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THE SPRING FEASTS OF THE LORD

THE SIGNS OF THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

part IV

A spruce on the watch by the side of the moon. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi
“Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.” (Lev. 25:9-10)

In Hebrew the fiftieth year is called Yovel, a celebration year, jubilee. It is the year of the blowing of the ram’s horn. Thus Yovel got its name from the shofar announcing the beginning of the year.

The sound of the Yovel declares the beginning of a new era, the era of God’s favour towards Israel. In Hebrew the word yovel can be read in two ways. Either “yovel”, which means a ram or a ram’s horn like a shofar, or in passive voice “yuval”, is led or was led, like in Isaiah 53: “he was led like a lamb to the slaughter... for the transgression of my people he was punished.”

Like a lamb which has a desire to follow its shepherd humbly, to be led, “yuval”.

The three names of the shofar are like a road signs on our salvation path: Keren, which is the name including the personal calling, rose up in smoke with the sacrificed ram instead of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). On Mount Sinai the Israelites heard the sound of that horn, Shofar, for the first time when it called the people to make the change, a turn around, teshuva.

The nation learned the sound of the shofar when The Lord himself blew the horn (Ex. 19:16). From that point on the Israelites were commanded to blow themselves on the shofar (Lev. 25:9), until The Sovereign Lord himself blows it, this time the shofar called Yovel (Zech. 9:14).

Then He will announce freedom, liberation, a jubilee to all nations, to all of those who will hear His voice.

Yeshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ, started his ministry in the synagogue declaring with the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor.

Proclaiming the jubilee, which is The Messiah himself.

In Him is the heritage restored, the one we lost in the garden of Eden. In Him is the essence of Yovel. (http://torah-art.net)

Markus Nurmesniemi
Shalom uvracha!

Passover, Pesach, is what joins irrevocably together the two groups of people vitally important to the history of mankind: Jews and believers from the nations. Pesach is the foundation of Judaism as well as of Christianity. When we look at the plan of salvation and the revelation of the entire Bible, we see that this particular feast binds these siblings together clearer than any other.

The first ever Pesach of the Hebrew people triggered off the deliverance of slavery and from the clutches of Egyptian tyranny. That series of events was a powerful image and shadow of the future sacrifice of Yeshua, Jesus, on the cross where redemption through the blood of the Lamb had its divine completion. Thus in this feast, too, we see the biblical principle of pre-completion and completion. We will see the final completion when God’s plan of salvation brings forth new heavens and a new earth. All YHWH’s feasts are connected to Yeshua the Messiah. They are foreshadows, signs of what has happened and what will still happen.

The season of Pesach leads us to self-examination and repentance. If we allow ourselves and first of all God to show us what is hidden in our hearts, sin in all its faces can come into light. God is first of all a loving God and long-suffering in His grace, and He wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth (1 Tim. 2:4). We will always find the truth by looking up at Yeshua.

To love Yeshua is to keep His commandments and walk as He walked (1 John 2:1-6). This is bound to take us to the place of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Our Lord is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); this is the way that sends its rivers of living water into us, when we remain faithful to the truth.

Redemption on the cross at Calvary at Pesach opens us the chance to confess and reject our sins. We may bring all our shortcomings, sins, and weaknesses in all confidence every day to the cross, and be cleansed by the blood of Yeshua, the blood of the Holy Lamb. We know this, but do we practise it?

There are traumas, sins, and burdens hidden deep in every individual, family, community, and nation that are difficult to deal with or almost impossible for man to deal with. We should, however, be able to break those walls of silence in our lives, or they will break us. Every sin committed by an individual, a family, or a nation is hereditary in one way or other until it is confessed and rejected before the Lord. We need not do this alone. Yeshua is always by our side and through His Holy Spirit He will give us the strength we need for the work of reconciliation, when we ask Him for it.

When those walls are broken, the blessings of God may flow freely into our lives allowing us to begin with reconciliation. Revelation of the way, the truth, and the life makes us spread His love around us.

It is time for judgement to begin with the family of God (1 Peter 4:17). That is why it has been wonderful to see the desire of God’s own to be really one! Something is clearly happening. The Lord’s Bride is seeking to live in peace, searching to make up all former controversies and quarrels, as we can see in many places also in Finland. It is not ecumenism that unites the Bride, nor the issues we together disagree on with others. Neither are we united by doctrinal matters we agree on.

What unites us, is a shared belief in one Lord Yeshua the Messiah. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, He is the Saviour, our King. Oneness (echad) of the Bride and desire of reconciliation will certainly cause changes where ever we live. The unity of the Bride is a transforming force that will make rain enormous drops of blessing upon our darkening society. The early church was such a transforming force in their own time (see The Acts, esp chapter 2).

This issue is dedicated to Spring Feasts and their significance in the divine agenda of pre-completions and completions. In addition to Pesach, our meritorious collaborators have written articles on the Feast of Firstfruits and Pentecost. God bless them for their precious work for the Bride. This issue closes the circle of the Feasts of the Lord. In the next issue we will focus on new themes. Keijo Lindeman’s series of articles “Signs of the Coming of the Messiah” has now come to the fourth part, and the Lord willing, we will enjoy Keijo’s expert series in the future, too.

God bless you abundantly, dear readers, and give you all the strength and wisdom you need to live your daily lives.

Maranata!
"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.’ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” ( Hebrews 12:18-24).

The Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), or Pentecost, is one of the biblical spring feasts. Its history began on Mount Sinai at the foot of which Moses gathered the people of Israel (Exodus 19). It was there, on Mount Sinai, i.e. Horeb, where God gave Moses the Torah (Torah= instructions, teaching) with all its teachings, instructions, and commandments, the heart of which were the so called Ten commandments that God’s finger wrote in two tablets of stone (Ex.31:18). The history of Shavuot, or Pentecost, continued later on Mount Zion in the first moments of the new covenant, and will continue even up to the heavenly Mount Zion. This is the theme we will discuss in this paper. We will begin by a short introduction of the significance of the Lord’s feasts.

**The feasts are in honour of the Lord**

The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord. These are the Lord’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: the Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast’” (Leviticus 23:1-6).

When people speak about biblical feasts that have their origin in the Old Testament days, one often hears people say that these are feasts of the Jews that do not belong to Christendom. This is an effort made to invalidate the significance of the feasts given in the Bible and to justify the feasts celebrated by Christianity which are not entirely based on the Bible but have been influenced by Roman culture. Biblical feasts are, of course, feasts of the Jews, but first of all they are the Lord’s (Yahweh’s) feasts that are celebrated to His honour. We need to bear in mind that the early Apostolic church of the new covenant kept these original feasts of the Lord even in the Greek regions of Philippi and Corinth ( Acts 20:6; 1 Cor 5:6-8; John 7:2,14-20; 10:22-23; Acts 2; 20:16).

