

WINNING JEWS TO CHRIST

A Handbook to Aid Christians in their Approach to the Jews

by

Jacob Gartenhaus, Lrrr. D.

Copyright @ 1963

CHAPTER SEVEN

FEASTS AND FASTS

THE JEWISH CALENDAR

The Jewish people count the year “to the creation of the world,” which according to tradition and based on biblical data occurred 5720 years ago. Thus the year 1961-1962 is in the Jewish year 5722. This reckoning “to the creation” is not mentioned in the Bible. Instead, the Bible era especially in regard to the festive seasons, is “**to the going out of Egypt.**” Thus the Jews have two systems of reckoning the years:

1. The Sacred year which begins in Spring in memory of “**the going out of Egypt**” and
2. The Civil (or secular) year which begins in Autumn when the “world was created.”

For example, the feast of Passover is celebrated in the first Sacred month (Nisan), “**This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you**” (Exodus 12:2), while what the Jews call “New Year” (the Bible calls the “Memorial of Blowing of Trumpets”; see Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 10:10; 29:1) is celebrated on the first day of the seventh Sacred month.

The year is divided into twelve lunar months (of 29 1/2 days) with a 13th month seven times in every cycle of nineteen years. The lunar year (12 times 29 1/2 days) has 354 days, and is thus eleven days shorter than the solar year, which counts 365 days. In order to make up for this annual difference, a whole month is inserted every third or second year.

Thus every 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th year (in a cycle of 19 years) is a leap year of 13 months. The months do not have 29 1/2 days each but alternate in length: Nisan has 30 days, Iyar 29 days, and so on. In some years there is a little variation in the length of the months for certain reasons.

The names of the Jewish months are not given in Hebrew in the Bible. The Jews learned them from the people in Babylon during their exile in that country. In the Bible the months are usually named by ordinal numbers (1st month, 2nd month, etc).

Nor are there Hebrew names for the days of the week. The names of the days and months used by Christians are of pagan origin!

The names of the Jewish months are:

1. *Nisan* (corresponds to March 20 up to April 16 or thereabouts),
2. *Iyar*,
3. *Sivan*,
4. *Tammuz*,
5. *Av*,
6. *Elul*,
7. *Tishri*,
8. *Cheshvan*,
9. *Kislev*,
10. *Tevet*,
11. *Shevat*,
12. *Adar*.

In a leap year the 13th month is called *Ve-Adar*.

The present Jewish Calendar is based on astronomical principles and was adopted about 1500 years ago. Before its adoption (as in the time of Christ), the Rabbis did not rely on scientific calculations. They were probably not well acquainted with astronomical rules, and their chief reliance was on actual observation of the moon.

On the thirtieth day of each month the Rabbis (during the Second Temple — The Sanhedrin) examined witnesses who claimed to have seen the new moon. If the evidence was reliable and satisfactory, that day (the 30th) was formally proclaimed to be “New Moon” (*Rosh Chodesh*). If there were no witnesses, or the evidence was not trustworthy, the month was declared to begin on the following day.

Since upon the date of the New Moon depended the date of any festival that fell in the month, the people all over the country were informed by messengers or by beacon signals from mountain tops of this formal “*sanctification of the New Month*.”

Those Jews who lived too far away from Jerusalem to be reached in time, and thus could not know whether the 30th day was declared as New Moon, had to keep sacred both the 30th day as well as the following day, and accordingly every festival of that month had to be kept two days instead of one day as it was observed in the homeland.

“New Years’ Day” was celebrated for two days even in Jerusalem, because it fell on the first day of the month. The adoption of the “Second Day Festival” is still being observed in Diaspora (outside Israel) although the exact time of the appearance of the new moon is now well known and is printed in the Jewish Calendar. Thus, for example, Shavuoth — Pentecost — is kept two days instead of one day as fixed in the Bible.

HOLY DAYS

Before continuing here, it is important to read carefully concerning the biblical festive seasons in Leviticus, chapter 23 and Numbers, chapters 28 and 29.

I would call the reader's attention to the fact that my portrayal of the various holydays here is as they have been observed in the Diaspora up to three or four decades ago and as I knew them in my early youth.

