

# Christian Holidays #1

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Are you ready for a quiz? Grab a pencil and pad and write down the names of the two most important Christian holidays. It should only take you a few seconds. No consulting your calendar allowed, just write down two words. Got it? And the days are Christmas and Easter. Now I bet you got it right.

## **Not in the Bible**

But Let me tell you something curious about this, neither one of these days is found either mentioned or observed anywhere in the Bible. You would think that if they had the importance in the early church that they have today in Christianity at large, you would think that somebody somewhere would have mentioned one of them. You would think that Luke, for example, recording in the book of acts, quote "We stayed overnight at Troas through Christmas and then we sailed across to Philippi" or maybe he would say quote "We hastened in order to be at Jerusalem by Easter". But no, nothing like that is found in the Bible at all.

## **Holidays in the Bible**

Now there are holidays mentioned in the Bible and they are quite prominent in both Testaments. For example in Acts 20:6 Luke records: "We sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them in Troas in five days; where we abode seven days." This is just a little passage commenting about where they were going and when they were going there. But all of a sudden in the middle of this comes the Days of Unleavened Bread. What in the world is that? Well, it is part of the Passover festival. Simple. Something that many people look upon as Jewish, but here they are still taking notice of these days.

In Acts 20:16 Luke records this: "For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he was in a hurry, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost."

## **Are the Holidays of the Bible Jewish?**

Now a days these holidays are usually dismissed as Jewish, but is that the way we ought to look at them? What if I told you that the holidays of the Bible, while they have a Jewish historical significance, are actually Christian in there meaning and application. Would that change the way you look at them? For in fact I am going to demonstrate that the early

Christian Church observed those very holidays that most modern Christian churches dismiss as being merely Jewish.

The issue has been complicated by Christians who are really too anxious to dispense with the Old Testament law and they take a cheap angle at getting rid of them. They argue that the Law was nailed to the cross or they were fulfilled in Christ, and a host of other arguments, all designed to get the Law off of the table and out of site. They don't realize that they are creating some enormous theological problems with this, but I am going to side step all of that for the moment.

I want to address the holiday questions from an entirely different angle and one that may be totally new to you.

### **Is Christ Found in the Holidays of the Bible?**

My question is: Is Christ to be found in the holidays of the Bible? For if the holidays of the Bible are all about Christ, it casts a whole new light on all of the arguments that want to do away with them.

### **Appointed Times of JEHOVAH**

First I want to point out some things that are commonly overlooked relative to the holidays of the Bible. The first thing is, they are not merely Jewish. Consider this short passage from Leviticus 23 back in the Law. Beginning in verse one: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, {2} Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, Concerning the Feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My Feasts." Now a little bit is lost in the translation of this text, not a lot but a little. Here's a closer rendering: "And JEHOVAH spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, Concerning the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my *appointed times*". Notice the emphasis, whose are these anyway? According to the text, they belong to God. They are actually the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH.

The word here translated "feast" is the Hebrew word "moed" which means "*appointed times*". Now the question is: When did these become the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH? Was it when Moses gave them to Israel or was it before that? This is a small point, but God did not say "These shall be my *appointed times* from this day forward", He said "They are my *appointed times*." This kind of takes us back to another incidence of the use of the word and it is found in Genesis 1 verse 14 where God 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."

But if you look at this in the original, it is "Let them be for signs, and for *appointed times* and days and years." This really does suggest that there were *appointed times*,

holidays, if you will, right from the start and there is no real reason to suppose that there were not.

Keep in mind I am not trying to prove anything to you here. These are not proofs. They are pointers that direct our gaze in a direction that we may not have been looking at before now. It is like turning on a light and shining the light on things that maybe we haven't given enough attention to.

### **The Exodus Story and a Feast**

Now with this in mind, consider the occasion where all of this got started. Thanks to Charlton Heston as Moses in the classic movie "The Ten Commandments" and the newer movie the "Prince of Egypt", nearly everyone knows the overall story of the exodus.

But there are little things about this story that you may not have noticed. For example, you know that God sent Moses to Pharaoh and said "Let my people go", right? But did you know that Moses when he was sent to Pharaoh, the first thing he had to say to him was: "Let my people go that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1). He didn't ask Pharaoh to let them go forever. He didn't ask him to merely let them out of slavery. He said, "We have a feast coming up and we want to go into the wilderness to observe it". Now, I think many people think this was just a ruse on Moses part, an excuse saying "Let us go", we are pretending to go out here to keep a feast, we aren't really going to do it, but this is what I am going to ask you for so you will let us go and it didn't matter because Pharaoh hardened his heart.

But you know that it is also possible that it wasn't a ruse, that there was approaching one of God's *appointed times*, one of His festivals.

### **God is Constant**

Now keep in mind through all of this that God is constant. In Malachi 3:6 he says: "For I am the LORD, I change not; that is one of the reasons that you sons of Jacob haven't been burnt up." Then in James 1:17 it says: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." God is constant, and what this says to me is that from the very beginning, from the get go, from the start, God had things in mind that He was going to do. And these things that God had in mind are evident, all along the way. It shouldn't boggle the mind that God had his own *appointed times* right from the start.