**The feasts are a shadow of things to come**

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow
of the things that were to come, the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The feasts God has given are a shadow of the things that were to come, pictures of what would become reality in the future. The Lord’s feasts embrace God’s entire redemption plan in Yeshua the Messiah, from the cross at Calvary to new heavens and new earth, when the redemption plan of the Holy One of Israel has its ultimate fulfillment. All the feasts of the Lord are linked to Yeshua the Messiah through a significant event in His life.

Spring Feasts speak about Yeshua the Messiah’s first coming about 2000 years ago:
* Pesach, or Passover, is a picture of Yeshua, God’s Passover Lamb, redeeming the debt of our sin on the Cross at Calvary on the fourteenth of Nisan during the evening sacrifice.
* Chag Ha’Matzot, or the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, is a picture of believers’ unleavened, pure walk with God, as described in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.
* The Resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah happened on the day of Waving of the Sheaf, the first day of the week, evidently on Saturday evening (according to the biblical calendar the day begins in the evening), when Yeshua was resurrected as the first fruit of those who are asleep, after His body had lain in the grave for three days and three nights.
* Shavuot, or Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, was the festival during which the Holy Spirit was poured out in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, and the Torah was written in the hearts and minds of believers, as written in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8.

Autumn feasts speak about Messiah’s second coming. Interpretations vary as to this issue; this is how I understand it.
* Yom Teruah, or the Feast of Trumpets, on the first day of the seventh month is a shadow of the blast of the trumpets of judgement on the Lord’s Day, as Joel 2 tells us. This day is followed by

Yamim Noraim, a ten-day period of Days of Awe (Daniel 1:12, Revelation 2:10).
* Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, on the tenth of the seventh month is a picture of redemption through Messiah (Hebrews 9). At the same time it represents the coming of Messiah and the taking-up of the church.
* Succot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, is a foreshadow of Messiah’s Millennial Kingdom, time when all peoples will come to Jerusalem to bow down before the Lord Almighty and to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-19).
* Shmini Aseret, or the eighth day following the feast of Tabernacles, is a picture of the age of new heavens and new earth, where God’s salvation plan through Yeshua the Messiah will have its eternal fulfillment.

**Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai**

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.’ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush. ‘Moses, Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’ ‘... So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain’” (Exodus 3:1-4, 10-12).

“Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children” (Galatians 4:25).

Moses lived as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter in Egypt, and he was educated in all knowledge and wisdom of the age (Acts 7:17-38). When defending an Israelite, Moses struck dead an Egyptian and had to run away. He ran to the land of Midian where Jethro, the priest of Midian, gave his daughter Sippora as wife to Moses. It was there that the angel of the Lord, or God, appeared to him and told him to go to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. He was to take the people to the land of Midian to worship the Lord on the very mountain, Mount Sinai, where God had just appeared to him. This happened in the land of Midian, at the foot of Horeb, i.e. Mount Sinai, which is located in present-day Saudi Arabia, in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula close to southern Jordan, and east of the Gulf of Elat/Aqaba. This place is called Jabal Al-Nur or Mount Sina. Sinai is a picture of redemption, on the tenth of the seventh month (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Apostle Paul also says that Sinai is in Arabia. In Paul’s days Jerusalem and the entire Jewish nation were under the authority of Rome, in slavery like the Israelites in Egypt. Moses was sent to bring the people out of the slavery of Egypt together with his brother Aaron.

“Afterwards Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.’’ Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go’” (Ex.5:1-2).

“In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt – on the very day – they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to yourself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites’” (Ex.19:1-6).

“When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God” (Ex.31:18).

When Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, they told the ruler of Egypt, in the name of the Lord God of Israel, to let the people of Israel go to hold a festival in the desert and worship the Lord on Mount Sinai. The people of Israel were delivered after ten plagues that the Lord accomplished through Moses. The people left Egypt at Passover, eating unleavened bread (Exodus 12-13). Moses led the people, according to the Lord’s instructions, through the Sea of Reed, i.e. the Red Sea, through the Gulf of Elat/Aqaba, by Nuweiba. From the bottom of the sea relics have been found which point, among other things, to the wheels of Egyptian chariots which were drowned in the sea. From there the Israelites continued to Sinai to celebrate Shavuot, to make a covenant with the Lord, and to receive the Torah. (The feast of Shavuot follows Pesach in the third biblical month).

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were
sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language” (Acts 2:1-6).

For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord, I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:7-12).

In his letter to the Galatians Paul teaches that under the old covenant, the Torah covenant, the people of Israel were put in charge of the Torah, which would lead them to the Messiah (Gal.4:19-29). With the coming of the Messiah the time of a new covenant began: we are no longer slaves to the Torah, but we have been given the status of children of God by faith to live under grace. Transition from the old to the new covenant took place in the upper room in Jerusalem, probably in Mount Zion region, where Yeshua and the disciples had eaten the Passover (Luke 22:20).

Many Bible scholars assume that after Yeshua’s Ascension the disciples came together in the same upper room in Mount Zion region (Acts 1:12-14). That is where they had evidently gathered to celebrate the feast of Shavuot, when the Holy Spirit was poured upon them (Acts 2:1-6). There on Mount Zion, same phenomena appeared as once on Mount Sinai: fire, sound of a violent wind, and tongues of fire. The age of the New Covenant, based on Yeshua’s redemptive sacrifice at Calvary, had begun (Luke 22:20).

The Holy Spirit wrote the Torah on believers’ hearts and in their minds at Pentecost. The Torah no longer exists inscribed on tablets of stone, instead, it has been written in believers’ minds and on their hearts by the Holy Spirit. The new covenant was made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and believers from other nations have access to it through faith, thus becoming part of God’s Israel, the natural olive tree of Israel (Ef.2, Rom.11).

In the new covenant we do not keep the Torah out of slavery, but out of grace and freedom of the new covenant. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us strength to keep God’s commandments, not our own strength (Ezek.36:27). In the old covenant the Torah was written on tablets of stone. In the new covenant the Torah is deposited in our hearts and minds, and it guides us in the light of the Holy Spirit.

However, we have to take into consideration that with the new covenant changes and renewals have been made to the Torah, see e.g. Hebrews 7:11-12; 10:9-10 (the subject is too large to be discussed here, though). The Torah still has much to teach us new covenant believers, but under grace, according to Yeshua’s teach-
ings and interpretations, taking into consideration the changes and renewals caused by the new covenant (Rom. 6:14).

