

Examining Judaism (5)

Let us continue our study of Modern Jewish Holidays.

Pesach: Passover

Beginning on the 15th day of Nissan (March- April), Pesach commemorates God passing over the Israelites and killing the first born in the land of the Egyptians. This holiday is marked by many customs. A home must be cleaned of all bread or bread products containing leaven. They follow the Bible in having unleavened bread called Matzah. There is a special set of dishes just for the Passover. The Passover meal is called Seder and the Exodus story is told. "Jews who do not keep any of the dietary law, or keep the Sabbath, observe Seder. The reason is simple: Passover is marked around the family dinner table rather than in synagogue. For some it is just a family gathering-a time for people to come together for a holiday meal. For others, it is an occasion to reenact a moment in history through rituals and readings." (Being Jewish: The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today, page 157.) Bitter herbs are eaten to symbolize the bitterness of slavery. This meal ends with a wish that next year the Pesach will be in Jerusalem. Meaning the Messiah will come next year.

I commend the Jews on teaching their children about the Passover however they missed our Passover. John calls Jesus the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) The Jews were saved from physical death by sprinkling the blood of a lamb on their doorpost but not spiritual death. Today the blood of Christ cleanses the obedient believer from all sins. (Acts 22:16; John 1:7) We have the better sacrifice. When the Messiah comes again he will establish His throne in Jerusalem. Why? Because the Bible plainly says "O Thus says the Lord: "Write this man childless, A man who shall not prosper in his

days; For none of his descendants shall prosper, Sitting on the throne of David, And ruling anymore in Judah.'" (Jeremiah 22:30 NKJV) This was said to King Coniah. Never again would his descendants ever rule in Jerusalem in the throne of David. The Bible also says this world will end at the return of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:24)

Shavu'ot

What can you do when you want to observe a religious practice but cannot? You change the practice. That is what the Jews have done with Shavu'ot.. Known as the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament and Pentecost in the New Testament, it was a time to offer the first fruits of the harvest to God. (Number 28:26ff)

After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews could no longer offer the sacrifice. "The Rabbi gave new meaning to the holiday by saying that it was Shavu'ot that the Torah was given to the Israelites." (Being Jews: The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today, page 175) Like most Jewish Holidays, there are special foods and time of prayer.

Rosh Hashanah

This celebrates the Jewish New Year. It seems odd to me since they use Number 29:1-2 as their text, "On the first day of the seventh month, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. It is a day for you to blow trumpets, and you shall offer burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the Lord." The Jewish calendar begins with Nissan and the 7th month is Tishri (September- October). They use this time to clear up any sins committed against each other.

A shofar, (ram's horn), is used as a trumpet during special services. Another ceremony is called tashlich. "The custom is to walk to the edge of a river or lake and symbolically throw away one's sins. (Being

Jewish: The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today, page 114) Throwing breadcrumbs on the water does this. Incidentally, not all Jews observe this ritual. One explained that he used to until one time when a strong wind blew the bread back to the shore. He decided that God did not want their sins.

Let us remember that sins are not "symbolically thrown away". Under the Law of Moses the high priest offered a symbolic sacrifice for the sins of ignorance. The Hebrew writer refers to this in chapter 9, ("For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctified for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Verse 13-14)

Today we do not "symbolically" throw away our sins. We have the blood of Christ to redeem us from sin. (Ephesians 1:7) I hope you have noticed the number of times Jews compensate for not having a true sacrifice for their sins. Without the blood of Jesus they have no hope.

-- Dennis Tucker

(To Be Continued)