

Introduction to the Three Volumes

One of the most controversial issues in the history of Christianity has been the debate over the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh. The contention is not only with regard to which, if any, of these appointed times should be observed but when and how. It is to the resolution of this debate that our three volume study is dedicated. To begin this endeavor, we shall first lay out the issues to be addressed and present a general outline for our research. This effort will serve as a generalized road map highlighting the path upon which our study intends to travel. Then, in our first chapter, we shall provide some initial definitions and explanations for a few of the basic terms that will be used throughout. These definitions and explanations will assist the reader by providing him with the purpose for their use and by adding clarity to our analysis.

The Debate

It is a historical fact that, while under the Torah (Law) of Moses, the Israelites were required to keep a number of festivals and sacred days dedicated to Yahweh. These special occasions included the holding of sacred convocations and the observances of certain days when one's own work was to cease. The Torah of Moses also required the performance of a number of prescribed sacrifices, offerings, and an assortment of temple services. The debate among Christians arose from the fact that, according to the New Testament, those following the messiah are no longer under the Mosaic Torah but under grace.¹

It is the precise meaning of the charge that we are no longer obligated to be under the Torah of Moses that has been at the heart of the dispute. Does this mean that any commandment, statute, or law designated in the Torah of Moses is now null and void? Are we now free to commit acts for which those under the Torah of Moses would have received the death penalty, severe punishment, or excommunication? Or does the expression "not under the Torah" simply mean that we are no longer under obligation to perform the fleshly works of the Torah? If that be the case, are we still subject to its various commandments and statutes which are not fleshly works? Would these remaining statutes even include, among other things, a requirement to observe the festivals and sacred days dedicated to Yahweh? Or does our answer still lie beyond any of these solutions?

The subject is further complicated by another factor. Even if one were able to prove that those under grace are still required to observe the festivals and

¹ Rom., 6:14, 15; Gal., 5:18; cf., Gal., 4:4f.

sacred days dedicated to Yahweh, he is still faced with the difficult problem of determining which practices are correct. Indeed, the controversy is an ancient one and has continued to our present time. Disagreements over exactly when and how such days ought to be observed, for example, were already raging among various Jewish factions as early as the second century B.C.E.²

The importance of Yahweh's festivals and sacred days for Christians cannot be overstated. The issues surrounding their observance proceed from the very heart and core of Christian doctrine and tend to strenuously test anyone's ability to understand Scriptures. Indeed, the debate over these festivals and sacred days was a major source of conflict among the early Christians. For example, history informs us that—contrary to present-day popular belief—the first Christian assemblies actually observed the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh, including Passover, Pentecost, and the weekly Sabbath day. Nevertheless, by the first half of the second century C.E.,³ these practices became the source of many disputes and resulted in the first schism in orthodox Christianity.

The debate among various early Christian assemblies over which days they should observe and over exactly how and when these festivals should be kept was ongoing for centuries. Indeed, many of the issues faced by Christians during the second and subsequent centuries remain with us to this day. One of the objects of this investigation, therefore, is to get to the bottom of what has caused so much disagreement and confusion.

Format for the Three Volumes

This research has been organized into three volumes, each subdivided into parts representing a different field of inquiry:

VOLUME I

After providing our introduction to the three volumes and some preliminary definitions, Volume I serves two basic functions: (1) to answer the question of whether or not the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh are required for Christians under grace and (2) to examine the background and controversy surrounding the various practices of Passover (Phasekh) and Pentecost (Shabuath).

Part I

Required Under Grace?

Part I of Volume I shall demonstrate whether or not there is any scriptural requirement for Christians under grace to observe the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh. To accomplish this task, we will explore the conditional

² In our study the abbreviations C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (Before Common Era), the scholarly, religiously neutral designations, will be utilized rather than the corresponding A.D. (*anno Domini*; Year of the Lord) and B.C. (Before Christ).

³ Ibid.

covenants of inheritance granted by Yahu Yahweh⁴ to Abraham and his seed (the messiah).⁵ It is by this inheritance that the promise of eternal life is provided to all of those who qualify. This investigation will necessitate a close examination of the mechanism by which one receives eternal life. It shall also be shown how this inheritance of eternal life is connected with the Torah of Moses and with the giving of grace.