**Heavenly Mount Zion**

"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste - nothing escapes them... And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will see visions, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, too. The dreadful day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

Along with the physical Mount Zion there is the heavenly Mount Zion as well as the heavenly Jerusalem, where the spirits of the righteous reside according to Hebrews 12:22-24. At the end of this age of grace the world will face difficult times; the day of the Lord will come and God will judge all ungodliness and sin of the world, and only few people will survive the judgement (Isa.13:9-13;24).

These judgements include e.g. a great world war and an atom war, in which a third of mankind will perish (Rev.9:12-21). The church of God, however, does not have to face the horror of the atom war, but the church, in a state of resurrection, will be caught up to heavens to meet the Lord, away from the fire and sulphur, the same way that Lot was rescued from fire and sulphur that rained over Sodom (1 Thes.4:13-18; Luke 17:26-30). The Lord Yeshua will come down from the heavens, like in the days of Moses on Mount Sinai, and bring His church away from under the atom war. Yeshua also speak about those who will escape.

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near... Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36).

Yeshua tells us to watch and pray that we would get away from the terror of the end times to the heavenly Mount Zion at the Lord’s coming and resurrection, when the heavenly bodies are shaken in the atom war.

We will not remain, however, on the heavenly Mount Zion, but, at some point, we will come with the Messiah to save Israel, to judge the world, and to establish the Millennial Kingdom, in which we will rule with the Messiah, if we remain faithful till the end (Zech.14:1-5; Jude 14-15; Rev.20).

Let us remain faithful so that we might be among those who escape and come with the Lord to establish the Kingdom of the Messiah. If we are not yet believers, let us receive Yeshua (Jesus) as our Saviour and Lord, and follow faithfully His teaching and commandments that we might be among the escaped and taken up to meet Him in the air.

"Different" kind of Passover

Written by:
Dr Clifford Denton

Time for Christians to Enter into Pesach, not to just use it as a Teaching Opportunity.

On the biblical calendar, according to the three main Feasts of the Lord, Sukkot (Tabernacles) is behind us and Pesach (Passover) lies before us. Exodus 6:6-7 gives God’s fourfold promise to the Children of Israel:

- To bring them out from under the burden of their oppressors;
- To rescue them from bondage;
- To redeem them with an outstretched arm and great judgments;
- To take them as His people and be their God.

The four promises are recalled by the drinking of four cups of wine during the Passover Seder. These four cups were shared by Yeshua with His disciples at what we call ‘The Last Supper’. Two of the cups are specifically mentioned in Luke 22:15-22, when Yeshua reinterpreted the Passover as a remembrance of Him. What was accomplished in the deliverance of Israel from bondage to Egyptian slavery became a foreshadow of Yeshua’s deliverance of His people from this world of bondage to sin.

The recent celebrations of the birth of Yeshua (Christian Christmas) are now behind us, so it is fitting to focus on the more important remembrance of our Lord:

- To bring them out from under the burden of their oppressors;
- To rescue them from bondage;
- To redeem them with an outstretched arm and great judgments;
- To take them as His people and be their God.

The Bible contains the account of the birth of Yeshua, so it is fitting to remember His coming as a man, but more important is it to remember Him as our Saviour who gave His life for us. As the Apostle Paul said, when we remember the Lord’s sacrifice through the sharing of bread and wine, especially at Passover, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

The promises of God in Exodus 6 preceded the ten great plagues of which we read, by coincidence in the first Torah Portion of the New Year (on the Roman Calendar). That is what it took to free the Israelites from Egypt.

Likewise, such immense earth-shaking events will take place prior to Yeshua’s return to complete our redemption: the great woes recorded in the Book of Revelation.

We have entered the Roman New Year but now, at Passover, we will enter the biblical New Year. As we enter this new year, the signs of His coming are all around, so let us go forward to Passover in remembrance of Him. Let us not be so preoccupied with the things of this world to miss out on these days of preparation. Yeshua Himself said:

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near. (Luke 21:28)

Over recent years more and more Christians have used the Passover Seder as an opportunity to teach about our Jewish roots, but this year let us enter fully into this celebration. We will be doing this at our retreat in our new and growing Centre for study and prayer at The Cedars, Rochester, Kent in England. Join us wherever you are.

www.tishrei.org
This feast demonstrates quite clearly, how Yeshua’s resurrection happened “according to the Scriptures” indeed. This feast is the Feast of the Firstfruits, or of the Sheaf of the Firstfruits of the Harvest.

“The Lord said to Moses. ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so that it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath… You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live’” (Leviticus 23:9-11,14).

The Feast of the Firstfruits, or the Sheaf of the first grain harvested the first crop, the first thing to do was to take a grain offering to the Lord. As we have read in Leviticus, the firstfruits of the barley harvest had to be taken as an offering to the priest to the Tent of Meeting or to the Temple.

The lesson we learn from this is that if God, in his faithfulness, has blessed us with the first harvest, he will surely let us have more harvests in the future.

In ancient Israel this feast meant in practise that after you had harvested the first crop, the first thing to do was to take a grain offering to the Lord. As we have read in Leviticus, the firstfruits of the barley harvest had to be taken as an offering to the priest to the Tent of Meeting or to the Temple.

The Pharisees, for their part, understood it to mean the ceremonial Passover Sabbath. They referred to the context, which focuses on Passover. This day after the Passover Sabbath was the sixteenth day of the month of Nisan.

Because it was closely connected to the preceding high Sabbath, which had a set date in the calendar, it could fall on any day of the week, depending of the year.

This controversy went on, and both parties adhered firmly to their views. The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE finally solved the problem. The Sadducees, who had been priests in the Temple, were left unemployed. Synagogue worship services became the heart of religious activity in Jewish communities.

And because synagogues were spheres of operation of the Pharisees, their interpretation was finally accepted and established as the rule even up to our days.
Feast of the Firstfruits in the New Testament

Considering that this Feast of the Sheaf has often been left in the shadow of the greater feast of Passover, is any attention paid to it in the New Testament?

Indeed, yes, there are many references to this feast in the NT, and it is one of the most important feasts to believers in Yeshua. First Corinthians chapter 15 links this Feast of the Firstfruits organically to Messiah’s life. In this chapter Rabbi Shaul of Tarsus teaches the doctrine of resurrection to the believers.

He makes an astonishing connection between this feast and the subject he is teaching.