Today, especially in America, the holydays have no longer the great significance, the ennobling effect upon Jewry they had previously. If any of them are observed at all, it is less in compliance with the Word of God, than it is in compliance with men, especially with old parents; some dim and vague nostalgia; and more often than not to hear the voice of a "famous Chazan," or Cantor who sings and recites the prayers in enchanting tones. Sometimes the sermon, or rather "lecture" of the learned Rabbi draws attendance to the synagogues and temples on the holydays, especially on "New Year" and on the "Day of Atonement."

Since the destruction of the Temple and cessation of Sacrifices the holydays were not celebrated in exile in accordance with the Word of God. For example:

1. According to the Scriptures the holydays were to be celebrated by various offerings. In exile there were no sacrifices.
2. The ritual service of "Day of Atonement" was mainly performed by the priests as it was a sacrificial ministry, whereas the people as a whole had almost nothing to do with it except to keep it holy like a Sabbath Day and to fast. *

*** The Hebrew words for "ye shall afflict your souls" (see Leviticus 16:31; 23:23; Numbers 29:7) is generally understood to mean "to fast."**

In Diaspora this day has become the most important day in the observance of the Jewish Religion.

3. "New Year" which together with the "Day of Atonement" has become known as the "awful days" (when even those Jews who don't usually attend the synagogue find it obligatory to attend) is not mentioned in the Scriptures at all.
4. According to the Scriptures the "First Day of the Month" was to be a solemn holyday; while in exile, and especially now, it had little importance.
5. I may add that while God ordained the holydays to be kept only one day, in exile they were kept two days. Only Yom Kippur is observed one day.

There have been many other discrepancies in the observance of the holydays in variance with the Scriptures.

However, bereft of the possibility of offering the prescribed sacrifices, the Jews did in their own way, keep the holydays “holy” in the highest possible degree. Here again we may use Paul’s words, “**Zeal of God, but not according to knowledge,**” but such well-meant zeal, such devotion, such submission in love, awe and reverence to God as the Jews evidence in their holydays may well have earned them the name of “God’s Chosen People.” That bears true witness to Israel’s potentialities to fulfill their mission at the close of the “**times of the Gentiles.**”

SABBATH

Keeping the Sabbath holy is one of the Ten Commandments (See Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

The Sabbath has been the center of Jewish life and of the Jewish home. No matter how badly the Jew fared during weekdays, on the Sabbath he was his own self — a scion of kings and prophets. No matter what his position was within the community, no matter if through the weekdays he and his family suffered the pangs of hunger and other adversities of poverty; no matter how he was despised or beaten and bruised by non-Jews from without, when the Sabbath came he was transformed into a king — at least as lord and master of his home.

In the old ghetto life and within the Jewish settlement, it seemed that the six weekdays were only days of preparation for the proper observance of the Sabbath. Friday was almost entirely devoted to preparation for the advent of holy Sabbath: baking, cooking, housecleaning, everything was done (no cost was spared) that the home, no matter how dingy and congested, should be converted into a royal abode.

While the menfolk went to have the ritual cleansing at the Mikveh, the community bath, the womenfolk washed themselves at home. All put on the cleanest and best clothing, usually special “Sabbath-clothing.” Toward evening the men went to the synagogue for “Reception of Sabbath,” as the Sabbath-eve service is called where special prayers and chants were recited and sung. The center of the service is the beautiful hymn called *L’cha Dodi*, “Come My Beloved,” which clearly hints that the Messiah is already come.

When the men return from synagogue they find their home (perhaps simply a one-room home) highly illuminated, especially with Sabbath candles, the table being festively decked with the best that their income can afford. On entering, the men greet the women, “*Gut shabbes*” (“Have a good Sabbath”) and all reply, “*Gut shabbes.*” Then everyone chants a welcoming song in honor of the two angels, who are believed to accompany every man home from his Sabbath-eve service.

Then comes the *Kiddush* (sanctification) which the head of the family solemnly pronounces over a cup of wine of which everyone tastes after the blessing. Then after washing of hands the whole family, “king” father, “queen” mother and the other members of “royalty” sit down around the table, happily, radiantly partaking of the delicious food, interspersed with *Zmiroth* — sacred songs — which terminate with the final lengthy blessing.

