

AWAY WITH YOUR FEASTS

The feasts of the Levitical system of the Old Testament have always been held by Hebrews since Sinai. The early Christians refrained from the celebrating of feasts with the exception of a small segment of Judean Christians such as the Ebionites who maintained many of the Judean traditions. As Christians, we should understand that the feasts and sacrifices were attached to those laws that were “nailed to the cross” and thus, we should not observe them.

The first talk of the abolishment of the feast days did not originate in the Christian Church. Their abolishment was continuously prophesied in the Old Testament by the prophets and was fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus, closing the era of the old covenant and the bringing in of the new covenant. ***"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."*** Jeremiah 31:31 to 33; ***"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come saith the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."*** Hebrews 8:6 to 8, 13. Some may say "But these verses are speaking about the Jewish people." Yes, Jeremiah was, but the Christian writing of Hebrews brings this writing into a wider scope to include the Gentiles. The old testament prophesied that God's people would include the Gentiles. ***"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."*** Isaiah 11:10; ***"... I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."*** Isaiah 49:6b; ***"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles ... I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles."*** Isaiah 42:1, 6. Let us read what John said in Matthew 3:9. ***"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."*** And at a later time Paul writes accordingly in Galatians 3:29. ***"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*** Remember that Abraham pleased God because of his faith and trust in God; it was not because of the blood running in his veins that God loved Abraham. We, too, if we live by faith, are considered “Abraham's seed”. So we see that if we follow the words as taught by Jesus, we are following God's Word, manifested in the Christ. And if we be in

Christ, we are not under the old covenant with all its sacrifices and ceremonialism, but under the new covenant which is to live spiritually, by faith.

That old covenant with its curses, deaths, rites, sacrifices, high sabbaths and feasts were to be done away with. Samuel, the prophet of God had this to say to Saul in I Samuel 15:22: **"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."** And Micah the prophet wrote in Micah 6:6 to 8: **"Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"** Jeremiah the prophet wrote concerning the same matter, in Jeremiah 7:21 to 23: **"Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh: For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you."** The prophets Jeremiah and Micah and the prophet, priest and judge, Samuel, all spoke in the same voice that the offerings and sacrifices and the sweet aromas to God were in reality nothing; on the other hand, being obedient, just and merciful are what is desired from mankind and these three old testament prophets who listened to the Spirit knew of those things that were of God's Will. Isaiah the prophet also knew within his heart that God had no need for ceremonialism. Isaiah wrote of God's Spirit saying to him in chapter 1:11 to 14: **"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, [called for these rites of sacrificial offerings] I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them."** God made it quite clear when speaking to Jeremiah and Isaiah by the Spirit that all these ceremonial sacrifices were done for the enjoyment of their own vainglory. Jeremiah even explicitly stated that God did not ask for nor commanded Moses to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Mankind loves social gatherings and love to display elaborate rites with multitudes assembled together for the purpose of, what they claim, are sacred dedications of solemn sacrificial worship to God. During these rites, animals which God created and put under the husbandry of mankind, were indiscriminately slaughtered and sadly not even required by God. When necessary, God did give permission that certain animals may be taken for food to satisfy their hunger. But to kill thousands of animals for the vain delight of man's love of performances of ceremony is not pleasing to God. The soul of man had

chosen his own ways to worship God in those days before the Christ, which included killing animals, giving blood offerings and incense burning. None of these things God desires, although many men have preached that God desired the people to offer them, but when God spoke through His prophets, He said otherwise, as we had read previously. ***"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" - "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD?" - "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams or with thousands of rivers of oil?" - "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices."***

So where did these sacrifices come from and by who's command? The scriptures tell us that God gave us the "Ten Words" (declogue) and he added no more. ***"These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me."*** Deuteronomy 5:22. It was Moses who gave us the offerings, sacrifices and the feasts. Moses believed it was part of a good system to make the people to be obedient in observing God's law, though, as we know from Jesus, the apostles and prophets, it was not. Moses organized the priesthood and the Levitical system with all its blessings, curses, deaths, offerings, sacrifices and feasts and all these things were written in the "book of the law". ***"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished. That Moses commanded the Levites, which bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee."*** Deuteronomy 31:24 to 26.

Certain Christian denominations say the feast days were not abolished, but only the sacrifices of animal offerings. We know this argument to be unfounded, because have we not just read that God has no need of the incense, wine and the food? But just to refresh ourselves, let us turn to a couple of texts that speak about God's attitude towards the feast days: ***"Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them."*** Isaiah 1:14; ***"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell *in your solemn assembles. [* your holy days]"*** Amos 5:21. In addition to the seventh-day Sabbath, which was the only Sabbath instituted by God, the Hebrews had attached sabbaths (or days of rest) to all their feast days. Just as ceremonial sacrifices were offered at every assembled feast, sacrifices were even offered on God's seventh-day sabbath, which is why God, through His prophets, was continuously pointing out to the Jews of their pollution of His sacred Sabbath day. From the verses provided, we see that the abolishment of the feast days with their bloody sacrifices was prophesied numerous times by old testament prophets. As clearly stated by the prophets as well, God wanted an obedient, loving, and caring people and this was not demonstrated in the following of the "book of the law". Remember that God said He hated and despised the appointed feast days; they mean nothing to him, yet the feast days delighted the souls of those men observing them.

Turning to the New Testament, we know from the scriptures that the new covenant was not to come into affect until the Lamb of God had fulfilled all, even the conquest of death which was accomplished by Jesus' resurrection by God. The offerings and sacrifices of the feasts were held at the temple and all Jews that could afford to was expected to go; it was their sacred duty for them to participate, and those within a 20 mile radius of Jerusalem were expected to attend. When Jesus forecasted the destruction of the temple, he was foretelling the complete cessation of temple services. ***"And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*** Mark 13:1, 2; ***"And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*** Luke 21:5, 6. See also Matthew 24:1, 2. Bear in mind that during this era, the feasts were held at Jerusalem.