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

Many people may regard these verses as an explanation of the order in which resurrection will take place, but Paul is in fact referring to the Feast of Firstfruits. The literal translation of the Greek word ἀπαρκήθη (νω, 20:23) is ‘firstfruits’ (see Rom.16:5;11:16;8:23, Rev.14:4). Thus Yeshua’s physical resurrection was the fulfilment of the foreshadowing Feast of the Firstfruits, or the Sheaf of the first barley harvest! The Messiah is the Firstfruit, the Sheaf of the first harvest.

Prophetic fulfilment

As we have seen, this ancient Feast of Firstfruits was a shadow of Messiah’s resurrection. It was a harvest feast during which the sheaf of barley was waved before the Lord. Think about it: The seed was sown into the ground, the ground had brought forth the crop, and then the crop was lifted up for all to see. Yeshua refers to his own death, burial, and resurrection using these figures of speech:

“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:23-24, 32).

These symbolic words were spoken to Jewish disciples who had come to celebrate Passover. They were spoken before the Feast of the Firstfruits (John 12:1,20).

While speaking of his own death, burial and resurrection, Yeshua uses figures of speech that refer to the Feast of Firstfruits. The waving of the sheaf is a picture of his resurrection.

But there is more to connect the Feast of Firstfruits to Messiah’s resurrection. The exact date of that feast in the particular year, in which the Messiah died, was buried, and resurrected, is a powerful witness of the fulfilment of the foreshadowing feast. You remember the controversy between Sadducees and Pharisees about the phrase “on the day after the Sabbath”.

Sadducees took it to mean the day after the weekly Sabbath, whereas the Pharisees understood that this Sabbath was the high ceremonial Passover Sabbath, the fifteenth of Nisan. The day after this Sabbath, the sixteenth of Nisan, was the Feast of the Firstfruits.

A question arises: which view is correct, and how does it connect to Yeshua’s resurrection? Interestingly, and what is made possible only by God, both views fit in the historical context of the gospels.

The most commonly accepted traditional view is that Yeshua ate Passover with his disciples when the fourteenth of Nisan began, that is on Thursday evening in that particular year.

He was arrested the next night and questioned in front of Roman authorities. And finally he was crucified on Friday morning at nine. He gave his life at three in the afternoon, the exact time the Passover lamb was to be slain. This happened before the Sabbath began. His body was soon buried and left in the tomb till the next day. Then as soon as it was possible, early on the first day of the week, the women came to the tomb and saw that it was opened, but they did not find Yeshua’s body.

According to the Jewish way of counting Yeshua was three days in the grave: 1st day: part of Friday until the sunset, 2nd day: from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, and 3rd day: from Saturday sunset onwards. Although Yeshua’s grave was found empty early on Sunday morning, according to the Jews’ way of counting Yeshua could have risen up any time after Saturday sunset. The Apostle Paul says: “He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor.15:4). When we look at the chronologial order of these events, we see the touch of God’s hand on the timing of the Feast of Firstfruits. It was essential for the Messiah to die exactly at biblical Passover in order to fulfill the prophecies. Furthermore, it was equally essential that he rose from the dead at the Feast of the Firstfruits.

The situation may seem problematic on the surface, when we remember the differing opinions that Sadducees and Pharisees had about the timing of this feast. But on closer examination we find that Yeshua of Nazareth fulfilled both interpretations in that particular year when he died and was raised up from the dead! Yeshua was raised on the third day after Passover, that is on the sixteenth of Nisan. Thus he fulfilled the Pharisees’ interpretation. But surprisingly enough, this was also the fulfillment of the Sadducees’ interpretation.

In that particular year when the Messiah gave his life, the Feast of the Firstfruits coincided with Sunday following the weekly Sabbath. This idea is supported by a small detail in John’s gospel that refers to the full twenty-four hour day Yeshua was in the grave.

“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished’. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down” (John 19:30,31).

The phrase “a special Sabbath” reveals that there was something out of ordinary about this Sabbath. Why did John call that Sabbath “special”? The reason is that in that year the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, i.e. Passover Sabbath, the fifteenth of Nisan, fell on a weekly Sabbath.

In his book The Time of Crucifixion and the Resurrection Samuele Bacchiocchi writes:

“Rabbinic sources seem to demonstrate that a weekly Sabbath was called “special” or “great”, when it coincided with Passover, because, as Charles C. Torrey aptly says, ‘the characteristic solemnity of it (Sabbath) was greatly emphasized by the most important feast of the year coinciding with it’” (Bacchiocchi, The Time of Crucifixion and the Resurrection, p 44, 1988, USA).

One could even think that this particular Sabbath was “special, great”, because it bore resemblance to the Sabbath that came after the creation of the world. We remember how God had created man on the sixth day of creation, and having thus finished his work, he had rested on the seventh day. Similarly the Creator, became flesh in the Messiah, and now especially as Passover Lamb, had with his own blood redeemed this fallen mankind from the dominion of sin, death and devil on the sixth day of the week. He then rested the seventh day in Joseph’s new tomb. On the cross Yeshua said, “It is finished.” Could there be a Sabbath “more
special, or greater” than a Sabbath after these words?

We can say, therefore, that the views of Sadducees and Pharisees about the timing of the Feast of the Firstfruits were both correct in that particular year. Only God Almighty could have orchestrated this. Praise to God and the risen Messiah, the fulfilment of the prophetic Feast of the Firstfruits!

What impact can the commemoration of the Feast of the Firstfruits have on us as a community of believers and as private persons? Once we understand that the theme of the feast is resurrection, the impact can be very far-reaching. The idea of resurrection has always been one of the central beliefs of Christian faith.

In the fourth century, however, Christians, particularly in Rome, wanted to separate themselves from the Jews, and in 325 CE the Council of Nicea ordered, among many other anti-Jewish regulations, that Christians were not allowed to observe Jewish Passover, but that they were to celebrate the resurrection on a new Christian holiday, namely on Easter Sunday.

Although according to Sadducean reckoning the Feast of the Firstfruits coincides with Christian Passover/Easter Sunday, many Christians have forgotten the connection that exists between the resurrection and the feast God had ordered Israel to observe. It is wonderful that in these last days so many believers in Yeshua seek to grasp their faith in its original context. When Christians celebrate Messiah’s resurrection as the God-appointed Feast of the Firstfruits, it is possible that it in a beautiful way draws the Jews’ attention to Yeshua of Nazareth as the promised Saviour of Israel and the whole world.

Then it will be clear that all really happened according to the Scriptures. We will be encouraged in our faith like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus to whom the risen Messiah taught “beginning with Moses … what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

But along with this annual feast in commemoration of the Messiah’s resurrection, the truth of resurrection must be alive in us every day. In the Apostle Paul’s profound words: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me” (Gal.2:20).