We know that there was a well-known system of laws in effect prior to Moses. In fact, of Abraham God says in Genesis 26 verse five: "Because Abraham obeyed my voice, kept my charge, my Commandments, my statutes and my laws." Notice this isn't just saying that Abraham did good things for me, it isn't just saying that Abraham walked in my basic law.

There was a system of law involved here, including charges and commandments and statutes so that whole system was there.

### **Moses' Encounter with Pharaoh**

Now here specifically is what the Scripture says about Moses' encounter with Pharaoh. Exodus 5 and verse 1: "Afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness." This is what God says and I don't think God lies, do you? Now this could be a mere coincidence, this one is not called an appointed time, it is called a feast, a celebration, but it is pointed squarely at the Passover, which since they couldn't keep it in the wilderness like they wanted to do, they kept it right in the middle of Egypt to the eternal regret of the Egyptian people.

### **An Existing Festival**

There is reason to believe that there was already a Festival at this occasion that Israel had to observe. What I am going to suggest to you is that God always had His *appointed times* and there were occasions when God acted in history, and these often took place on these *appointed times*. As a result of God's action, the day itself took on the meaning of God's action, and thus the festival Moses said they wanted to observe in the wilderness would have been on the 14th day of the first month, but it would not have been the Passover. It took on the meaning of Passover, because on that night, God passed over the houses of Israel and took all of the firstborn of the land of Egypt. So for Israel, all these *appointed times* took on names and customs that were related to the important events in their history and they and the rest of the world forgot that there was a transcendent meaning to those days.

It's not surprising that even if there were a previously existing festival on this date, that the Passover with all of the enormous events that it had involved with it for Israel, would just simply overshadow and blow away the memory, the recollection or the importance of the previous existing holiday. But this went on through Israel's history, and as a result, all these holidays signified major events in their history. Passover pictured the exodus. Pentecost pictured the giving of the Law. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the wilderness wanderings.

### **Traditional Explanations**

Traditional explanations say that the festivals came in with the old covenant and went out with the old covenant, that they were purely Jewish and only had application to the Jewish people but what if that isn't right? What if the feasts of JEHOVAH are transcendent and from the very beginning were pointed not at Israel's history, but at the very work and Ministry of Jesus Christ? What if, like a chameleon, they take on the color and the shading of the background in which they are found? What if they took on a Jewish and historical meaning for a time, but all along were pointing toward something higher? Would that change the way you look at them?

## **The Passover**

Now it's hard to know where to start. Lets begin with the first of the holidays that fall in the year, the Passover. There is a short passage in one of Paul's letters that when you read it and understand what is going on, it should make a person stop and rethink this whole question.

This letter is written to a Gentile Church and commentators tells us that it was written during the Passover season, and that is hard to miss. Paul is dealing with a serious problem in the Church and in the process he makes a connection that we need to grasp. He says in 1 Corinthians 5:1 "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife." This was disgusting behavior on the part of this member.

Paul continues in verse 2: "You are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. {3} For I am absent in body, but I am present in spirit and have judged already, as though I were present, concerning the man that has done this deed, {4} In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit is there, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, {5} I want you to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Now I don't know what that means but I sure wouldn't want to be in that position, so whatever they were going to do, doesn't sound good at all. That is not our point in this passage.

Continuing in verse 6 "Your glorying is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" Now it's obvious from his previous expression to being puffed up, which is really an allusion to leavening in bread, puffing up the bread, and now he chooses yet another metaphor involved with leavening and leavened bread. He then says: "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened." It's a funny way of saying things. It probably made all kinds of sense to the Corinthians because they had put the leavening out of their houses and therefore they were unleavened, however they were spiritually not unleavened, because of the presence of this man in their Church. Otherwise it doesn't make any sense to say to purge out the old leaven as you are unleavened, because if they were unleavened they didn't have any, do you follow? So in purging out the old leaven, they will be spiritually unleavened as they are physically unleavened.

## **Christ Our Passover**

Then Paul makes this astonishing statement (verse 7) "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: {8} Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Not long ago, I got a letter from a lady who was taking me to task for suggesting that Christians might keep the Passover, because she thinks I was Judaizing . But perhaps she

forgot this particular passage of scripture where Jesus Christ is inexorably tied to the Passover.

Throughout most of history, Passover has been in the eyes of the world as a Jewish festival dealing with a great event in Israel's history that took place on this day.

But here is a letter to a Gentile Church identifying the Passover with the sacrifice of Christ and it doesn't just do that, Paul urges them to keep the Feast, however at a higher and different level.

Listen to what Paul says "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: {8} Therefore let us keep the feast." He is basically referring to the fact that there is a transcendent meaning of Passover that reaches far and above the meaning that all Jews had known up until this time and now it has found its fulfillment in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

There is an assumption that the 14 day of the first month in the Jewish calendar became important, because that's when Israel was delivered from Egypt. But what if Israel was delivered on this day because it was one of the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH? When it comes to the sacrifice of Christ, that day did not become a Christian festival because Christ was crucified on that day. Christ died on that day, because it was one of the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH.

