

Are the Festivals (Moedim) for Today?

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One of the questions that inevitably arises when people began to see the beauty of the Biblical Festivals is whether or not they are for believers today. The theological categories in which many modern-day believers have been schooled insist that the Festivals were “merely shadows” of the person and work of Messiah Yeshua, and that with His coming they are no longer needed. Some would go further and even say that to celebrate the Biblical Moedim is to detract from the central position which Yeshua should hold in our theology and worship. But what do the Scriptures say about the place of the Moedim in the life of God’s people?

First, we should remember that the word used for the Festivals is the Hebrew מוֹעֵד, “appointed time,” and that this is the same word that is found in the opening creation narrative in Genesis 1. Here, the sun and moon are given especially for “. . . signs and seasons.” The word translated “seasons” [NASB] is מוֹעֲדִים, *mo’dim* the exact same word used to describe “My appointed times” in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere in the Torah. Why is this important? It is important because it shows that *the Festivals which God reveals in the Torah are connected with creation first*. That is to say, God designed the universe itself (the sun and moon and the whole planetary structure) in order to point to and regulate the Festivals, the “Moedim.” Thus, the Moedim are first and foremost a part of the creative order, not merely a part of the covenant made with Israel at Sinai.

Secondly, the Word of God explicitly states that the Moedim are to remain throughout all the generations of Israel (Sabbath: Exodus 31:16; Pesach/Hag haMatzot: Exodus 12:14, 17, 42; Shavuot: Leviticus 23:21; Rosh HaShannah/Yom haKippurim: Leviticus 23:31; Sukkot: Leviticus 23:41). Therefore, whether for an Israelite or for one attached to Israel through faith, there is to be one Torah for all (Numbers 15:16, 29; Leviticus 16:29). The implications for this are clear: *if Israel is commanded to do and keep the Moedim of the Lord throughout her generations, then all who have attached themselves to Israel through faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and His Messiah Yeshua are equally privileged to keep the Lord’s appointed times.*

“But,” some may detract, “it is impossible to keep the Festivals as they are prescribed in the Torah.” In part this is true. Each festival requires sacrifices and involvement with the priesthood and the Temple, all of which are presently impossible. But if we are able to do and observe part of the prescribed activities for any given Moed, and if the Moedim are rich in blessings and instruction, would it not seem wise to do all we can in connection with the appointed time, and leave what we cannot do in the hands of HaShem? Consider this illustration: suppose as a father I asked my son to mow the lawn while I was at work. When he went to the shed to get the lawn mower, he found there was only enough gasoline to mow half the lawn. Consider two scenarios: my son could either do nothing to fulfill the job I had given him, or he could mow as much of the lawn as the limited amount of gasoline would permit. Which scenario do you suppose would gladden my heart as a father? The answer is obvious: to do all within our ability to obey and please our Abba bespeaks a true heart of faith. And so it is with the Moedim: while we cannot fulfill the instructions completely (because the Temple and priesthood are absent), we can do and guard many of the instructions for each of the Moedim, and in so doing we are blessed and God is honored.

Thirdly, *the Scriptures are clear that the victory of God in the end-times is manifest by His people, both Israel and the nations, worshipping Him together*. Consider the prophecy of Isaiah, quoted by Yeshua as He cleared the Temple mount of unrighteous practices: “For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.” (Isaiah 56:7, cf. Matthew 23:13). The context of Isaiah 56 is clearly one of the ingathering of the nations to worship the Lord, and this worship is characterized by the careful guarding of the Sabbath, the first of the Moedim (Leviticus 23:1-3). What is more, the reign of Messiah, characterized as it is by the global worship of the One true God, is marked by all of the nations coming to celebrate the Festival of Sukkot (Zechariah 14:16-19). The prophets therefore envision the end-times and the reign of Messiah as being characterized by the observance of Sabbath, the first of the Moedim and Sukkot, the last Moed in the yearly cycle. Thus, the Sabbath (in Isaiah) and Sukkot (in Zechariah) function as “bookends” to encompass all of the Moedim in the prophetic viewpoint.

Indeed, that the Temple should be the “house of prayer for all the peoples” surely includes the prayers and Psalms incorporated into each of the Moedim.

The fact that the millennial reign of Yeshua includes the celebration of the Moedim is significant because it shows that the Lord’s appointed times have a farther reaching significance than the revelation of Yeshua’s death and resurrection. If they were merely shadows of His first coming, then they would serve no purpose in His millennial reign. But far from their meaning being exhausted in the first advent of our Messiah, the festivals also point to His kingly reign, and to the time when “He will be One and His Name One” (Zechariah 14:9). It would seem to be a matter of wisdom then, if we will be celebrating the Moedim during the millennial reign of Messiah Yeshua, that we should strive to understand the meaning of these appointed times by celebrating them now.

Fourthly, *as followers of Yeshua, we both walk according to His instructions and His example.* Peter testifies that we should “follow in the steps of Messiah” (1 Peter 2:21), a phrase which denotes living the way He did. This means (in Peter’s immediate context) being willing to suffer the way Yeshua did—for righteousness sake. But it also highlights the primary objective of any disciple: to be like his teacher. As followers of Yeshua, we should therefore ask a very simple question: did Yeshua, our Teacher, keep and guard the appointed times of the Lord? The answer is clearly “yes.” Therefore, as His disciples, so should we.

That this simple logic is accepted as a matter of fact by His disciples is clear, for we regularly find them celebrating the Moedim in the record of the Gospels. Furthermore, this same teacher/disciple relationship was evident in the life of Paul even though he was an apostle “born prematurely” (1 Corinthians 15:8 - the Greek word ἐκτρομάτι means “born early” not “born late” as is often suggested by English translations. Would this mean that as the Apostle to the Gentiles he saw himself born in an era which preceded the future ingathering of the nations?). We find Paul celebrating the Moedim and read in Luke’s account about how Paul made a special effort to be in Jerusalem for Pesach (cf. Acts 20:16). It’s not surprising, then, that he commands the Corinthians to celebrate Pesach (1 Corinthians 5:8) with hearts free of leaven. If Yeshua’s disciples, including Paul, all celebrated the Moedim as their Teacher did, should not all of us who claim to be His disciples do the same?

Finally, God’s loving instructions, given to us in the Torah (remember that the primary meaning of Torah is “teaching,” not “law”), are given to us in order to teach us what honors Him, and what is best for us. *As we celebrate the cycle of the Moedim, we discover more and more what it is like to live life according to God’s schedule rather than our own.* Consider this comparison: the Moedim are to time what money is to tithes and offerings. Even as we grow in faith and understanding by honoring God with our money, so we learn of His redemptive plan and his sovereign rule through the Moedim. We learn that all time (like all of our possessions) belongs to Him. In honoring Him by pausing on the days of His Moedim and focusing upon the lessons He intends to teach us, we learn to mold and fashion life’s plans with Him always at the center. May God grant that our lives, both in the details as well as in the whole, reflect His awesome glory and might.