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 Title: “*The Fall Feasts of Israel*”
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Thank you, Pastor Kevin Freeman and Redland Baptist Church, for having me; it is an honor to be with you today and present on the Fall Feasts of Israel and how they point to Christ and to also share about my ministry.

CPM exists to pray for, evangelize, disciple, and serve Jewish people everywhere and to help fellow believers—such as yourselves—to do the same. Our ministry exists in 26 cities in the US & 19 countries worldwide, including Israel.

I serve in the DC area.

When it comes to the appointed festivals, the first thing we need to realize is that the Hebrew calendar was not just a way to keep track of all the **ceremonial** or **sacramental** things that God wanted Israel to do, but the festivals and the calendar were God’s way to know His plans & anticipate the great spiritual work of redemption that He was accomplishing in his people and in the world.

In other words, the fall feasts would point to the *weightier, spiritual* work that God was doing...and planning to do in the future.

Repentance at the 1st holiday, Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah),
 Redemption on (DOA), Yom Kippur
 and Rejoicing at Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles.

Do the themes Repentance, Redemption and Rejoicing sound familiar?

It should because when we open the NT...

...we begin immediately with the ministry of repentance through John the Baptist, which prepared the way for the ministry of Redemption through the Messiah’s Atonement, which led into great rejoicing, having unleashed the new covenant with the ministry of the Holy Spirit who *at last* makes God’s presence to dwell—no longer in a *tabernacle*, no longer in a *temple*, but within our *hearts*.

The stages for the NT’s spiritual work of Repentance, Redemption, & Rejoicing is rooted and grounded in the Torah’s fall feasts of Israel.

ROSH HASHANAH

Let’s go ahead and dive into the first fall feast...which in fact is not named by God in Leviticus 23.

In the Christian world, the feast got called “the Feast of Trumpets” and in the Jewish world it came to be known as “Rosh Hashanah,” which literally translates to the “head of the year” or in other words, the Jewish New Year.

Biblically, this holiday was to anticipate and prepare for the coming most important day and most important spiritual work of the entire year, the Day of Atonement. And this incredibly serious and solemn season of repentance was **to be called in** by a unique sound—the blowing of a shofar. The shofar, is a ram’s horn and it is blown on the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah). There are many reasons for sounding the shofar that are found

in Scripture and in Jewish tradition. In addition to the New Year, the shofar was sounded at the arrival of a visiting dignitary, as an alarm, at the start of the new year, and even at the beginning of every new month. It was also blown to inaugurate the movement of troops into battle (Numbers 10:1-10).

The ram's horn was used a lot of times in the context of battle. The shofar was a war sound...a warning of impending danger.

It is meant to grip the soul with concern and fear...and in this feast, with fear of impending judgment. The feast of Trumpets was therefore a solemn call to reflection & repentance. Because repentance prepares the way for redemption.

In a way, the shofar was like a booming loud voice *calling out in the wilderness* "prepare ye the way of the Lord"...specifically, the Lord's way of redemption.

---BLOW SHOFAR---Happy New Year! OR, Shanah Tovah!=A good year

Now, in Rabbinic Judaism today, Rosh Hashanah is a two-day holiday that ushers in the Ten Day of Awe, which is a ten-day countdown to Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

This time is spent reflecting & repenting for sins committed over the course of the previous year before God literally closes the Book of Life and inscribes the fates of each soul for the coming year.

The Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 is the central text read on this holiday because the story of Isaac serves as a reminder of the message of sacrifice and hope. (That's where the ram's horn comes into play because God provided a ram in the place of Isaac).

Something I find interesting...is that Jewish people use the Binding of Isaac as a basis for a theology that they call "the merit of the fathers" or *Zechut Avot*.

So when Jewish people pray from their prayer books asking for forgiveness and mercy from God, they appeal to the merit Abraham had before God, because of his obedience to God in sacrificing Isaac. Jewish people read this text every morning and plead with God to have mercy on them because of Abraham's deed.

So this Jewish prayer book is teaching that ***an (almost) sacrificed son millennia ago (has merit to) bring about forgiveness of sins.***

Well, that's exactly what we believe the Messiah accomplishes—what Yeshua already accomplished by willingly sacrificing himself (like Isaac), willingly obeying God (like Abraham), and shedding his own blood for atonement (like the Ram). He is the Lamb or Ram of God whose MERIT takes away our sins. He accomplished a basis of merit even greater than the fathers.'