The following day is consecrated entirely to the service of God. There is the morning service at the synagogue which occupies almost all of the forenoon, then the festive meal which, with its accompanying prayers and chants is also considered as part of the divine service.

The afternoon is spent in reading sacred books; each according to his education. Then again to synagogue for the late afternoon service and a third meal, a light one, after which, at nightfall, there comes the daily evening service.

The Sabbath is then terminated by *Havdalah* (“separation”). Like the *Kiddush* which ushers in the holy day, so also the *Havdalah*, which separates the sacred Sabbath from the secular weekdays, is performed over a cup of wine. Then comes *M’lavesch Malkah* — a farewell meal in honor of the departing queen — Sabbath. This meal accompanied by recitations and chants often lasts till late at night.

The Sabbath had to be observed not only by observing affirmative laws, in special prayers, rites and ceremonial meals, but also by refraining from doing certain things.

The Bible forbids doing work on the Sabbath day, but it does not say exactly what is to be considered as work. So the Rabbis wrote down hundreds of acts which are to be considered as work. Certain objects which may lead to the desecration of the Sabbath, such as money, candles, etc., should not even be touched. No burden ought to be carried on the Sabbath. Pious Jews even refrain from carrying a handkerchief, though in case of necessity it was wound around the neck like a scarf and was considered as a garment. No fire is to be kindled on the Sabbath. **“Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day”** (Exodus 35:3), so the Jews (in exile) had to use the service of a Gentile to make a fire in the stove in cold weather, also to remove the candlesticks from the table, when not in use.

Present day Orthodox Jews refrain from turning on electric lights, even from using the telephone, radio and television sets, since a spark is lit when activating them. Nor may a burning light or fire be extinguished. Thus some Jews kindle their lights before Sabbath sets in, and let them burn till the Sabbath is out. Others use various gadgets which automatically turn on and off the electric current.

Smoking tobacco on the Sabbath is strictly prohibited. Prohibited, too, is riding, either on an animal or on a vehicle. Only when on board ship may the Jew continue his voyage on the Sabbath. Jews of old and observant Jews now, have been cautious not to break any of the hundreds of Sabbath laws. Yet in spite of these harsh limitations (so many “don’ts”), the day was not only a holy day but also a day of delight, of joy and happiness. The Jew excluded all worry, sorrow, and mourning and, of course, all thoughts of any part of his weekday occupation.

Well was it said by a Jewish sage: “More than the Jews kept the Sabbath has the Sabbath kept the Jews.” They surely could not have survived the everyday hardships, if they had not had the weekly day of rest and resuscitation, a day on which they could remind themselves that they are the “Everlasting Nation,” the nation who had a Covenant with God.

The other holydays, too, were kept as holy as humanly possible. They have been days fully consecrated to God. No sports or any kind of entertainment were allowed — only prayer, study of sacred books, and consumption of food eaten solemnly and ritually.

THE THREE PILGRIM FESTIVALS

“Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty” (Deuteronomy 16:16):

1. *Pesach* (Passover);
2. *Shavuoth* (Weeks);
3. *Succoth* (Tabernacles).

According to the Bible the first and seventh days of Passover, the day of Pentecost, and the first and eighth days of Tabernacles were to be kept as **“holy assemblies”** (Leviticus 23). In the Diaspora, an additional day is observed in each case (see Section on Jewish Calendar). The day after each of the three Pilgrim Festivals is called *Isru Chag*, which is a kind of a half holiday.

I. PESACH (Passover)

Most interesting volumes have been written on this Festival. *

*** The author has published a book on Passover from the Christian viewpoint.**

We here must limit ourselves to some of the main points. The name Passover refers to Exodus 12:27, and is celebrated for eight days (in Israel only seven) from the 15th of Nisan to the 22nd of Nisan —the first month of the Jewish Year. The first two days and the last two days are full holydays, while the intervening days are half-holidays (“Chol-haMoed”), when work may be done.