Further, in order to deal with the issues involved with the conditions of this inheritance—whether under grace, which is the Torah of Trust (Faith),⁶ or under the Torah of Moses—our search demands that we understand what sin is and how sin prevents us from receiving the eternal inheritance. It is also important to fully realize the purpose of the Torah of Moses, why it came into existence, why it still exists, and why it will continue to exist until heaven and earth pass away, this despite the fact that Christians are not under all the conditions of that contract.

The results of this investigation shall demonstrate that the obligation for keeping the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh is still with us. It emanates from those statutes contained in the Abrahamic Covenants of Promise (the Torah of Trust), not from the Torah of Moses. The evidence shall also prove that this requirement will continue until the end of our present world-age—that is, until our present heaven and earth pass away.

Part II

Phasekh and Shabuath: Background and Controversy

Part II of the first volume provides the historical and cultural background for the two most controversial festivals of Yahweh—Passover and Pentecost. Various ancient constructs and systems for the observance of these festivals shall be examined, both Jewish and Christian. In this discussion, the historical development and origins of today's popular Jewish and Christian interpretations shall be brought to light. The results will set the stage for our in-depth examination of the evidence from Scriptures to uncover the correct Passover and Pentecost system proclaimed by Yahweh.

⁴ That the name Yahu (MT “Yah”) is a praenomen is demonstrated by its use as “Yahu Yahweh” (MT “Yah Yahweh”) in the Heb. of Isa., 12:2, 26:4; and Ps., 130:3, cf., MCM, 1, p. 25, 4, pp. 28f. Evidence proves that the deity's praenomen—not only as a theophoric element in personal names but more importantly when used as a direct reference to the deity—was from its very beginning rendered Yahu. Its earliest appearance in archaeological records as a direct reference to the deity, which dates from the mid-eighth century B.C.E., for example, finds that the Judahite spelling of the name was יָהּ (Y-ah-u) (KA, Inscr. C, 1; SEL, 1, pp. 125f), pronounced “Yah-ū.” Meanwhile, under Aramaic influence, this name was spelled י (Y-u) by those in the kingdom of Israel (Meg. I, pl. 115), pronounced “Yāū.” The form Yahu continued among various Jewish and Christian groups as late as the sixth century C.E. The late text of the MT, meanwhile, suffered from a developing Jewish prejudice, which would not allow them to utter any more than two letters of the sacred name (e.g., Mid. Teh., Ps. 113:3). As a result, יָהּ was shortened to י and subsequently pronounced “Yah.” For a list of references where the name Yahu (MT “Yah”) is used in our present text of Scriptures see YAC, p. 619, s.v. LORD, #7. *Jah*. For a full discussion of the evidence regarding the name Yahu, as well as how, due to religious superstition, it later came to be shortened to Yah when used in the MT and other texts, see TNY.

⁵ Gal., 3:15f.

⁶ Rom., 3:27.

VOLUME II

The second volume shall provide the final proof of which Passover and Pentecost system is sponsored by Scriptures. It will examine three issues: (1) the authority advanced by different early Christian assemblies to support their views on Passover; (2) an investigation into scripturally-based definitions that explain for us the original intent behind how and when to observe Passover and Pentecost; and (3) the Phasekh practice of Yahushua the messiah.

Part I

The Authority for the Christian Transformation

Part I of Volume II shall examine the different authorities claimed by various early Christian assemblies to support their respective practices of Passover. Those who observed Passover only on the 14th day of the first month, for example, claimed the apostles John and Philip were their authoritative guides. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, argued that Peter and Paul had taught them to keep Passover only on the first day of the week during the seven days of unleavened bread.

The Christians at Rome also made the claim that Peter was their founding bishop. They considered Peter to be the chief apostle, noting that he possessed the keys to the kingdom of heaven and was vested with the power to bind and loosen things on earth and in heaven. This power to bind and loosen was then interpreted to mean that Peter had the right to change the traditions and practices of the Assembly. Because Peter was martyred in Rome, the Roman assembly also contended that Peter had thereby honored them with a leadership role among all Christian assemblies. Accordingly, Peter's power to establish the traditions of the Assembly fell to the Roman line of bishops. These and other assertions shall be scrutinized for their validity.

