

HOLY DAYS OR HOLIDAYS???

*THE TRUE BIBLICAL FEAST DAYS FOR THE
NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVER*

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION



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NOTE TO THE READER

Have you, the reader, ever wondered why the Christian worship of today seems so different from that shown in the New Testament and practiced by the Apostles and the other members of the first century church? Why, for example, do we not have one Biblical account of any first century Believer having gathered around a Christmas tree, burned a Yule log, or attended an Easter sunrise service? Many of these individuals had actually walked with our Messiah and heard His teachings first hand; they had direct knowledge of His birth, death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. Did they commemorate these extremely important events and, if so, how? Where did our own holiday observances originate and just how true to the Scriptures are they.

Such questions are not merely academic. Since Christian "talk radio" has come into its own, every year around Christmas and Easter the lines become ablaze with questions and comments about the holidays. Ministers lament the fact that the holidays have become too commercialized, while card-carrying pagans call in and claim that Christians have stolen *their* holidays. Many sincere Christians make appeals to "put Christ back into Christmas" and other sincere Christians call in to say that He was never in Christmas in the first place. But such discussions are not limited to the world of talk radio. Increasing numbers of Believers are beginning to question traditional practices and increasing numbers are not sure where to turn.

This study will examine the issue from a non-denominational point of view and will reveal for the reader the fact that the actual Biblical dates of our Savior's birth, death, and resurrection, are determinable from the pages of Scripture. We will also come to discover indications of important future Messianic events as the plan of salvation unfolds. We will find that the first century Believers embraced all these events and commemorated them as their "true Christian feast days." We will further discover that all these dates have been in the pages of Scripture all the time; we have simply not been taught to see them. As they come to light for us, we will see that the Word of our Creator is true and consistent from beginning to end. His Word itself will reveal for us these key and exciting elements of the faith "once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). And finally, the study will touch lightly on the holidays currently practiced by the various elements of mainstream Christianity to determine how close to the truth they come.

The study proceeds upon the premise that the Bible is the inspired Word of the Almighty and does not contradict itself. The author strongly recommends that the reader pause at this time to ask the Almighty Creator for wisdom, understanding, and discernment. May His truth, and not the author's opinion, be found by every reader.

All Scripture verses will be quoted from the King James Version unless otherwise specified. The name of the Messiah will be rendered from the original Hebrew "Yahoshua".¹ Any references to our Creator as "God" will reflect the original Hebrew "Elohim." And finally, the word "LORD", when referring to the Creator will be rendered in the original Hebrew "Yahowah".²

With respect to currently-practiced Christian holidays, it is often necessary to look to sources outside the Scriptures to trace historical development. Although there are scores of books available on the subjects discussed, the author has chosen to limit citations to the Encyclopædia Britannica as much as possible. Encyclopædia Britannica is respected as an objective source, which does not intentionally endorse any particular denominational viewpoint. When necessary to cite any other extra-biblical source, the author will try to point out any possible bias.

THE TRUE BIBLICAL HOLY DAYS

The Bible is truly an awesome book. It is a chronicle of an awesome Creator and His relationship to His chosen people (Exodus 6:7). In this chronicle, we see the inherently sinful heart of man and his propensity to turn away from the will of his Heavenly Father. As Believers, however, we see that from the Garden of Eden the Creator had a plan to ultimately save His people from their sins by the precious blood of His only-begotten Son:

And Yahowah Elohim said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. [underlining added] (Genesis 3:14-15)

Believers understand that this statement refers to the fact that the seed of the woman--Messiah Yahoshua--would one day triumph over Satan. But if the omnipotent, omniscient Creator was able to make such a prophecy concerning the Messiah, does it not also make sense that He already knew the very day in the future that this triumph would occur? Would He not also have known the very dates of our Savior's birth, death, resurrection, and the myriad of other significant events in His life and ministry?

¹ Pronounced "Yah-ho'-shoo-uh." Another variant is "Yahshua" with its alternate spellings "Yeshua" and "Y'shua." The Biblical significance of our Savior's name is discussed at greater length in the study "What's In A Name?"

² The pronunciation of the original Hebrew "יהוה" is a subject of some controversy among many Bible scholars. The author's choice of "Yahowah" rather than "Yahweh" is addressed at greater length in the study mentioned in the footnote above.

After all, did not the Messiah tell us that the Father already knew the time of Messiah's second coming to the earth?

But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. [underlining added] (Matthew 24:36)

But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. [underlining added] (Mark 13:32)

It shall be demonstrated in the course of this study that our Creator did know the dates of all these events. As a matter of fact, He had appointed these dates many centuries before they actually came to pass. As we continue our search, we will find out what these “appointed times” are and how they apply to our own lives. Before we delve into these “appointed times,” however, we should take a moment to note that the specific timing of many key Biblical events is actually more important than many of us have been taught.