The same mighty power that raised Yeshua from the dead causes this life of the Messiah to live in us. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which is promised to every person whose sins have been forgiven through the blood of Yeshua. In biblical baptism we have a beautiful picture of how the ego-centered life is washed away and the Messiah’s life in the Holy Spirit takes over.

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Rom. 6:3-5).

For me the most important events in world history are these: Yeshua’s death, burial, and resurrection. As strong as is the reliability of these three and God’s power manifested in them, as great will their impact be on us, when we surrender to Yeshua. Your salvation and strength to live to God’s honour do not come from you but from Yeshua, who died and was resurrected for you. When you belong to him, you may live in his power – the life of resurrection.

Sources: Kasdan, Barney, God’s appointed times, pp 39-47, 1993, USA.

Passover
Foundation for Christianity and Judaism

Written by:
John D. Garr, Ph.D.

Passover, the first festival of the biblical liturgical calendar, is basic to both Judaism and Christianity, for both Judaism and Christianity are founded on events that occurred on this day. Perhaps more significantly than any other thing, Passover links Jews and Christians in a commonality of faith that is inseparable.

For the Jewish people, Passover was the day some 3,500 years ago when they were delivered from the slavery of Egyptian taskmasters. The blood of the paschal lamb applied to the doors of their houses spared them from the terror which Yahweh visited upon Egypt that caused Pharaoh to relent and release the Israelites from bondage. Passover, then, is at the beginning of the year (on the fourteenth day of the first month, Nisan [March-April]) because God’s calendar begins with redemption.

For Christians, Passover was the day nearly 2,000 years ago when “God . . . gave his only begotten Son” to be the perfect Paschal Lamb whose blood would save mankind from an even more onerous slavery than that experienced by Israel in Egypt, the bondage of sin and death. Jesus Christ elected to become incarnate as a Jew among his Jewish brethren so that he could die and thereby deliver those who would believe upon him from both sin and the death of eternal separation from the Eternal Father (Hebrews 2:9, 14, 15). Christianity is founded upon that first New Testament Passover, which for all believers is a festival of redemption.

Martin Buber, one of the twentieth century’s greatest thinkers, observed that Jews and Christians have two things in common: a Book and an expectation (the Bible and the hope of Messiah’s coming). To this we could add a third thing: the foundation of our respective faiths. In both the first Old Testament Passover and the first New Testament Passover, the theme is redemption, and the basis for redemption is God’s grace. Neither Israel nor Christian believers merited their deliverance. It was only by grace through faith that both were redeemed. God’s grace created faith in Israelite hearts that produced obedience to God’s requirement: “sacrifice a lamb and apply its blood to your houses.” God’s grace continues to create faith in the hearts of those who hear the good news of his salvation through Messiah Jesus: “confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead.”

The Jewish people have been faithful each year for some 2,500 years to celebrate the festival of Passover that Yahweh commanded them to remember in perpetuity. Each Jewish father uses this occasion annually to teach his own children about the fact that they personally were delivered from Egypt when their ancestors obeyed God’s voice. In effect, the Passover Seder that is celebrated in each Jewish household is both a memorial and a reenactment of that first Passover night when God’s sovereign act freed Abraham’s children and prepared the way for the fulfillment of the promise that he had made to Abraham over 400 years before.

The earliest Christians continued in this tradition of celebrating Passover annually. Taking their cue from the commandment of their Lord to remember his death until he returns, they met together on the day of Passover (Nisan 14) each year to memorialize the death and resurrection of Jesus by observing the liturgy that he prescribed when he gave his disciples the unleavened bread of the Passover Seder, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you,” and offered them the Seder’s cup of redemption, saying, “Drink; this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.”

Despite the fact that subsequent Judaeophobia, anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism caused the church to abandon this foundational part of its biblical Judaic heritage, Christians today have every reason to remember the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus at the time of Passover. Surely it is time to restore this foundational remembrance of redemption that is basic to both Judaism and Christianity.

Passover – Sacrifice and Baptism

On the very first Passover, the physical liberation that ancient Israel experienced through the outstretched arm of Yahweh, their God, was not an end in itself. It was only the beginning,
the corporeal freedom that made possible their pilgrimage to spiritual redemption. Every observant Jew since the time of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage has affirmed the fact that man’s freedom does not consist in physical liberation alone because immediately after remembering the day of deliverance, he begins the countdown toward Pentecost and spiritual redemption.

This is the time of the counting of the omer, the seven weeks and one day from which we get the term Pentecost (fiftieth). The only reason which Yahweh and Moses gave for commanding Pharaoh to “let my people go!” was “so that they may celebrate a festival unto me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1, New Revised Standard version). Without the fifty days that followed the first Passover and without the Mt. Sinai Pentecost experience that concluded among those days, Israel’s deliverance would have been meaningless, for without the giving of the Torah, the exodus was incomplete. Passover alone would have produced a free nomadic people who would have vanished into the sands of time.

The Passover-Pentecost continuum produced a kingdom of priests, a continuing witness that they may celebrate a festival unto the Lord. All of Israel who had crossed unharmed! Their initiatory baptism rite, like the children of Israel to use a newly-opened highway of public access to safety. God’s word was clear: “Go forward, move on!” Six hundred thousand men, plus women and children, then began the march between walls of water, in what must have been a terrifying challenge.

Each Israeli had to have profound faith in God and in his prophet. They had left Egypt because Pharaoh had commanded it. Now, they walked into the Sea because they chose to believe God would save them from the turbid waters that towered above their heads. The extent of their faith is underscored by the fact that shortly after the last Israeli passed between the waters, Pharaoh’s entire army drowned where Israel had crossed unharmed!

Israel’s Corporate Baptism

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, the apostle Paul compares the Red Sea crossing with baptism, making it and Israel’s subsequent actions spiritual events. “…our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

All of Israel was baptized in the Red Sea, and all of Israel drank spiritual drink from Jesus the Rock. What a profound statement, pregnant with meaning!

First Israel was physically delivered from bondage when Yahweh “passed over” their houses because he saw the blood circling their doors. Then, they were baptized in the Red Sea in what was both a physical and spiritual exercise. All of Israel that had just escaped death now experienced a death, burial, and resurrection in the Red Sea. When they walked down the slopes into the sea’s bottom, they surrendered their lives to the authority and will of God. They died to self. Then, they were buried for a time between the walls of water. Finally, they were resurrected to a new life of freedom from Pharaoh’s pursuing armies when they climbed up the eastern shore of the Red Sea.

Their lives were no longer their own; they had surrendered them to the pleasure of God and had received them again as his gift of life and freedom.