Passover is also called Feast of *Matzoth* (Unleavened Bread) * and *Feast of Harvest*, because this falls at the time of the barley harvest.

*** Because no bread other than unleavened may be eaten during the eight days of Passover (see Exodus 12:19, 20; 13:7; 18:18).**

As thanksgiving for the harvest, an omer (a certain measure of the new grain) had to be offered on the second day of Passover. (About Pesach read also Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-20; I Corinthians 5:7, 8; 6:7; 11:24-26).

The most festive and ceremonious part of Passover is the Seder, the ritual meal or “home service” of the first two nights of Passover. Even more than the Sabbath eve, the home looks as if magically converted into a royal hall.

Light, joy and happiness permeate the atmosphere. While on Sabbath eve the head of the family assumes the role of a King, on the Eve of Passover he is more of a “high priest,” and the table around which the family is seated is more like an altar, as it is decked with sacred symbols, each of which commemorates some particular event of the deliverance from Egypt. The table-service begins with the Kiddush (as on Sabbath eve). It is continued with reciting the *Haggadah* — the story of the miraculous deliverance. The recitation and chanting of the various parts of the *Haggadah* (some of which are devotional, others quite frivolous) together with the ritual food, often occupy the greater part of the night.

While most of this home service is a memorial to the redemption from Egyptian slavery, there are also many symbols pointing at the redemption of the soul by the Messiah, and the mystery of the Trinity. Such, for example, are the *three Mazzoth*, the bone of a lamb, the *Aphikomen*, and the “Cup of wine for Elijah.” *

*** See my book on Passover for particulars.**

When and how these apparently Christian symbols got into the Passover ceremony is not yet very clear. The Jews who solemnly observe them have no good explanation for this.

At the services of the synagogue during Passover, special prayers are added to the daily ones. Also certain sections of the Torah, relevant to this holiday are being read.

Sephirah (“counting”), or the Counting of the Omer. We have previously mentioned the offering of the “Omer.” Now the Bible commanded to count seven weeks from that day till the Offering of the *First Fruit (Bikkurim)* on the fiftieth day (See Leviticus 23:15-17; Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26).

In Exile these days of *Sephirah* assumed a new phase: They have been considered as days of mourning (no weddings or other joyous celebrations on these days). Various reasons are given for it (see further on *Lag-baomer*), but none is better than that it originated from the time that the first Christians mourned over the crucifixion of Jesus till His reappearance and reassurance on the fiftieth day — on Pentecost. This is my opinion.

II. SHAVUOTH (Weeks) — The Feast of Weeks (See Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-17; also read Acts chapter 2, and I Corinthians 15:20).

It is celebrated on the sixth and seventh day of the month of *Sivan* — the third month of the year. To Christians it is known as *Pentecost*, a Greek word which means “fiftieth” — the fiftieth day after the bringing of the Omer. In biblical times it was also called *The Festival of the Wheat Harvest* (Two loaves were offered from the new crop). It was also called *The Day of First Fruit*. From this day until *Succoth* (the third Pilgrim Festival) the first fruits of the field (wheat, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, etc.) were brought by the Jewish farmers to the Temple as a token of gratitude to the Lord for His bounty (see Deuteronomy 26:5).

In Exile, Shavuoth lost its biblical character (which was agricultural and sacerdotal). It has become the *Feast of the Giving of Our Law*, as according to tradition, on this day occurred the Revelation on Mount Sinai, when the Torah was entrusted to the People of Israel (see Exodus 19:1).

(Significant about the special synagogue service is the reading of the book of Ruth, the Moabite woman of whom sprang the royal family of David — and the Messiah).

III. SUCCOTH (Tabernacles) (Leviticus 23:34-43; Deuteronomy 16:13-16)

This commences on the fifteenth of *Tishri*, the seventh month of the year, and ends on the twenty-third of that month. It is also called *The Festival of the Ingathering* (see Exodus 34:22).