In the Old Testament, for example, we find that the birth of Isaac was to occur at a pre-appointed time.

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. [underlining added] (Genesis 17:21)

Likewise, we find that the Almighty, speaking through the prophet Daniel, forecast precisely the future arrival of the Messiah in Jerusalem at a pre-appointed time measured from the date of a decree to rebuild that same city.

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. (Daniel 9:25)

Although there are many other Old Testament examples of events occurring at certain “appointed times,” we find that the New Testament has similar indications of the importance of such times. For example, if we look closely, we find that King Herod was very concerned as to the exact timing of the appearance of the star that announced the birth of our Savior.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. [underlining added] (Matthew 2:7)

Similarly, our Messiah indicated that certain of His actions had to be done only at the proper time. One such example is found in the book of John.

Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come.
[underlining added] (John 7:8)

Not only was our Savior concerned with timing issues, Himself, but He indicated that the religious leaders of His day should have been able to discern the timing of His coming.

And when *ye see* the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. *Ye hypocrites*, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? [underlining added] (Luke 12:55-56)

Furthermore, He later went on to say that because they had failed to discern that time, the city of Jerusalem and Temple were to be destroyed:

And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. [underlining added] (Luke 19:44)

But just why should the Scribes and Pharisees have been able to figure out the time of Messiah's arrival? Was He demanding something of them that they could not do? Did the Almighty allow the destruction of Jerusalem without just cause?

The answer to this question is that the Scribes and Pharisees indeed should have been able to discern the particular time to which He referred--and it goes well beyond simply understanding the timing given in Daniel 9:25. The specific timing of Yahoshua's birth and approaching death were strong indicators that He was in fact their long-awaited Messiah. And, as will be demonstrated shortly, these "appointed times" were set at creation week. Without a doubt, the religious leaders of that day should have been able to discern them.

We should, however, be very slow to judge the Scribes and Pharisees living at the time of Messiah's first coming. The sad fact is that modern-day Believers, even with both testaments of Scripture, would not fare much better than they did. Due to the pagan influences, which crept into the early church, we have also been blinded to these "times" even though they are--and have always been--right in the pages of Scripture.

But if the true Biblical Holy Days are in the pages of Scripture, how is it that they have been missed by millions of sincere Believers throughout the centuries? The answer to this question is that, due to the

influence of Rome, we have been taught not to see these "appointed times". Although they were celebrated by the Believers of the first century, they were subsequently dismissed by Rome and put "off limits" to Believers. This was accomplished by labeling these "times" as "Jewish Holidays" which were of no importance to the New Testament Believer. But does the epithet of "Jewish Holidays" agree or disagree with the Scriptures?

If we look to the Scriptures we will find a curious fact: These "appointed times" are meticulously laid out in the Old Testament, but nowhere in the entire Old Testament are they ever referred to as "Jewish Holidays." As a matter of fact, the Creator of the Universe calls them by quite a different term:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, *Concerning the feasts of Yahowah, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.* [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:2)

These *are* the feasts of Yahowah, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:4)

And Moshe [Moses] declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of Yahowah. [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:44)

Notice that the Scriptures do NOT call these feast days "Jewish" feast days. They are specifically called "feasts of Yahowah." The plot thickens, however. Because the King James translators did not understand the significance of these "times," their use of the word "feasts" is not the most accurate rendering of the original Hebrew word "דָּבָר." *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* defines it as

4150. דָּבָר **môw'êd**, *mo-ade'*; from 3259; prop. *an appointment*, i.e. a fixed time or season; spec. a *festival*; conventionally a *year*; by implication, an *assembly* (as convened for a definite purpose); technically the *congregation*; by extension, the *place of meeting*; also a *signal* (as appointed beforehand):--appointed (sign, time), (place of, solemn) assembly, congregation, (set, solemn) feast, (appointed, due) season, solemn (-ity), synagogue, (set)time (appointed).

As will soon be shown, the rendering "appointed times" or "set times" is actually a more precise term for the original Hebrew word "ydtm"³ The verses from Leviticus 23, therefore, should read

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, *Concerning the appointed times of Yahowah, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my appointed times.* [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:2)

These *are* the appointed times of Yahowah, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:4)

And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the appointed times of Yahowah. [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:44)

In other words, these are the "Appointed Times" of the Creator of the Universe--not simply some quaint religious festivals of a religious denomination known as Judaism. And as we will soon discover, it is to these same "Appointed Times" that our Savior and the New Testament writers referred numerous times in the Scriptures. Before we go into each of the specific "Appointed Times" however, we must first examine the validity of the earlier claim that these "appointed times" were set during creation week itself.

