



“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS!”

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“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS!”



“Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

THE festival of *Purim* was celebrated by Jewish communities around the world this year, on 3-4th of March. This is the holiday that commemorates the redemption, through divine intervention, of the Jewish people from an evil **Persian** ruler about 2,500 years ago. It’s the story of Queen Esther, Mordechai and Haman.

Purim is normally a joyous holiday, especially for the children. Jews celebrate this holiday by dressing up in costumes (as the true identities of several characters in the story of Esther are “masked”); and by eating special cookies known as “Haman’s ears”; and by a reading of the scroll of Esther in the synagogues.

THE FEAR OF ANOTHER ANNIHILATION ATTEMPT

Behind this year’s celebrations there was a deep concern that another holocaust could be in the making. Many people were praying about the threat to the Jewish people from Iran (modern-day **Persia**), and President Ahmadinejad, who has denied the Holocaust and threatened to “wipe Israel off the map.”

In Israel, Rabbi Yitzhak Batzri ben David launched a campaign to enlist 10,000 children to pray that God would annul Ahmadinejad’s plans for the destruction of the Jewish people.

MILLIONS OF CHRISTIAN CHILDREN PRAY FOR SAFETY OF ISRAEL ON PURIM

Batzri was surprised to discover that Christians were also arranging a prayer rally in which up to 6 million Christian children around the world would participate. The rabbi welcomed the initiative. “Hopefully, it will awaken the entire world to the Iranian threat,” he said. “If the goyim (gentiles) have come to the realization that we are in danger, maybe the Jews in the Diaspora will finally wake up.”

The man behind the Christian prayer rally was Texas-based evangelist and author Michael Evans, who explained his plans to enlist the “pure hearted prayers” of six million Christian children worldwide to pray for the protection of the Jewish people from the Iranian nuclear threat. “After reading about Rabbi Batzri’s campaign, I said to myself, ‘Why stop at 10,000?’” Evans said, “Six million is a reminder to

Christians that never again must we allow a Holocaust. And since the young suffer most in times of catastrophe, it is fitting that children should be the ones praying.”



THE STORY OF ESTHER

One of the most gripping stories in the Old Testament is the story of Hadassah which we may read in the book called by her Persian name - Esther. (Hadassah means “myrtle” and Esther means “star.”)

The story has a devilish plot to destroy the Jewish exiles who lived in the Medo-Persian Empire. The villain was an evil man named Haman whom the king had elevated. Everyone in the kingdom was ordered to bow down and pay homage to this Haman.

But there was a devout Jew by the name of Mordechai who refused to bow down to Haman who claimed divine honors, or to anyone except God. This so enraged Haman that he plotted to destroy both Mordechai and all of his people. Haman petitioned the king that these people should be destroyed as “they do not observe the king’s laws.” And he even promised to pay the king 10,000 talents of silver for this “favour.” The King, Xerxes (or Ahasuerus in Hebrew), who ruled over an empire of 127 provinces extending from Ethiopia to India conceded, saying, “Do with them as you please.”

Haman sent out orders to the governors of all the provinces decreeing that on 13th of Adar, all Jews, both young and old, including women and children, were to be annihilated. Then following his wife’s suggestion, Haman had gallows made, 50 cubits (75 ft) high, on which he planned to hang Mordechai.

In an amazing twist in the story, it so happened that Mordechai had an orphaned cousin whom he had brought up – Hadassah. She was a very beautiful young woman, and by providence she had been chosen by the king to become his queen. Her Jewish identity had not been disclosed, and she was called Esther.

When Mordechai heard of Haman’s edict, he put on sackcloth and went into the city wailing bitterly. Queen Esther heard of this and sent messengers to her cousin to find out the reason. Mordechai told them everything and gave a copy of Haman’s edict stamped with the king’s signet ring. And he told her that she must go into the king and implore his favour and to plead with him for her people.

Esther replied that there is a law that no one can go before the king who is not summoned. Anyone who disobeyed that law would be put to death, unless the king held out his golden sceptre to him. And as Esther has not been summoned by the king for some thirty days, she could risk her life by approaching the king.