The special feature of this Festival is that meals are eaten in specially built booths (the very pious even sleep in them). Another important feature is the observance of the “four species,” in accordance with Leviticus 23:40; **“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.”**

The seventh day of Succoth is called *Hoshana Rabba*, and the eighth day is *Shemini Atzereth* (Leviticus 23:36). The ninth day is *Simchath Torah* (“Rejoicing of the Law”). In Palestine, this holyday is celebrated on the eighth day together with *Shemini Atzereth*. This festival has no basis in the Bible. On this day the annual reading of the Torah * is completed and recommenced for the coming year.

*** The Torah (Pentateuch) is being read in the synagogue on Sabbaths in about fifty weekly portions until it is all read over the period of the year.**

This is a very joyful day. In the synagogue during service all the sacred scrolls are taken out of the Holy Ark, and carried by young and old in procession. Children also partake in the reading of the Torah.

(Women may be present in a secluded part of the synagogue during the services — but they never participate).

THE FEARFUL DAYS

I. ROSH HASHANAH (*New Year*). This holyday falls on the first and second day of the seventh month — *Tishri*. Among the order of the sacrifices for each holyday enumerated in Numbers 28 and 29, there are also special sacrifices to be offered on the first day of the seventh month, which more than other New Moons was to be kept holy (see Numbers 29:1-6). (The number “7” had some symbolic significance in the Bible [in Hebrew lore], thus also the 7th day of the week, the 7th year, etc. had special significance).

This seventh New Moon was, somehow, in Exile, converted into the *New Year* and the *Yom Haddin* — “The Day of Judgment,” when God sits in judgment of each and every creature and decides the fate of each in the following year. But the sealing of the judgment is done on the tenth day of Tishri — the Day of Atonement. In the intervening time man can still repent and repair any wrong he had committed during the past year. The two days of “New Year” and the Day of Atonement are called “The Fearful Days,” and together with the seven intervening days, are called “The Ten Days of Repentance,” when by prayer, alms-giving and fasting one may avert the execution of the deserved penalties.

Thus before Rosh Hashanah is over Jews greet each other with the earnest wish, “May you be inscribed to a good year.”

Between Rosh Hashanah and Day of Atonement the greeting is, “May you be sealed to a good year.” “Inscribed,” of course, refers into the “Book of Life.”

There is not much festivity at home on Rosh Hashanah. On the other hand, the services at the synagogue are very elaborate, including many prayers for forgiveness and the blowing of the SHOFAR (horn) (see Numbers 29:1 and Leviticus 23:24). Another solemn feature is the reading of the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, as a reminder to God to remember the covenant and forgive for Isaac’s sake.

II. YOM KIPPUR (Day of Atonement) — (See Leviticus 16:30 and Numbers 29:7)

This is the most solemn day in the Jewish year. It is a total fast day which begins with the preceding evening. Not even a drop of water may be taken into the mouth. All the day as well as a great part of the previous night is spent in the synagogue. Solemn and touching is the commencing service (called *Kol Nidre*) on the eve of Yom Kippur and the concluding service (called *Neilah*).

On the day before Yom Kippur the rite of *Kapparah* is performed.

Since the person who sins deserves to die and since there is no man without sin, and since the ordained sacrifices have ceased, the people take a substitute which is to die as a ransom. Usually the male takes a cock, and the female, a hen, and by reciting certain prayers and circling the fowl around the penitent’s head, it takes over the sins and accordingly is to die instead of the human. This “sacrifice” is then ritually slaughtered and consumed or given to the poor and needy. This rite is now seldom practiced. Only the extremely pious still cling to it.

This rite as well as the other rituals, prayer, fasting and charity does not allay the sense of guilt, does not dispel the fear of just retribution; somehow they fear that all these are not enough for atonement. It is no wonder that they call these days “Fearful.”

Is it not our duty to tell them of the Lamb of God, of the great Sacrifice made for the Atonement of all that believe on Him?

THE MINOR FESTIVALS

I. CHANUCAH (Dedication)—This festival is celebrated for eight days beginning from the 25th of Kislev (the ninth month). It commemorates the re-dedication of the Temple by the Maccabees. The events that led to this festival are recorded in the Apocryphal Book of “Maccabees.”