In the Book of Psalms, there is a very curious verse that seems on its face to be a misprint or error in the Scriptures. Under Divine inspiration, the psalmist makes the following statement:

He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down. [underlining added] (Psalms 104:19)

Every high-school student knows that the yearly seasons are not determined by the moon, but by the position of the sun with respect to the slant of the earth's axis. So why would the psalmist make such an astronomical error?

The apparent problem with this verse lies not with the divinely inspired psalmist, but with the incomplete understanding of the human translators who translated our English versions of the Bible. Just as they mistakenly used the word "feast" for the Hebrew word "ydtm" (appointed time) in Leviticus 23:2, 4, and 44, they likewise improperly used the word "seasons" for the same Hebrew word in Psalm 104:19. The proper rendering should be "appointed times" and the verse would read

³ Although the author does not endorse The New American Standard Version of the Bible, this version correctly translates " ydtm" as "appointed times." Similarly, the English translation of the Old Testament written for Jews (known as the Tanakh) uses the term "set [meaning appointed/fixed] times."

He appointed the moon for the appointed times: the sun knoweth his going down.
[underlining added] (Psalms 104:19)

But does the moon really show the "appointed times" of the Creator? We will soon see that this is indeed the case and that the Scriptures are in total agreement.

Unlike our modern calendar, in Biblical times the month was set by the appearance of the new moon. The book of 1 Samuel gives us a strong indicator of this fact.

So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat... And it came to pass on the morrow [the day after the new moon day], *which was* the second day of the month, that David's place was empty...
[underlining added] (1 Samuel 20:24-27)

This passage shows us that, since the day after the day of the new moon was the second day of the month, the day of the new moon was the first day⁴ of the Biblical month. It is a well-known fact among Bible scholars that up until the bar Kochba revolt of 132-135, the Temple High Priest would watch for the first sliver of the new moon every month and blow the shofar (ram's horn) to proclaim the beginning of the month (called "Rosh Chodesh").⁵ This practice is borne out by Scripture.

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this *was* a statute for Israel, *and* a law of the Elohim of Jacob.
[underlining added] (Psalms 81:3-4) [Referring to Numbers 10:10]

So we find that, unlike in our modern solar-based calendar, the first day of each Biblical month was determined by the appearance of the New Moon. We also find that all of the "Appointed Times" of Yahowah are given with respect to the days of the Biblical lunar months. For example:

These *are* the appointed times of Yahowah, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their appointed times. In the fourteenth day of the first month⁶ at even *is* Yahowah's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the feast of unleavened bread unto Yahowah... [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:4-6)

⁴ The Biblical day is made up of "the evening and the morning" (Genesis 1:5). Therefore, the Biblical day begins at sunset rather than at midnight.

⁵ "Rosh Chodesh" means "head of the month."

⁶ Biblically, New Year's day is actually the first day of the Biblical month of Abib [also called Nisan] (Exodus 12:2).

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, ye shall have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation... [underlining added] (Leviticus 23:24)

We see from these passages that the "Appointed Times" of the Almighty were determined by counting the specific number of days after the appearance of the new moon. With this understanding, we can now look back to creation week to see that the Creator's "appointed times" were in fact set on the fourth day of creation.

And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: [underlining added] (Genesis 1:14)

This verse, which details the functions of the "lights in the firmament"--the sun, the moon, and the stars, shows us that our Creator's "Appointed Times" were indeed fixed at creation. As will be addressed in a later study, the function of the stars is to show the "signs" of the times with respect to our Father's plan of salvation.⁷ And the function of the sun is clearly to delineate the "days and years." But what about the function of the moon?

Just as in Psalm 104:19, the Hebrew word translated as "seasons" in Genesis 1:14 is the word יָדוּם which we have seen means "appointed times." The verse should therefore read,

And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for appointed times, and for days, and years: [underlining added] (Genesis 1:14)

We know from Leviticus 23 that the "appointed times" of the Almighty were determined by counting the specific number of days after the appearance of the new moon. The Scriptures are simply stating here in verse 14 that the reason that the moon was put in the sky during creation week was to show the "Appointed Times" of the Almighty Creator of the Universe. That is why the writer of the Book of Revelation could state that our Messiah was the

Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. [underlining added]
(Revelation 13:8)⁸

⁷ See, for example, Job 38:31-33, Jeremiah 10:2, Matthew 24:30, and Revelation 15:1

⁸ Bible translations based on the Greek New Testament text known as Codex Vaticanus ["book of the Vatican"]--such as the NIV, RSV, and NAS Bibles--change the wording of this verse.

It was at creation--at "the foundation of the world"--that the "appointed time" was set for our Messiah to offer Himself up to pay for the sins of the world. As we will see in the studies of the individual Appointed Times of the Almighty, not only our Savior's death, but the timing of His birth, resurrection, second coming, and every other significant event in His life was "appointed" from the foundation of the world. The first of these Appointed Times of our Creator—the birthday of our Messiah—is discussed in the study entitled, *The Birth of Messiah*.