The timing of the Red Sea event coincided with what would later become the festival of unleavened bread. Could it be that God was using this exercise to remove the leaven of Egypt from the lives of the Israelites just as he was physically removing them from Egypt? It could well be that this event even occurred at the time of what would later be the festival of firstfruits. What better metaphor could God have chosen than to reveal the coming death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the firstfruits! (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) in the figurative death, burial, and resurrection of Israel in the Red Sea?

In a very real sense, Israel had been reborn. Now, they were ready to journey to the mountain of God, there to enter into a covenant to become God’s bride. When Yahweh thundered from Sinai in a voice that shook the earth and was heard around the globe in all languages, only Israel that had been reborn in the waters of Red Sea baptism responded to his commandments: “We will do, and we will be obedient.” (Exodus 24:7)

The moment they agreed to accept and do God’s Torah, their Passover experience was complete, they were delivered from spiritual bondage to sin and death. For the first time since Adam and Eve in the garden, man was offered the choice of life or death, blessing or cursing (Deuteronomy 30:19). Whereas before that time sin and death reigned over all men (Romans 5:14), now some could chose to live, to drink of the Rock physically for life in the desert and to drink of the Rock spiritually unto life eternal.

The Concept of Baptism

The concept of baptism is encapsulated in the word immersion. To be baptized is to be immersed in something, whether it be in repentance, in sanctification, in the Holy Spirit, in the body of Messiah, in suffering, in death, or in water. In whatever form it is manifested, it represents a complete surrender to God, to his will and his Word.

We understand the truth of this concept when we recall that a long-standing Jewish immersi-on tradition was antecedent to Christian baptism. John the Baptist did not simply have a heat stroke in the Judean desert and suddenly invent the idea of baptism from whole cloth! He — as well as the Messianic believers after him — was continuing a Jewish tradition. Just as Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the blood of the paschal lamb, so Gentiles who were proselytized to Judaism were initiated into Jewish faith by circumcision. Just as Israel had been baptized in the Red Sea, so proselytes were required to be immersed in the waters of Israel’s mikvah (ritual immersion pools filled with “living water”) either from a flowing hand or from rain. Then, as Israel came before Sinai to receive God’s law, converted believers were taught the same Torah.

Not only Gentile proselytes but also the Jews themselves submitted themselves to the waters of the mikveh. When they experienced any ceremonial uncleanness, they immersed themselves in the water, not to cleanse themselves physically, but to demonstrate their submission to the washing of God’s Word.

Many teachers among the Jews had come to characterize the mikveh experience as a death, burial, and resurrection. Some has even considered John 3:3-5, an opportunity to reenter the waters of the womb and be reborn. Paul’s use of these metaphors is more clearly understood when they are returned to the Hebrew matrix from which they came. Believers in Messiah Jesus were considered to have been immersed in his death, buried with him in baptism so that they could be raised in a newness of life (Romans 6:3-5).

They were born again (from above) in the metaphor that Nicodemus, the Israelite rabbi, understood as it applied to proselytes’ being born again when they accepted the Torah and were circumcised, but did not know how to apply to Jesus’ new teaching (John 3:3, 5). Their initiatory baptism rite, like their Israeli ancestors, was not...
for physical uncleanness, but for the answer of a good conscience before God (I Peter 3:21). Anyo-
ne who did not repent from sins entered the water a dry sinner and came out a wet sinner! Wa-
ter baptism was efficacious only if the heart was immersed in the Godly sorrow of repentance (II Corinthians 7:10).

**Baptism and Repentance**

When John came baptizing in Jor-
dan, both the exercise and the lo-
cation had profound significance. The Baptist was telling all of Is-
rael that they, like Gentile prose-
lytes, needed to immerse them-

selves first in repentance and then in water. He brought them to the Jordan at the same place where their forefathers had crossed on dry land (a second genera-
tion experiencing a second water baptism as they passed through the waters of the Jordan River).

Here at the ford of the Jordan that had parted when the priests had taken the ark of the covenant from the wilderness into the prom-
ised land, John urged his fellow Jews to turn their backs on the land of Israel, reenter the water, and then turn in true repentance to renew their covenant with Yah-
weh. The Hebrew word for the re-
pentance which John demanded is teshuvah, meaning to turn.

A physical act of turning, of im-
mersing in water, demonstrated what was occurring inwardly. Is-
rael was receiving the opportuni-
ty to accept the kingdom of God, welcoming Yahweh’s dominion in their lives and preparing for the coming of their Messiah.

**Christian Passover and Baptism**

Christians are empowered by God’s grace to allow faith to be produced in their hearts (Ephes-
sians 2:8) as they hear the word of the gospel (Romans 10:17). The moment they do, they eat of the Lamb that was sacrificed on the day of Passover (I Corin-
hians 5:7, John 6:53), and in that act of faith, they are set free. God passes over their sins, accepting their faith and imputing to them in return the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:22-24), Then, being freely justified by his grace, believers in Messiah have peace with God (Romans 5:1).

A new believer in Christ experi-
ences the reality of that which Is-
rael’s experiences foreshado-
wed. His Passover is not just a day of memorial — it is a person: Christ our Passover. His Shabbat is not merely a rest day — it is a person: Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. His Mikveh is not just a pool of water — it is the wa-
shing of the water by the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26) in which the truth sanctifies and cleanses (John 17:17).

He receives not a law engraved by the finger of God on stone tablets — he receives the indwelling Lawgiver, himself, the Holy Spirit. He becomes Jewish in spirit when his heart experiences the circum-
cision which the prophet envisio-
ned (Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29). He comes not to a physical moun-
tain burning with fire — he joins the spiritual Zion, the heavenly Jeru-
salem (Hebrews 12:21, 22).

Each time a new believer is initi-
ated into Christian faith through the baptism of repentance, he is participating in a long-standing tradition that church inherited from Judaism. He partakes of the Passover Lamb whose blood covers and removes his sins. He takes of the unleavened bread of sweetness that replaces the bit-
ter leaven of his sin.

Through the waters of baptism he demonstrates to the sinful world just as Israel demonstrated to Pharaoh that the God of the Bible is a deliverer, one who helps his chosen people pass from the curse of death into the promise of everlasting life by being trans-
lated from the darkness of this world into the kingdom of Mes-
siah (Colossians 1:13). He is dead to the world through the death of Christ, buried with him in bap-
tism, and raised to the newness of life.

Insights on the impact of Passo-

ver upon the historical Christi-
an worship experience can be learned from Dr. Garr’s book, Christian Celebrations for Passo-

ver (A Christian Passover Haggadah) and from his new book, Pas-

sover: Festival of Redemption for Christians and Jews. For informa-
tion see www.restorationfounda-
tion.org/bookstore.htm , write Restoration Foundation, P.O. Box 421218, Atlanta, GA 30342, or phone (678) 6153568.