In short: the “Greeks” (here, actually the Syrians) intended to subdue the small state of Judea and force the Jews to abandon Judaism and instead to adopt the worship of Greek gods. While all the nations around (in the near East) yielded to this superior power, the Jews, faithful to Jehovah (God) revolted, defeated the mighty armies of the idolatrous enemy (in 165 B.C) and rededicated the Temple which had then been defiled and desecrated by the “Hellenists.”

The Kindling of the Chanucah Lights commemorates the miracle which took place at the rededication. The Talmud tells that when the victorious Maccabees were seeking the sacred oil to rekindle the “Menorah” (the continual lamp — see Exodus 27:20), they found only one cruse of oil, whose seal of the High Priest was unbroken, and was thus undefiled. This sacred oil was sufficient only for one day; yet, miraculously it lasted for eight days.

There is no special sanctity to this holiday except that certain prayers are added to the daily prayers and that in the evening the Chanucah candles are solemnly lit, accompanied with benedictions and recitations. It is considered more of a children’s holiday, as they have usually been free from school and received gifts from the adults. There is no limitation on work.

John, the Evangelist, tells of Jesus being at the Temple on Chanucah, when the people who were, at that time, expecting the Messiah, asked Him if He was the Messiah (John 10:22-39).

It is quite possible that the early Christians celebrated this Feast of Lights (as Chanucah is often called) and in course of time, after the marvelous widespread ‘influx of Gentiles into the Christian faith, it evolved into a new holyday — what we now call Christmas.

(Let us pray for the time when both Jew and Gentile will together celebrate the *Feast of the Light of the World*).

II. PURIM (Lots), falls on the 14th and 15th of Adar, the 12th month. In English it is called the *Feast of Esther*, as its origin is in the book of Esther. The Jews call it “Lots” (see Esther 9:26-32).

It is celebrated in commemoration of the deliverance of the Jewish people in Persia about 23 centuries ago. Like Chanucah, work may be done on the two days of Purim. The services in the synagogue are distinguished by the reading of the *Book of Esther*, and at home by festive meals.

This is a merry holiday when Jews are allowed to get drunk, to masquerade and even to ridicule the Rabbis, and to distort and recite certain prayers to make them sound ridiculous, and thus arouse laughter.

The children are given license to raise as much noise as they wish. In the synagogue whenever the name Haman is read during the reading of the *Megillah* (“Scroll”: Book of Esther), the children make noise by specially fabricated noisemakers, whistles, fire crackers, etc.

Haman (as you may know) was the first modern anti-Semite who about 23 centuries ago declared that the Jews ought to be exterminated because they are different from all other nations.

“And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king’s laws; therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them” (Esther 3:8).

Haman and many others after him, have endeavored to destroy the Jewish people, but they survived, because **“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper”** (Isaiah 54:17), because they are indestructible — an everlasting nation.

The most welcome part of this holiday is, of course, the sending of gifts to friends and to the poor.

There are two remarkable things about this Festival:

1. The book of Esther (upon which the festival is based) is the only book in the Bible wherein not even once is mentioned the name of God in any form, although the hand of God is felt on every page of it.
2. The Talmud says that all the festivals will be abolished when Messiah comes, only this one, PURIM, will remain.

This is the only festival mentioned in the Bible which God did not command. In Esther 9:20-28 it states that Mordecai wrote to the Jews to observe this festival, and that the Jews took it upon themselves and upon their children to observe it forever. Also, Esther wrote an edict to all the Jews — to the same effect.

On whose authority? Has God approved of it? (There is some mystery in this — and someday we may be privileged to know it).

III. ROSH CHODESH (literally: The Head of the Month)

In pre-exile time the first day of each month was solemnly celebrated and additional sacrifices were offered (see Numbers 28:11-31). From II Kings 4:23, we understand that it was an established festival. And Amos 8:5 seems to indicate that no work was allowed on Rosh Chodesh.

In course of time it lost its importance. Now it is almost forgotten except that additional prayers are recited on this day.

IV. LAG BAOMER

The 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer (see Pesach) is a half-holiday. The origin of this holiday is obscure. Formerly it was ascribed to a plague which occurred in Judea (about 70 A.D.) during the days of the SEPHIRA (see Pesach), but on this day the plague stopped. Now it is ascribed to the revolt of the false Messiah Bar Kochba which terminated with a horrible massacre and the final cessation of Jewish life in Judea. (In that case, why celebrate?)