Mordechai’s reply was these poignant words:

“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows whether you have come to *this position in the kingdom for such a time as this?*” (Esther 4:14)

Esther’s equally poignant reply was:

“Go, gather all the Jews who are in Shushan (Susa), and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast in the same way. And then I will go in to the king, *even though* it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish!” (Esther 4:16)

After the three days Esther dressed in royal robes came into the king’s inner court. The king extended his golden sceptre. He knew there must be some major reason why Esther would risk her life. He then asked her what her request was.

Esther asked the king to come, along with Haman, to a banquet that she had prepared. The king agreed, and Haman was brought in. During the banquet the king again asked Esther what her request was. She then asked the king and Haman to come to a second banquet the next day – and there she would tell her request.

Haman was feeling pretty good, as the Queen has invited him to both banquets.

The second banquet however was a bombshell for Haman. The king again asked what her request was.

“Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, grant me my life – this is my petition; and spare my people at my request; for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as, male and female slaves, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.’” (Esther 7:3-4)

The king then demanded, “Who is he? Who would presume to do this?”

And Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman.”

The king, filled with anger went into the garden. Haman then began begging Esther for his life. The king returned and found Haman falling on Esther’s couch, and exclaimed, “Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?”

Well, they hung Haman on the gallows he had made for Mordechai.

Haman’s house was given to Esther, who also then disclosed who Mordechai was to her. (The king knew Mordechai, as once he had exposed a plot to kill the king, and had been rewarded.)

Once more Esther implored the king – to revoke the edict of Haman. The king could not, under the laws of the Medes and Persians, revoke a decree. But he gave Mordechai and the Jews the right to assemble and defend their lives and to kill any who attacked them. So a new edict to this effect went out to the provinces.

On 13th of Adar the Jews prevailed over those who attacked them, killing hundreds of them. And Haman’s ten sons were hung by the king’s command.

The next day was a day of rejoicing. And the 14th Adar has been celebrated ever since as the festival of **PURIM**.

* * *

Note: Purim has also had a significant meaning for Iraq (part of the ancient Persian Empire). On February 28, 1991, the first day of Purim, the first Gulf War came to an end. On March 18, 2003, again the first day of Purim, US President George W. Bush

issued a 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq or face war. The 48 hours was exactly the two days of Purim that year, just before the “shock and awe” (attack on Iraq) began.

MASHAAL SAYS ISRAEL WILL ‘DISAPPEAR’

Mar. 6, 07. During a meeting in Tehran with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, Hamas leader-in-exile, Khaled Mashaal, said Israel will eventually disappear from the world, and the Palestinians should be prepared for that.

At a press conference, Mashaal was asked if Hamas had now recognized Israel. He did not answer directly, but said: “The Palestinian government insists on June 4, 1967 borders (for Israel), and full Palestinian sovereignty with Jerusalem as its capital.”

COMMENT. Put two extremists together and what can you expect but a lot of hyperbole? Mashaal and Ahmadinejad have either not read history, or they have forgotten it. Haman’s water-tight plot to annihilate the Jews of Persia backfired. The Romans tried to wipe out the Jews, but the Roman Empire disintegrated, and Israel has been restored. Adolph Hitler’s Final Solution to annihilate the Jewish race failed. Egyptian leader General Abdul Nasser, along with Syria, twice tried to destroy Israel, and failed.

And Ahmadinejad, and Hamas will also fail. Israel will survive - not because of its military “greatness,” but because of the Word of YHWH.

“And it will come about in that day that I will set out to destroy all the nations that come up against Jerusalem.” “Now this will be the plague with which YHWH will strike all the nations who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, their eyes will consume away in their sockets, their tongue will consume away in their mouths.” (Zechariah 12:9, 14:12)

“Now I am going to bring back the captives of Jacob, and have compassion on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy Name. They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they committed against Me, when they live securely on their *own* land with no one to make *them* afraid.” (Ezekiel 39:25-26)

Today, Israel is going through a period of introspection, and the nation needs leaders of integrity, men and women of faith and wisdom. And the nation as a whole needs to repent and turn to the Messiah. Indeed that time is coming. The LORD says:

“And it will come about in that day that I will set out to destroy all the nations that come up against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication, so they will look on Me, the One they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly for Him, like the bitter weeping over a *lost* first-born.” (Zechariah 12:9-10)

ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR BELIEVERS IN ISRAEL

As most of our readers will know, there has been, for a long time, fierce opposition to Jewish believers in Israel, especially from the Orthodox Jews.