As part of this discussion, we shall also address the real motive used by many of the early Christian leaders as their authority for transforming the Christian festivals and sacred days. Years of persecution by Jewish leaders resulted in a deep-seated hatred of the Jews among many early Christian groups. In fact, Christians even detected the instigating hand of mean-spirited Jews behind the later persecutions sponsored by the Roman government and various pagan religious leaders. They argued that the motive of these plotting Jews was jealousy and a desire to destroy Christianity.

The built-up resentment against the Jews became so overwhelming that many Christians began associating all Jewish practices as contemptible, even if those things were sanctioned by Scriptures. The primitive practices of the Christian Assembly with regard to the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh, meanwhile, were in many ways very similar to their Jewish counterparts. In response, the argument was advanced that these earlier Christian practices should be avoided on the grounds that they were considered acts of Judaizing. Christians, they proclaimed, should seek new, different, and unique Christian expressions of these traditions.

Part II

Scriptural Definitions

Part II of this second volume will utilize scripturally-based definitions to demonstrate the correct system for observing Yahweh's Passover and Pentecost. We shall explore scriptural definitions for such terms as *arab* and *byn ha-arabim*, which are required in order to understand when to begin the day of Passover. Other important phrases, such as "the day after the Sabbath," which is used to calculate Pentecost, will also be examined. All of the relevant Exodus and post-Exodus passages from Scriptures concerning the Passover shall be explored to their fullest extent. These will, in turn, be compared against both the scripturally-based definitions and the interpretations offered by various Jewish and Christian perspectives. This process will weed out the misinterpretations and guide us toward the correct practices.

Part III

Messiah's Phasekh

For Christians, the Passover system used by the messiah remains a matter of substantial importance, for it is the ultimate proof of which system is the correct and original practice. Accordingly, Part III of Volume II shall investigate the New Testament account of the messiah's most famous Passover meal, the Last Supper. The events leading up to and away from this famous meal will be scrutinized to see whether or not it reflects a Passover system not recognized by the official practice of the Jewish state. Such questions as, "Was the Last Supper a Passover meal?" "On what day of the week and month did the messiah eat his Last Supper?" and, "Exactly how many days did the messiah rest in the grave?" shall also be addressed.

VOLUME III

Volume III shall investigate the remaining festival, sacred days, and calendar issues of Yahweh. The discussion will include an examination of the weekly Sabbath day and the festival and sacred days of the seventh scriptural month. It will also study the debate surrounding how, according to Yahweh's calendar, one should determine both the day of a new moon and the first day of the new year (i.e., a scriptural month and year). To accomplish this task, this investigation will be divided into two major parts:

Part I

The Sabbath, Seventh Month, and Prophetic Meanings

In these chapters, the requirement for Christians to observe the weekly Sabbath day and the sacred days of the seventh scriptural month are examined. This study will include the evidence that all of the first century C.E. Christian assemblies, including the Romans, observed the weekly Sabbath day and the sacred days of the seventh month. Only during the first half of the second century C.E. did the Roman and Alexandrian Christians begin to pull away from these important days. Nevertheless, most other Christian groups continued to practice the weekly Sabbath for a number of centuries. Many

also continued the observance of the festival and sacred days of the seventh month. Eventually, under Roman leadership, almost all of the assemblies abandoned this observance.

In Part I we shall also investigate the prophetic meanings behind the celebration of all of the festivals and sacred days of Yahweh. These days were set aside in order that we might learn about Yahweh's program for salvation. When appropriately practiced, they reflect our trust in Yahweh and his plan. It is precisely for these and other important reasons that Yahweh has required those in his Assembly to observe his festivals and sacred days.

Part II

The New Moon and the New Year

In the second part of this volume, we shall examine the important issues involving when the assembly is to begin a scriptural month and year. As part of this in-depth study, the historical and political background behind the different Jewish, Samaritan, and Christian systems will be explored. The evidence will reveal that during the first century C.E. the Pharisees developed a complex set of interpretations for determining months and years. As Pharisaic power grew, the older more conservative Jewish systems were suppressed and, in time, forgotten. We shall discover that the early Christians did in fact keep alive correct forms of the more ancient biblical understandings. This investigation will conclude with scriptural definitions that shall demonstrate just how one is to determine a new moon, both as the first day of a month and as the first day of the year, as well as provide the guidelines for when intercalation is required.