(This article is compound with two of Dr Garr’s articles: Passo-

ver - Foundation for Christianity and Judaism and Passover—Sac-

rifice and Baptism.)

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Photo of a painting where a woman suffering from hemorrhage disease is reaching Yeshua’s hem of garment in order to get healed. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi
Supermoon seen in freezing surroundings in Sodankylä, Lapland. Photo: Markus Nurmesniemi

Prophetical Perspectives
The Signs of the Coming of the Messiah - part IV

Written by:
Keijo Lindeman

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor 13:9)

The Fig-tree – Israel – the most important sign of the age

“Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:32-33).

While teaching at the Mount of Olives Yeshua admonishes his disciples to learn from the parable of the fig-tree. He says, “When you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.” This means that when the signs of Messiah’s coming mentioned in Mount of Olive’s prophetic teaching appear one by one, it is not yet the End. That is to say that when all these signs given by Yeshua in his prophetical speech come true in front of our very eyes, the coming of the Lord is right at the door.

The second thing Yeshua the Messiah told them to pay attention to are the changes happening in the fig-tree. In particular the time when the leaves come out would be a sign of the nearness of His coming and of the ultimate fulfilment of all things.

What is this fig-tree?
Israel is God’s fig-tree

“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey” (Deuteronomy 8:7-8)

“When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig-tree” ( Hosea 9:10)

Israel is the land of the fig-tree. It is God’s fig-tree that the heavenly gardener Himself takes care of waiting for it to bear fruit (Luke 13:6-9).

Cursed by Yeshua, the fig-tree withered

“What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. The godly have been swept from the land; all men lie in wait to shed blood, each hunts his brother with a net” (Micah 7:1-2).

Then he said to the tree, ‘May no-one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And his disciples heard him say it... In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig-tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig-tree that you cursed has withered!’ Have faith in God’, Jesus answered” (Mark 11:12-14, 20-22).

Walking towards Jerusalem with His disciples, Yeshua did something strange. He cursed a fruitless fig-tree, and the tree withered from the roots. Thus He, to begin with, fulfilled Micah’s prophecy of the fig-tree in which no early figs can be found, meaning with this the unbelieving, hypocritical, miserable, and fallen spiritual state of the Jewish people. (Luke 13:6-9).

No real faith in God, no fruit of the Spirit was found in the majority of the people (Gal. 5:18-23). Yeshua also knew beforehand that He, their Jewish Messiah, would be rejected by the people’s corrupt spiritual leaders as well as...
by most of the common people. (However, in the days of the Early church many thousands, maybe tens of thousands Jews believed in Yeshua; Acts 2:37-42; 9:31; 21:17-26.) Yeshua was weeping when He said what would happen as a result of this rejection: the enemy would occupy Jerusalem in the days of their generation and the land would become desolate because they did not recognize the time of God’s coming to them (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24).

This happened in the year 70 when the Romans took over Jerusalem; the temple was destroyed, over a million Jews were killed during the three-year siege, and many people were taken to Rome where they were sold as slaves amongst the nations. In the years 132-135 there was the Bar Kochban revolt, which the Roman army put down. The name of Jerusalem was changed into Aelia Capitolina, and the land itself was given the name Palestine according to Philistines, ancient arch-enemies of Israel, and the Jews were forbidden to go there on pain of penalty. That was the end of the Jewish nation; the land remained deserted for almost two thousand years. The fig-tree withered from the roots.

The leaves of the fig-tree came out in 1948

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you: I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

Although the fig-tree withered from the roots, it was not the end of it. God left a stump in the ground, from which a new fig-tree would spring up (Job 14:8-9). Several Bible prophecies predict that as certainly as the Lord will send the Jewish people into exile and cause the land to be deserted because of disobedience, as certainly will He gather them from among the nations at the end of the days. (Numbers 26:38-45; Isaiah 14:1-2; Jeremiah 31:1-14, Ezekiel 37).

This became reality on the 14th of May in 1948, when the nation of Israel was reborn after almost two thousand years of desolation--much to the amazement of many so called expert scholars who strongly doubted these prophecies would ever come true. When Israel became an independent nation, the leaves of the fig-tree came out; that is the understanding of many scholars of the prophetical word. (There are scholars who apply the fig-tree parable to mean Jerusalem, but we do not see the Bible giving much support to this theory.) Israel’s rebirth as a nation was the beginning of the prophetical countdown of the end time. Israel is God’s clock in the end times, and by watching it, we will be on the pulse of the times.

Has the church substituted Israel?

“This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord Almighty is his name: Only if these decrees vanish from my sight, declares the Lord, will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me. This is what the Lord says: Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

“I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin… As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:1-28-29).

According to the interpretation of the Bible of some Christian movements, the promises that God gave physical Israel are no longer valid, because the Jewish people has broken the covenant and rejected their Messiah. Their view is that the so called “spiritual Israel”, or the church, has replaced physical Israel, and all the promises God has given it now belong to the church, and the physical...
Israel is left with the curses at the most. This interpretation is called Replacement theology.

Jeremiah gives, however, a very clear answer to these replacement theologians. God will reject Israel definitively because of its sins only when the sun does not come up in the morning and all the laws of heaven collapse. Only then will Israel cease to be God’s chosen people. The apostle Paul is also very clear: he tells us to cast away such a doctrine from the church. God does not repent the call He has given to Israel, although most of the Jewish people still walk in spiritual blindness and unbelief. The apostle Paul warns Gentile believers not to boast over the natural branches, that is Jewish believers (Romans 11:17-29).

We might also ask Replacement theologians this question: If God’s promises concerning the exile, the desolation of the land, and the gathering of the Israelite remnant after the destruction of Jerusalem, the gathering of the Israelite exiles, those who have witnessed the rebirth of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, who have gone back to their own land, the national day of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, when the Jews rebuilt the Jerusalem altar that is before God. It says that the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of the mankind” (Revelation 9:13-15).

When Yeshua’s disciples asked Him about the time of restoration of Israel, He told them that it was not meant for them to know the times and dates God had set, but that powered by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they would become Messiah’s witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8;2:1-4; Luke 24:46-49).

The Messiah knew that many a century would pass before God gathers the Israelites to the end of the days from among the nations to their own land, and the nation of Israel is born again. For us who have witnessed the rebirth of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, which brings the day of the Lord nearer, it is easier to understand secrets of the divine agenda, but it is wise to be careful in our interpretations, for only God knows the exact times and dates which He has set and sovereignly controls.