A recent letter from a Messianic Jewish Russian believer in Israel gives some good news. He is very excited by what God is doing in the land. He tells of a clip on

Israeli TV's prime-time on the eve of Shabbat. It was a **positive** report on **Messianic Judaism** (Jewish believers in Y'shua) which he described as "an historic moment."

And in a second item of good news, a young man asked this brother to give a lecture on Messianic Judaism to a group of 50 young people (over 18 years) who had come from a pre-military course up in the North.

He agreed, and during the lecture, the audience just exploded with questions, and the whole meeting actually turned out to be an evening of personal testimonies and answers. These young people seemed to be native Israelis - not immigrants - and no one was aggressive or negative! This was never heard of before.

"More than in anything else, they were interested in the **personal relationship with God**. The meeting lasted longer than planned, and at the end, a friend who had come to pray and support the meeting, offered these young people some complete Bibles in Hebrew. He had 30 Bibles in his car – and all of them were immediately snapped up. We were absolutely overwhelmed!

"A few months ago I wouldn't have dared even to think about an event like this – that 50 young Israel boys and girls would ask us Messianic Jews to organize a lecture about Yeshua! But He who *is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think* - He has just done it by His hand, and we believe, we will see even more incredible things in the days to come!" And more good news ...

ISRAEL GRANTS LICENSE FOR CHRISTIAN TV

Jan 5, 07. Daystar Television Network, which owns and operates 50 television stations across the United States, will be the first Christian network to broadcast into every home in Israel with 100% Christian content.

"This is a first. Never before has the nation of Israel granted a license for a 100% Christian channel to broadcast into all of Israel. Up until now, it has either been illegal, impossible, or impractical. The message of the Gospel will now, potentially, reach into every home in Israel 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This is a moment in time that we will always remember," said a spokesman for Daystar.

The opportunity came after a year of negotiations with Jewish leaders, and a six-month trial of Daystar's flagship shows: "Celebration" and "The Joni show."

Praise the Lord for Israel's willingness to allow freedom of religion to such a generous degree. Pray for right content on Daystar's programs to prevail.

"Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your Name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted." (Psalm 89:15-16)



AUSTRALIA

ID CARD ROLL-CALL FOR 16.7 MILLION

9 JAN 07. The federal Government will start signing up Australians for its \$1.1 billion human services smartcard from April next year, using a network of 600 offices and a fleet of vehicles kitted out as mobile registration units.

The government is also developing targeted strategies for registering groups such as students, retirees and shift workers for the welfare access card, as it works towards an ambitious plan of issuing cards to 32,000 people daily between 2008 and 2010.

Chief technology architect Marie Johnson said plans to register 16.7 million cardholders were well advanced, although final decisions would be contingent on recommendations from the Allan Pels-led access card Consumer and Privacy Taskforce.

“If you look at any map of Australia you can appreciate the logistical and geographic spread that we’re dealing with here,” Ms Johnson said. “We will be required to register people around the country in remote and regional areas and we will need varying equipment, such as mobile registration units to manage the registration process.”

Registrations will be carried out through government offices operated by agencies such as Centrelink, Medicare Australia and the Dept of Veterans’ Affairs. - The Australian 7 Jan 07/ used by permission News Limited

The technology is amazing and not necessarily evil. It’s very rational, and seems desirable and necessary in this age when there is so much corruption and violence.

It’s the **ultimate marking system** that is evil. We can understand from the prophecies in the book of Revelation that when “the Beast” gains authority over every tongue, tribe and nation, everyone will need to take his “mark” to be able to buy or sell. That may not sound too bad, until it is realised that to qualify for the mark and its privileges, people will have to give allegiance and worship to the demonic trinity – Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet.

At that time, the choice will be between ..

1. Give allegiance to the demonic trinity, receive the mark of the Beast, and ultimately be cast into the eternal Lake of Fire with Satan and the forces of darkness;

OR ...