So if you're talking to a Jewish person, mention this: if you can see how the merit of the fathers brings about benefits and blessings, *how much more* does the merit of Messiah who has come in the footsteps of the fathers.

The merit of Messiah is GREATER than the merit of the fathers because it brings about *eternal* forgiveness, where you don't have to atone again the next year or worry about your fate or your forgiveness every year. Messiah offered once for all time a single sacrifice for sins, thus securing an eternal redemption...

On Rosh Hashanah, Jewish people need to hear about the ministry of John, the repentance that prepares the way for the Ram of God and the ministry of atonement that the 2nd holiday sets the stage for:

YOM KIPPUR

In both Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism today, Yom Kippur is the Holiest day of the whole year.

But in Rabbinic Jewish belief, those 10 days before YK is the time when God opens the book of life and invites people to repent of all their sins of the previous year. Then on Yom Kippur, God closes the book and seals the fates of all Jewish people for that year (until the next year).

If you repented well, you are considered righteous and can welcome in the new year with a clean slate and conscience. If you did not use this time to repent, then your sealed fate is not such a good one. **So, your atonement depends on your repentance, prayers, & good deeds.**

While we can appreciate and very much agree with this practice of intentional reflection, repentance, and fasting (which is very biblical), the theology proposed here is dangerously wrong.

And dangerous in the sense that the stakes are high: these are words and interpretations that fight for the soul...that determines one's atonement...our peace with God.

So many Jewish people today struggle with knowing—*really* knowing—whether their repentance worked, whether their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds...and if they really are forgiven. That's tormenting theology.

Who all in here knows that you know that you know you are forgiven eternally?

That there's nothing good you can do to make God love you any more, and no bad thing you can do to make God love you any less?

Who knows they don't have to work for or add to their atonement?

Praise God...it's a good feeling, isn't it?

Well imagine **not knowing, not being sure** whether this next new year holds blessings as a result of good repenting or curses as result of bad deeds outweighing your good ones--how can you even measure that? It's not actually possible to keep count.

God never intended **something so big and so important as your atonement** to be ambiguous or uncertain.

But rabbinic theology on Yom Kippur does not reflect the longstanding ancient terms laid out in the Hebrew Bible.

What I mean by "ancient terms?"

If you walk into a synagogue today on Yom Kippur, you'll see people **fasting**, wonderful—just wonderful rich **prayers & liturgy** (beautiful; cuts to the heart), & **lots and lots of repenting**—and I mean down to the details—like no leather shoes or any luxurious clothing.

But there are two things you won't see on this day of atonement...at least not anymore:

1) Blood sacrifices and... 2) a priest.

Because, the religion you see Jewish communities practicing today only came about *after* the destruction of the 2nd temple in 70 CE.

Judaism before 70 CE looked, practiced, and believed very differently from what you see today. One of the biggest and really forced changes that took place after the Temple's destruction was the doing away of the **blood sacrifice system** as well as the **priestly system**. After all, there's no Temple anymore.

So, in the days and centuries following that destruction, Second Temple Judaism underwent major reconstruction ...in both practice and theology...and the culmination of all those changes evolved into the Rabbinic Judaism of today.

Now, one of the first immediate changes that took place in Jewish theology...was that prayers *alone* became a sufficient substitute for blood sacrifices.

So, two of the biggest, most historical pillars of ancient Judaism inscribed in Leviticus 23—blood sacrifice and priestly system—just got reinterpreted and replaced—just like that! The demand for blood is now no more.

But biblically, blood was always the main item for atonement purposes, for drawing near to God in the Holy of Holies.

Lev 17:11 says that the Life is in the blood and “I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”

The Judaism of Moses, Joshua, David, the Prophets—even the Judaism of Abraham—knew the demand for blood sacrifice.

What Jewish people most need to hear on this Holy Day, is that...

Prayers alone cannot atone! Prayers can never suffice for atonement—let alone replace the demand for blood. The life is in the blood—not in prayers—not even in repentance! You can repent all you want—you can be the best repenter and even if you can think of every sin you ever committed...apart from the shedding of blood there can be NO atonement, no forgiveness of sins.

That’s a hard truth for Jewish people, but it is THE truth they most need to hear.

So, please, tell your Jewish friends, there *IS* a book of LIFE out there—and God *IS* writing names in that book. But the ink he’s writing with is *blood*. The blood of Jesus that God has poured out on the altar of the Cross to make atonement for our souls. He is the Highest Priest and the Highest Sacrifice.

