

## Appointments

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I think that most people believe that two of the most important holidays throughout the Christian world are Easter and Christmas. I have heard them called “the book ends of Christianity,” whatever that means. But there is something a little odd about that, and that is that neither of these days are found observed anywhere in the Bible.

If they were as important to the early church as they are today, you would think that someone, like Luke, would have said something. But instead, we find holy days in the Bible, and we find them in both testaments. Not only that, but they are found observed by the church in the New Testament. Now Luke did write, in Acts 20, where he said:

**Acts 20:6** But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Then later on, Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus because he would not spend the time in Asia “for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, by the Day of Pentecost.” Before that he had told the Ephesians, “farewell because I must keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem.”

Nowadays these holy days are usually dismissed by most people. Most, being Protestant Christians, look at them as being merely Jewish, but then we are left to wonder why the earliest Christians followed on in their observance. These days may have clearly had historical or Jewish roots, yet they were still observed faithfully in Christian churches known to be primarily Gentile. So there has to be a reason for that.

One thing I want to mention here is that we cannot just worship God in any way that we want to. In other words, we cannot choose what day is one of God’s appointments. Jesus even said this to the Pharisees back in Mark 7.

**Mark 7:6-9** He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.”

God dictates to us how we work with Him because He does not just accept any way of worship. Now we will turn over to Leviticus 23 and I want to touch on something here.

**Leviticus 23:2** “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.’

Some translations may put it as “the Lord’s appointed times.” The Hebrew word for feast there is *moed* and it literally means “appointment.” The Lord’s appointed times are festivals and holy days that commemorate significant times and events in Israel’s history. These holy days tell and show the truth of God’s great plan of salvation for mankind. They are holy days, but sometimes they are referred to as festivals.

Now from a New Testament perspective these holy days begin to take on a much richer meaning, than the Old Testament saints could have ever dreamed of. As Paul wrote to the Colossian church,

**Colossians 2:16-17** So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

These holy days, as we call them, look back in time to miracles that God performed for the world and for Israel, but they also look forward in time to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ occurring during the spring and fall harvests.

Now I want to consider the calendar here through which these appointments flow. This is because the Hebrew calendar, the one that we usually use as the calculated calendar, is very different from the one that we are used to. There is no January or February to be found, instead the Bible refers to the first month as Abib, or the seventh month which was Ethanim.

Now, as I have already stated the Lord's appointed times or His appointments, occur through the year, so the Jews, because they celebrated them every year, as do we, can and do anticipate each one of its seasons. A Jew knows that the Feast of Tabernacles occurs in the fall, just as the professing Christians anticipate that Easter occurs in the spring.

But the placement of these festivals through the year actually has prophetic significance. To be specific, Jesus' death and resurrection are the substance of the spring holy days, His return and establishment of His Kingdom are the substance of the fall holy days.

Our calendar, officially known as the Gregorian calendar, is based on relative motion of the sun throughout the heavens and for this reason it is sometimes called a solar calendar. It takes 365.2524 days to complete the year, so to keep the start of spring from shifting back into February, we insert a leap day, what we call a leap year every four years, and this keeps the calendar and the seasons together.

The Hebrew calendar, however, is based on the relative motion of both the moon and the sun and it is therefore called a lunar-solar calendar. Since it is based on the moon, the first of every month coincided with the new moon and the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month coincides with the full moon. In other words, each month is defined by the phases of the moon. So the Hebrew calendar keeps the months and their respective seasons together by the insertions of leap months. This means that most years have twelve months of 30 days, but then every so often they have a "leap month," where you have 13 months in that year instead of just 12.

This is pretty important to know. Many of you remember a Feast sermon that John Ritenbaugh gave concerning the correct date of the crucifixion, because there was some controversy over if it was in AD 30 or AD 31. Now if you typed

in Nissan 14<sup>AD</sup> 30 in your search it will take you to a Wednesday, and we know that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday. And if you punch in Nissan 14<sup>AD</sup> 31 it is going to say it was on a Monday, so that cannot be correct. We automatically assume what fits or appears to make sense to us, but sometimes things *appear* to be the right answer, but they just take a little more digging into to get the right answer.

So, if on a regular year on the Hebrew calendar, when the Passover falls on a Wednesday, the coming fall holy days will always begin on the Sabbath: Trumpets, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day all begin on the Sabbath. This is where John Ritenbaugh went and proved, without a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus observed His last holy days on the Sabbath. So we know that the preceding Passover, the one before that, had to land on a Wednesday.

Then we may think, how do you get a Wednesday Passover two years in a row? Well, all you have to do is search for the calculated Hebrew calendar Nissan 14<sup>AD</sup> 31 in a leap year, and guess what? Passover falls on a Wednesday, just as John proved to us.

Now the whole system has a 19-year time cycle, and in that cycle you will have leap months. Most scholars say that it is more accurate than our solar calendar, but it is more difficult to follow. The Hebrew calendar does not mark the first day of spring, summer, fall, or winter. The primary markers in the Hebrew calendars are God's appointments.

Although these technical details may be a little dry and hard to grasp at times, but they have important implications in certain passages of Scripture and we should understand these things.