2. Refuse to give that allegiance, refuse the mark; try to find a secure hiding place for 3½ years in order to escape persecution and the guillotine; and trust the Messiah for your eternal salvation.

Oh my reader! Don’t miss the Rapture! **Today** is the Day of Salvation!

(2 Corinthians 6:2)

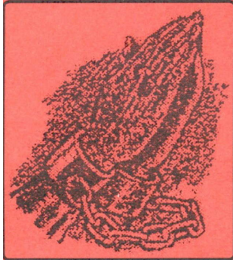
ANIMAL TAGS FOR PEOPLE?

Two US companies are betting that before long, the fast-expanding market for animal RFID chips will extend to humans. Under the federally-supported National Animal Identification System (NAIS), digital tags are expected to be affixed to the U.S.’s 40 million farm animals to enable regulators to track and respond quickly to

disease, bio-terrorism, and other calamities. Opponents have many fears about this plan, among them that it could be the forerunner of a similar system for humans. - *businessweek.com.* / Jan 11, 07.

THE PERSECUTED

“Remember (*and pray for*) the prisoners as if *you were* imprisoned with them; and those who are mistreated.” (Hebrews 13:3)



MYANMAR (BURMA): CRACKDOWN ON ETHNIC MINORITIES

There are an estimated four million Christians, most of them in the non-Burman ethnic minorities who live around the periphery of the country. They are being severely persecuted by the ruling military junta, both for their ethnicity and for their faith.

The army, with assistance in some places from Buddhist monks, is cutting off such people from food, education or any means to support themselves. But converts to Buddhism can get food for their families and education for their children, and will be exempted from the forced labour which literally kills so many.

UZBEKISTAN: YOUNG CHURCHES PERSECUTED

Police burst into the morning service of a large church in Tashkent and arrested the minister and other leaders. This church began in 1996 with 20 members and has grown to have over 700 people from a Muslim background, and other members as well. They have been trying to get the church registered, but the authorities always find a pretext to refuse.

Please pray for this church, remembering in particular the health of the minister who has had a stroke and now has problems with blood pressure.

The wave of persecution against Christians continues. A Christian headmaster received a letter ordering her to gather information about her pupil's church attendance, how often they went, who their parents were, where their parents worked, what kind of Christian literature they had at home. This is part of a government initiative to get details of all Christian pupils and Christian teachers. Cell groups meeting in homes have been banned. Pray for courage and wisdom for Christians faced with this kind of demand.

INDIA:

WIDESPREAD PERSECUTION

Persecution is breaking out in various places in India. Every week there are new reports of atrocities.

The Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission claims that reports of Hindu extremists persecuting Christians are “baseless.” This contradicts a report by India’s National Commission for Minorities (NCM). The NCM team found that Hindu extremists had frequently invoked the state’s anti-conversion law as a means to incite mobs against Christians and have them arrested without evidence.

In Jashpur district, Chhattisgarh state, Christians report the administration has been harassing them by filing 271 property complaints against their institutions.

Kathuwa, Jammu and Kashmir Districts are also under great threat by anti-Christian groups.

Churches are being closed and Christians are not permitted to visit the villages. Please pray especially for the interior villages as life is very primitive.

Our brothers and sister are hurting; pray for them and their children that the Lord would bring peace to their land and that many will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

THE ANTICHRIST THE KING WHO WILL DO AS HE PLEASURES



A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL
BY BOB HINES, NEW ZEALAND

CHAPTER 11 (PART 2)
PLEASE READ DANIEL 11: 36 to 45

As we saw in the previous issue, verses 2 to 35 of chapter 11 were fulfilled in past history. However many Bible students believe that verse 36 through to the end of chapter 12 have yet to be fulfilled.

The reasons for this belief are that firstly, the events detailed up to verse 35 can be proven by history to have occurred precisely as foretold. However there are no recorded historic events corresponding to the events beginning with verse 36.

More evidence in favour of this view is that verse 12:1 states that at the time of this king “there will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” In Matthew 24:21-22, Jesus Himself indicated that this time of distress would occur during the time period immediately before His return.

Further support for this view is that the description of the king, beginning with verse 36, corresponds exactly with the description of the Antichrist of the last day’s given in other passages relating to the return of Christ.