So tell them that, in fact, *there really is* no more need for blood sacrifices or a priest—but not because the demand for blood *changed* but because it was *satisfied. It...was...finished.* And that’s a big difference. God is not like man that he should change his mind. Rather, God himself, in keeping with the Torah’s terms, has provided the ram, the Lamb of God who “entered **once** for **all** **time** into the most holy place—not with the blood of goats or calves, but offering His own blood, thus obtaining redemption for us for **all** **time**.”

SUKKOT

We have gone from Repentance on Rosh Hashanah, to Redemption on Yom Kippur, to rejoicing on Sukkot! Great Rejoicing takes place on the last of the Holy Days—**Sukkot**, the Feast Of Tabernacles, the third & last holy day we’ll be talking about this morning.

Sukkot is uniquely special not only because it is the final fall festival...but also because it points us to the final destination, the ultimate goal of all the holidays, all the Torah, and really, all the bible itself: **God’s Presence**. And not just that, but God’s Presence Dwelling WITH his people.

And as we all know for ourselves (hopefully), this is fulfilled with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is unleashed only after the Atonement is finished or satisfied.

This is why this holiday is known as “z’man simchateinu”—our time of JOY. Sukkot is all about the commandment to—REJOICE!

Now, it’s kind of ironic that a SUKKAH—Hebrew for just one tabernacle—would be this holiday’s chosen image to joyously celebrate something so great & glorious as God’s presence.

A sukkah is just a flimsy, easy-to-make booth.

How many of you have seen a sukkah before? Perhaps in Israel or in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn if you’ve ever visited.

Yeah, it’s not the greatest structure to behold. It’s basically a rectangular teepee. And, it’s absolutely defenseless, easily broken.

And yet, when it came to appointing a time to remind His people about his great presence dwelling among them, it seems like God preferred the dusty tabernacle over the golden temple itself.

So why would God call for Israel to rejoice by hearkening back to the days of the *tabernacle* over, say, the days of the *Temple*, a much more magnificent symbol especially for God’s presence? Tabernacle? Really? I mean we’re talking about the days of wilderness wanderings, when God’s people were mere refugees on the move: **needy, hungry, thirsty, vulnerable, & unestablished as a nation**...with a pretty insecure tabernacle as *the* symbol of their great, mighty, and awesome God.

It’s not a coincidence that the sukkah is, at the same time, the symbol of vulnerability and yet the chosen Jewish symbol of the Divine Presence & our JOY & REST.

God chose the sukkah not because it points to itself but because it sets the perfect stage for something greater than itself, something that was still to come, that would achieve the spiritual vision of this holiday itself. (It points to) God’s *ultimate* and *preferred* dwelling place.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...And the Word became flesh and TABERNACLED among us”

God’s final, preferred dwelling place wasn’t a place at all. It’s a PERSON.

God, who deserves the golden splendor of a Temple, preferred to take on the insecurity and vulnerability of human flesh in order to better dwell with his people, to commune with the glory of his creation...He is Immanuel, God with Us...

Sukkot sets the messianic stage for the great Day of great Joy when “the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” This is where He is bringing us! To be in His presence and worship Him forever and ever.

In Jesus, we can enter the presence of God boldly...and even carry the presence of God into all the world.

Sukkot *also* anticipates the messianic kingdom like no other holiday. And what is the messianic kingdom except just another way of saying God’s holy presence will permeate the whole earth.

In fact, Sukkot is *THE* messianic holiday, on an international level.

Lev. 23 calls for Israel to “rejoice before the Lord for 7 days by “taking the fruit of splendid trees (etrog) and branches of a palm tree (lulav).

Now, the lulav is a palm branch, which has long been the biblical image of joy in connection to the messianic kingdom.

Remember when the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with palm branches? Well, why palm branches?

Because of this feast! Sukkot was always linked to the coming Messianic King, through Zechariah 14:

“The Lord will be king over all the earth...any who are left of all the nations...will go up from year to year to worship the King...and celebrate the Feast of Booths.”

They welcomed Jesus with Palm Branches because they believed he was the coming King and that the Kingdom had arrived, the time when all nations would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot.

One day you too will joyfully celebrate Sukkot in Jerusalem in the Messianic Kingdom...along with all the nations who come up to Jerusalem...but not only the nations but also ALL ISRAEL, who shall be saved, and celebrating Jesus, the Dwelling Place of God in its fullness!

May it come speedily in our day.