There is no special service on this day. Children are free from school, and they play as “soldiers.” In the land of Israel bonfires are made at night, the youngsters dancing and singing around them. Many of the pious visit the sepulchre of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, at Meron near Saffad (in Upper Galilee).

This Rabbi was (according to popular tradition) a great Kabbalist and miracle man, and even the mere visit to his grave may bring the fulfillment of wishes, according to popular belief. Here great illuminations are made accompanied with prayer and chants. Many people from far and wide also visit the sepulchre of Rabbi Akiba at Tiberias, who was one of the most revered Rabbis (he may have known Jesus, but later was the sponsor of Bar Kochba).

V. Tu B'SHVATH (or Chamishah-Assar Beshvat)

The fifteenth day of the SHVAT (the eleventh month), is also called “The New Year of Trees.” In pre-exile times this day was considered as the agricultural New Year in regard to tithes and the like. In Exile the day was celebrated by eating various fruits, preferably such as grow in Palestine (figs, dates, almonds, etc).

In the land of Israel, now, TU B'SHVAT is celebrated by planting of new trees, in towns and villages or new forests, recalling the words of the Bible: “**When you come into the land you shall plant all kinds of trees . . .**” (Leviticus 19:23).

The 15th of Av was a holiday in the times of the Second Temple. It is not now observed.

FAST DAYS

Besides Yom Kippur which is the only fast commanded by God⁶, there are five other fast-days:

I. TISHAH B'AV (the ninth day of Av —the fifth month). This is a very strict fast and like the fast of “Yom Kippur” it begins with the previous evening. It is a day of deep mourning as on this day the First Temple as well as the second one was destroyed. The Book of Lamentation is recited at the synagogue which is but dimly lighted while the worshipers sit or squat on the floor, a token of mourning. A book called Kinnoth, a collection of Laments and Wailings is chanted, with sighing and weeping and groaning.

* **The Hebrew words for “ye shall afflict your souls” (see Leviticus 16:31; 23:23; Numbers 29:7) is generally understood to mean “to fast.”**

II. SHIVAH ASSAR B'TAMMUZ (the 17th day of Tammuz — the fourth month), commemorating the capture of Jerusalem and siege of the Second Temple by the Romans. The “Three Weeks” intervening between this fast and “Tishah B'av,” are weeks of mourning. No wedding or any other joyous occasion is allowed.

III. ZOM G'DALYAH (The Fast of G'dalyah) commemorates the murder of the governor of the Jews who was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (see II Kings 25:25). The fast falls on the day next to Rosh Hashanah (the 3rd of Tishri).

IV. ASSARAH B'TEVETH (“Tenth of Teveth” — Tenth Month).

On this day began the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Now in Israel this fast is observed also as a Memorial Day for the six million Jews who were massacred by the Nazis in the second World War (1939-1945).

V. TAANITH ESTHER (“Fast of Esther”) falls on the day before the day of PURIM. It commemorates the fasting of Esther and the praying of the people that God might frustrate Haman's design to exterminate the Jewish people (see “Purim”). (Also, see Esther 4:16).

There was a sixth fast, but this is to be kept only by first-born males. It falls on the day preceding Passover, in memory of the death of the first-born of Egypt, before the exodus, while the Jewish first-born were spared.

Pious Jews observed various other fasts, either self-inflicted as penitence, or fixed ones on various occasions, which the people as a whole are not enjoined to keep.

On all the fast days there are certain variations of the daily prayers. With the exception of TISHAH B'AV, all the minor fasts begin at daybreak and last until nightfall. (Tishah B'av, like Yom Kippur, begins with the previous evening).

When a fast day falls on a Sabbath it is transferred to a weekday.

Isaiah, who in the first chapter tells of the New Moon and the Sabbath, as well as the other holydays, and the sacrifices and that they have become an abomination unto God, concludes his last chapter with the reassuring, reconciling words:

“And it shall come to pass, that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 66:23).

~ end of chapter 7 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