### **A Thread**

There is a thread that runs all the way through the Bible and the thread is unbroken. It isn't chopped up in little itty bitty pieces of eras and time or what have you. God has had a plan from the beginning and He has been working the plan from the start.

His festivals, His *appointed times*, contain the outline of that plan. There is a thread that runs all the way through the Bible and the festivals give us the points of which we can pick up that thread. I know some of these things may seem complicated and difficult but maybe if we pick up the end of the string and follow it along things will become clearer. I think the festivals of JEHOVAH might be that string.

Paul identified Jesus with the Passover lamb, but when we follow the string back, we find it doesn't end with what we thought was the original Passover.

Along comes Paul and we pick up a string that says "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." When we follow that string back a way, it leads way beyond the original Passover. There is for example a Scripture which is familiar to every student of the New Testament. It is found in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son. You know after all these years and after so much

familiarity it is easy to kind of toss that off. God gave up His only Son but He knew that He was going to bring Him back to life again and it's no big deal.

The string from Paul's reference runs right through this passage and all the way back to an event long before Moses.

### **God Tested Abraham**

The story is told in Genesis 22. It tells us that "It came to pass that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "I am here." {2} He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you of." {3} Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place that God had told him".

You know once upon a time I heard a preacher preaching about this and he got carried away a little bit because he talked about the strong man that Abraham was and how that whenever God told him "You take your only son to a mountain that I will show you and you offer him there as a burnt offering" and that did not bother Abraham. Abraham just got up, did his duty, chopped up the wood, loaded it up and took off to the place that God had shown him to kill his son.

Now I knew better than that, but it really took the movie "The Bible" to underline it for me in a way that nobody had before, with George C. Scott's magnificent portrayal of Abraham in that movie of when he gets the message from God. You have to understand the background of this situation. Abraham was an old man and had no children at all, and in the process of time his wife Sarah comes and says "Take Hagar my maid and get her pregnant and we will have a child by her and it will be our kid." And so he does, and the child is born and his name is Ishmael and he is the father of all of the Arabic people to this day. But that didn't work. All it did was to create heartache, trouble and distress. God came along and told him, "No, Ishmael is not the one. I am going to give you a son of your own through Sarah your real wife" (Genesis 17:19). In which God finally did.

It is hard to imagine what it is like, being an old man, having sons in your old age and then seeing these children grow up before you and the love, and every part of your being finds expression in that child, and then to be told, to take him and kill him.

### **No Big Deal**

Now the question of why would God do a thing like that to Abraham is a tough question. Why in the world would God put Abraham through this particular exercise? But if you stop and think about it for a moment, knowing that people are going to say, that this was no big deal, knowing that people would think that this was no great sacrifice, or at least thinking

that people would not realize the depth of the sacrifice, that God Himself was going to make His only Son a sacrifice. He allowed Abraham the incredible honor of acting out the role of God in his life. The willingness, the required willingness of taking his own son and to give him for a sacrifice wasn't easy! The realization of the agony of Abraham was brought home painfully by George C. Scott's portrayal in that movie, as he tried to help us all to understand the feelings of the man whose faith is so strong that he will do it, but whose humanity is so strong that he would rather take his own life in the process.

Continuing in Genesis 22:4 "On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. {5} And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the animal; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." {6} So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and put it on the shoulders of Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together walking down the road. {7} Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

That must have cut the heart right out of Abraham. The realization that his son still didn't know, the realization of what he himself was going to have to do on this occasion.

### **God Will Provide a Lamb**

Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together." That little phrase "God will provide for Himself a lamb" echoes down through history to this day. You know what, I think that this day was one of the *appointed times* of JEHOVAH. This was the day, that generations later, the firstborn of all of Egypt would die, and God would pass over the house of all of the Israelites and would deliver them from slavery. Slavery of Egypt is compared to the bondage of sin in many places in the Bible. And this was the very time many generations later, that while the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the precincts of the Temple, the very Son of God, Jesus Christ was pierced and bled and died on Calvary as our Passover.

The thread is very long but it is there.

Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. {9} "Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. {10} And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son."

You know this has to be one of the greatest scenes in movies of all time, the moment when Abraham actually takes the knife in his hand with that beautiful boy laid out on the wood ready to die. He was prepared to actually do it.

"The Angel of the JEHOVAH called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And Abraham said, "I am here." {12} And He said, "Don't lay your hand on the lad, don't do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:11-12).

You see, this was a lot more than just a test of Abraham's faith. This was one section of the thread that runs from the beginning of the Bible all the way through to the end of the plan of God laid out before the foundation of world.

"Abraham looked around and he found a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering in the place of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

Down through time Israel offered animals again and again as substitutes for their own lives.

Continuing in verse 15 "Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, {16} and said: "By Myself have I sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; {17} "in blessing I will bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. {18} "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.""

Let's remember what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:7 "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us". At that appointed time while the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the precincts of the Temple, the very Son of God, Jesus Christ was pierced and bled and died on Calvary as our Passover.

This tread leads forward from here but we are out of time. Until next time, I am Ronald Dart and you were born to win.

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Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly  
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries  
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

[www.borntowin.net](http://www.borntowin.net)