To give an example here. Passover begins on the 14th day of Abib (the first month). Since the months in the Hebrew calendar follow the phases of the moon, we know that this must be a full moon. Remember that the beginning of the months is the new moon and the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month is always a full moon. Have you ever thought about this: the darkness that fell over the earth when Jesus was crucified could not have been an eclipse of the sun as some skeptics have tried to claim. It had to have some type of supernatural origin,

it was a miraculous event. There were a couple of other things that happened also: a great earthquake and the dead were being risen back to life, but you do not hear too much about that from the skeptics either.

Now going back to Leviticus 23, the first thing that it tells us is about a weekly appointment—the Sabbath. It then describes several spring appointments—Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost. Then it moves on to describe several fall appointments—Trumpets, Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day.

**Leviticus 23:3** ‘Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.

Sabbath typically means rest, so the Sabbath appointment here has its roots in the very creation of the world. God blessed the seventh day and set it apart for holy use. Why? Because He is in it! He separated it from others in kind and in character. He made it holy because it was *His* appointment. Not for the Jews, not for Israel, but for all of mankind. Now let us look at Genesis 2.

**Genesis 2:1-3** Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

I want to look at the word “blessed” here, “He blessed the Sabbath.” If you look up the word, the first thing it is typically going to say is happy, but that is not what this word means. It is something totally different.

In the Hebrew, this word actually means kneel, as in an act of adoration and worship. There is another word in parenthesis next to this word in the Hebrew and it is “*eth*.” Now let me read the definition of that here. “It is a sign of a definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative.” So it is part of speech but it is what they call an untranslated particle.

*Strong's Concordance* goes on to say that these three letters is contracted from another Hebrew word, “*oth*.” This is used more generally to point out the object of a verb or preposition. This word “*oth*” actually means a sign; a beacon; a flag.

That is kind of interesting to me because did not God say to the Israelites that the Sabbath would be a sign that they were His people and He was their God? To break this down a bit, when God blessed the Sabbath, He made it His appointment, as a sign, to come before Him and kneel in adoration and worship of Him.

**Exodus 31:12-13** And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign [*oth*] between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.’

We know that there are many prophecies in the book of Revelation and we hear God say these things that there is coming a time when people of God and the people of this world are going to know that Jesus is Lord, and He is the one who has sanctified us, set us apart.

**Exodus 31:16-17** Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a continual covenant forever. It is a sign [*oth*] between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”

Everyone knows the story of the Exodus, but there are little things about that story that you may not have noticed. God sent Moses to Pharaoh to say “let My people go,” but do we also realize that there was a reason he offered to Pharaoh? Turn back to Exodus 5 and we will read this here.

**Exodus 5:1** Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”

Keep in mind that God is constant. He is not one way today and another way tomorrow.

**Malachi 3:6** “For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Jesus also says that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So it should not come as a surprise then that God would have had His appointments right from the beginning. We know that God’s law was in effect way before Moses.

You see on this occasion Moses did not call this an appointed time, it is not *moed*, feast, but it is a different Hebrew word *kadosh*. It is a sacred celebration, but such celebrations are seen later to be annual and to fit into the calendar.

So this one is pointed squarely then at the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of spring, even though it could not have yet been known as the Passover. Since Pharaoh would not let them go, this spring festival, with no name, was observed in the middle of Egypt, to the Egyptians’ dismay, and later became known then as the Passover.

What I am suggesting is that there are occasions when God acted in history, commonly took place at a *moed*, at one of His appointed times, and as a result of God’s action the day itself took on the meaning and even the name of the events. So we see this festival Moses said they wanted to observe in the wilderness could have been on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, but that day was not the Passover at that time. It became the Passover because on that night God passed over the houses of the Israelites and took all of the firstborns of the houses of Egypt.

I think that people generally assume that the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month in the Hebrew calendar became important because that is when Israel was

delivered from Egypt, but what if Israel was delivered on this day because it was already one of God's appointed times?

So when it comes to the sacrifice of Christ that day did not become a Christian festival because Christ was crucified on that day. Christ died on that day because He was the Passover Lamb, and the Passover, one of God's appointments with history, had come. Everything God does has an appointed time!

He even told Abraham when Sarah was going to have a son, and he would be back at the appointed time of his birth. I can believe then that the day that Abraham's almost-sacrifice of his son Isaac was one of God's appointments with history. This may have been the day generations later when the Israelites killed the lamb, put its blood on the doorposts of the house and ate the Passover lamb while the firstborns of all of Egypt were dying. It may have been the very day when Israel was delivered from bondage in Egypt as Christians are delivered from bondage of sin by the blood of our Passover lamb.

This was all planned out and done before the foundation of the world, and it may have been that very day, generations later, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was pierced in His side and died, while at the temple the Passover lambs were being slain. That event with Abraham and Isaac was most likely done on that "*moed*" and it was just a forerunner of when the Father would be sacrificing His Son Jesus Christ. It was already established!

Now let us put this into perspective here. In Hebrew *moed* literally means appointments, and apparently these appointments were there right from the beginning, in the creation account. Turn back to Genesis again.

**Genesis 1:14** Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs [*oth*] and seasons, and for days and years."

Let us look at the word "seasons" here. What do you think that Hebrew word is? It is *moed*. So this could be more accurately rendered, "and let them be for signs [*oth*] and appointed times."



What this suggests to me is that there were divine appointments (holy days) right from the very beginning. And there is absolutely no reason to think that there were not. If God had a plan then it should not be surprising that He would have these special times or appointments to meet with Him marked out for these special events right from the very start, not just for Israel, or the Jews, or the church, but for all of humanity.