The day of the Lord will take the godless world and sleeping believers by surprise, like a thief in the night. God has ordained everything to take place to the year, to the month, to the day and to the hour, and when He, at the sound of the sixth trumpet, releases the powers of destruction at the river Euphrates, everything culminates in a scene where enormous armed forces of 200 million men wage war on the earth, and in the end a third of the mankind is killed through fire and sulphur.

Even now we have taste of this through the wars that have been ravaging the Middle East in Syria and Iraq for many years – and others have joined the war: Hizbollah in Lebanon, and Turkey and Iran, and the superpowers USA and Russia.

Prophet Hosea’s two days

“They told me this parable: ‘Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away’” (Luke 21:29-33)

When Yeshua told the parable of the fig-tree, he said that the generation that saw this happen would not pass away. Many Bible scholars have the understanding that the meaning of this is that the generation that saw the nation of Israel be born on the 14th of May in 1948 will not pass entirely away until all the prophetic events have happened, which the Lord told would be signs of His coming and of the end of the age.

However, we need to bear in mind that our understanding of the prophetic word is limited, and when we study and interpret the prophetic timetable of the Bible our understanding is even more limited, which makes the possibility of wrong interpretation very big. What we are trying to explain in this study is only product of the writer’s limited understanding.

It must be noted, though, that prophetic predictions of the Bible will surely come true at the time and in the way God has determined even if our interpretation is wrong. The closer the time of fulfillment is drawing, the better we will understand. ‘For I have set and sovereignly controlled the time and the day of restoration of Israel, He told them that it is not meant for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority’” (Acts 1:8;2:1-4; Luke 24:46-49).

The Messiah knew that many a century would pass before God gathers the Israelites to the end of the days from among the nations to their own land, and the nation of Israel is born again. For us who have witnessed the rebirth of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, which brings the day of the Lord nearer, it is easier to understand secrets of the divine agenda, but it is wise to be careful in our interpretations, for only God knows the exact times and dates which He has set and sovereignly controls.

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Even now we have taste of this through the wars that have been ravaging the Middle East in Syria and Iraq for many years – and others have joined the war: Hizbollah in Lebanon, and Turkey and Iran, and the superpowers USA and Russia.

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this coming one promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of the creation’... But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-10a).

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches, I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star (Hebrew OT ‘shachar’) (Rev.22:16).

Hosea gives us a very interesting prophecy of Messiah’s agenda. It says that Yeshua the Messiah will go back to heaven to His place at the right hand of the Father until the day the people of Israel acknowledge their guilt. Then the prophecy promises that Israel will be made alive after two days and on the third day they will be restored. This prophecy has been applied to the passion of Messiah and His resurrection on the third day, and that interpretation is quite possible, too,
but most importantly it points to the fact that two days – about two millennia – will pass after the ascension of the Messiah (about 30 AD) until He, the Morning Star, will come back and Israel will live before Him as a nation of priests in Messiah’s Kingdom. At the Messiah’s coming the world will experience the spring rains of the Holy Spirit, the last great pouring of the Spirit in this age, and a revival just before the taking up of the church.

**How many years is the life of one generation?**

“The LORD’s anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert for forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone” (Numbers 32:13).

“You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will reverence your glory. For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. For the LORD will rebuild Zion, once more he will make its courts like the courts of Solomon. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. Let this be written to the future generation of the people of Israel, which means that the human race will not completely disappear until all is fulfilled. The Hebrew Bible uses the word “dor”, which means either a generation, then, what does the Bible say? There area various interpretations of which we will here look at some.

* The most common view has been 40 years. This figure is based on the disappearance of the desert generation of Moses’ time. This view was shared by many scholars up to the eighties (and that was my understanding, too, up to the early eighties). According to this interpretation the age of the generation should have been reached in 1988. Nothing very remarkable happened that year, why? We have to keep in mind that in the desert only the disobedient died during those 40 years, but men of faith like Joshua and Caleb lived after the 40 years had passed(Num. 32:10-13; Joshua 14:6-15). According to this it took over 40 years for a generation to disappear completely.

* The Greek NT uses the word “genea” (family, generation) when it speaks about a generation. Some have interpreted this to mean that the human race will not completely disappear until all is fulfilled. The Hebrew Bible uses both in the OT and the NT the word “dor”, which means either a generation or an era, an age, which makes the interpretation of the disappearance of the human race rather unlikely.

We may draw the conclusion that whatever the age of a generation, it seems rather obvious that all people of the generation who saw the rebirth of the state of Israel after almost 2000 years, will not disappear completely from the earth until all is fulfilled and the Messiah comes.

The days will be shortened for the sake of the elect.

“For then there will be great...
distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equalled again.

If those days had not been cut short, no-one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-11).

“He changes the times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning” (Daniel 2:21).

“LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD, renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2).

Good has times and seasons in His hands, and He can change them if He chooses. Hosea speaks about how God will revive Israel in two days, that is in two millennia, and restore them on the third day. Habakkuk prays the Lord to renew His deeds already before time. Yeshua told us that the days of the great distress would be shortened for the sake of the elect, that is Israel and the believers, because without it no-one would survive the judgements of the Lord’s day of wrath. This means also that the times of the last days as given in the Bible, which scholars have interpreted and keep interpreting, will be cut short in a way the Lord decides. That will surprise even the interpreters (Matthew 24:44).

Only Father God knows the day and the hour of Messiah’s return

“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36).

Many scholars of the prophetic word have tried to figure out the exact day and hour of the Messiah’s coming, but all their calculations have been and will be erroneous. How could it be possible for a man to know what even the angels of heaven and the Son of God do not know: the exact day and hour of His return (Mark 13:32). We are able to deduce from the signs we have been given that the time is near, one remarkable sign being Israel, God’s fig-tree. We may also study prophetal timetables and so enlarge our understanding, but what we are able to understand has its limits, and we do wisely not to fix any exact dates. What is relevant, is to be always ready for the Lord’s coming. Yeshua’s words are a straight answer to those who teach the so-called “only Jesus” heresy. They claim that there is only one person of God, Jesus, who reveals Himself sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. This is not the revelation of the Bible.

Yeshua, who is the Son of God and the Mediator between man and God the Father, is a person of His own, even in being one with the Father (John 10:30; 1 Tim.2:5; 1 Cor. 8:5-6). Yeshua has His own will which He has surrendered under the Father’s will, and only God the Father knows the time and hour of His Son’s return (Matthew 26:39,42; 1 Cor 15:28). Let us be prepared for that hour.

Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV), International Bible Society, 2001.

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"...that all of them may be one (echad)..." Joh. 17:21