful banners for use in the church services. Begin the service on October 9 with a parade of banners through the sanctuary with all the congregation marching in groups

behind the different banners. This is accompanied by joyous singing to the Lord led by the praise team. Display the banners in the sanctuary the rest of the week.

During the midweek services, add variety by showing a film on the Christian celebration of the feast in Jerusalem. Or you could have a play or some other type of visual presentation. Perhaps someone in the congregation who has been to Israel can give a slide presentation. Be creative!

Since the Feast of Tabernacles represents the Millennial kingdom, it would be appropriate to give a message on October 15 of what life will be like during this time on earth. A city-wide parade could be planned for the afternoon with many churches participating. This could culminate in a joint praise and worship service at a central gathering place such as a park or stadium.