An important event that happened at the time of Jesus giving up the Spirit was the tearing by force of the temple veil. It signified the beginning of the end of the old covenant of Moses. The Aaronic and Levitical system took away the personal approach of the individual speaking personally to God for the forgiveness of their sins; the high priest acted as mediator on behalf of the people when he entered into the holy of holies, first for himself and his family's sins, and then for the people's sins. The renting of the veil and the crucifixion of God's Christ had a significant impact in that the people could now pray directly to God for the forgiveness of their sins in the name of Jesus. He was their one-time sacrifice to God, and had willingly giving himself as a sacrifice, of which his death was the beginning of the bringing in of the new covenant. The veil that blocked off the way to the Most Holy was opened, allowing all to come unto God on their own. ***"Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent."*** Matthew 27:50, 51. See also Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45. ***"And he will destroy [swallow up] in this mountain the face of the covering cast [covered] over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations."*** Isaiah 25:7; ***"And not as Moses which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds were blinded, for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart."*** II Corinthians 3:13 to 15. Even though this veil was lifted and done away with by Christ's death, many Christians have put the veil over themselves again, and by doing so, have made the suffering of our Christ for nothing by returning to that which had been abolished through him. The temple was made by the hands of man, and all its ceremonial feasts and sacrifices are all from that first ministration written in the "book of the law". But we are the recipients of a much better ministration. ***"For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many ..."*** Matthew 26:28a; see also Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20. ***"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant [testament], which was established upon***

better promises." Hebrews 8:6. There is no doubt that there was a new covenant that was to come in effect at Jesus' crucifixion. He, Jesus, drank to it with his disciples at his last supper, knowing that the new covenant would be ushered in when his ministry was fulfilled even up until the time of his ascension by the power of God.

The gift of eternal life could not come through those laws of Moses' which contained blessings, curses and punishments unto death. Forcing people to be obedient through fear of punishment and death is not a law of love as it makes individuals behave in such a way that is not by their own free choice. The ordinances and ceremonies in the law of Moses did nothing for one's salvation. This is what Jesus had to say on the same matter. ***"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven: but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst ... the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life.***" John 6:32 to 35, 63b; ***"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.***" John 6:68; ***"For the law was given by Moses [the book of the law], but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*** John 1:17. Paul also wrote about the handwritings of ordinances that were contained in Moses' book of the law that contained the curses and death that were against us. Let us not forget that the feasts with their sacrifices were written in the book of the law as well: ***"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of they way, nailing it to the cross.***" Colossians 2:14; ***"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch of Pisidia and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down ... Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience ... And by him [Jesus] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.***" Acts 13:14, 16, 39; ***"And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.***" Acts 21:21. All those things from the old covenant of that first ministration were done away.

A man of the early church that we seldom hear about in exhortations is Stephen whose works are described in the book of Acts. There arose certain men of the synagogue who wanted Stephen dead because he spoke against the Jewish traditions, since Stephen knew they were done away with in Christ. ***"Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen ... Then they suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the***

customs [rites] which Moses delivered us." Acts 6:9, 11 to 14. Those Christians of today who have been led astray in keeping the Mosaic feast days have been told that those who witnessed against Stephen made up the stories of his speaking against the temple rites instituted by Moses in the law and of them being abolished. These previous verses say no such things. By Jewish law, a witness had to be a seeing or hearing witness. These men were not! They were suborned, or in other words they were bribed to commit perjury by being instructed by those people of the synagogue. So they set up false witnesses who had NOT personally witnessed Stephen's sayings. Why was there a need for suborned witnesses? We can only surmise that there was a great fear for people who did hear Stephen to witness against someone of Stephen's stature. Nevertheless, we do know that Jesus did preach the destruction of the temple and its rites, and Stephen, being a follower of Christ taught the same. Let's now continue on as Stephen stood before the council: **"Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"** Acts 7:1. We notice that Stephen does not deny the charge, but begins to tell them the history of the Jewish fathers and of their people, beginning at verse 2. Later in Acts 7, Stephen states: **"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear ... Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven: as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? ... unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as saith the prophet. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my foot stool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord; what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hands made all these things? Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murders."** Acts 7:37, 42, 45b to 52. The way that Stephen answered the question of the destruction of the temple and the end of the temple rites, many may not understand. In verses 42 and 43, the tabernacle had become that of the heathen god Moloch with its blood and flesh offerings. God had no need or want of offerings, so these laws of Moses were to be abolished as taught by the prophets. Every feast was sanctified by the blood of beasts. Stephen quoted from the Old Testament that God does not need a temple to dwell in; the universe is His dwelling: **"Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. ... He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man, he that sacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dog's neck, he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations."** Isaiah 66:1, 3. Stephen did not deny he had spoken words against the temple and its Moloch- type customs and of their uselessness, thereby, committing himself to death by stoning as required by the "book of the law". Let us not deceive ourselves as so many do; Jesus taught the ending of the temple and its services, so did Stephen, for which he paid the ultimate price.

In closing, let us always be guided by the Spirit of truth, and not fall back into that yoke of bondage that God's Christ, Jesus, freed us from but rather let us cherish that liberty that he brought us into. We no longer need to hold onto those ordinances that were nailed to the cross, which included sacrifices as well as feast days. God wants us to demonstrate our love freely, from our hearts, not through customs and rites that are nothing to God and do not demonstrate what we feel inwardly.

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