Consequently it is believed that the prophecies given in chapter 11:21-35 were fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes whilst those given from verse 36 onwards will be fulfilled by the Antichrist prior to the physical return of Christ.

This king, the Antichrist, “will do as he pleases” which surely means that he will be in a position to do so. To achieve this he will need to be a dictator demanding sole allegiance to himself. Daniel 7:25b tells us that he will even “try to change the set times and the laws.”

He will “exalt himself and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods.” Revelation 13: 5 - 7 states that he will “blaspheme God, and slander His name and His dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He will be given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.” God will allow him to succeed in his lust for power but only “until the time of wrath is completed.”

Not only will this dictator deny the one true God but he will also show total contempt for any and all gods, both those worshipped by his ancestors and by the gods worshipped by women in particular. Instead he believes himself to be the all powerful God.

Some students interpret the phrase “the gods of his fathers” as referring to the pagan gods worshipped by the Jewish peoples during times when they departed from worshipping the true and only God of Israel, and therefore conclude that the Antichrist will in fact be of Jewish origin. Whilst he may indeed be Jewish, I find it difficult to prove this based upon this one verse.

Verse 38-39 tells us that instead of worshipping God he will worship “a god of fortresses.” Although this is a difficult verse to interpret with any certainty the implication seems to be that he will enjoy making war - something which he will be very successful at doing until the time of the end.

In fact verses 40 – 46 give us prophetic insight into a series of battles that will be waged in the end days. The King of the South (Egypt) will attack the Antichrist at the same time as the King of the North (Syria) brings both their army and Navy against him.

Bearing in mind that at this point of time (The Tribulation period) the Antichrist will have a peace treaty in place with Israel. It is therefore a possibility that Egypt and Syria in fact attack Israel and that because of this the Antichrist will see this as an attack upon himself.

He therefore rushes his army to the Middle East invading many countries in the process, conquering Syria and Egypt and it would appear also taking the opportunity to break his covenant with Israel (“The Beautiful Land”) and invade them also.

It would appear that in his hurry to retaliate against the invaders, Egypt and Syria, he bypasses Edom, Moab and Ammon, and they are delivered from his hand. Although the exact boundaries of Ammon in particular are unclear evidence seems to confirm that in fact all three of these nations' territories now form part of the nation of Jordan.

Although he takes this opportunity to extend his power over many other, unnamed, countries, it does not all go his way. Whilst no doubt enjoying his victories in the Middle East he hears that nations in the east and north are rising against him and he sets out again to put a stop to this new threat. Some students believe that this new threat is the invasion of Israel foretold in Ezekiel 38 -39 when Russia (the land of Magog) and her allies attack from the north, and Iran (ancient Persia) attacks from the east. But there is no reference given in Daniel 11: 44 as to the identity of these nations from the east and north.

This prophecy describing the Antichrist and some of the battles he will be involved with ends with the promise that in the end (at the return of Jesus Christ), he will be stripped of his power and will meet his end alone. Revelation 20:10 tells us that "he will be cast into the lake of fire where he will be under divine judgment forever."

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MESSIAH CAME TO FULFIL THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, THE TYPES, THE FEASTS AND THE ETERNAL PLAN OF REDEMPTION



“Y’shua said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’.” (John 4:34). “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that Your Son may glorify You ... I glorified You on earth; I have accomplished the work which You gave Me to do.” (John 17:1-4)

#7 IN A SERIES ON THE NEW COVENANT BY DON STANTON

A QUESTION that once weighed on my mind was ...

AS WE ARE UNDER THE NEW COVENANT, WHY DO WE RETAIN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN OUR BIBLE?

The simple answer is because both the Old and the New Testaments are the Word of God.

The apostles had no New Testament, and they fully accepted, and referred to the Tanakh (the Old Testament) as the Scriptures – the Word of God.

Paul wrote to Timothy:

“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise *in respect* to salvation through faith in the Messiah, Y’shua. All Scripture is divinely-inspired - God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching, for conviction and reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate and complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

That should be enough to convince the believer that the Old Testament is divinely-inspired, and is essential for our understanding and growth in our spiritual lives.

We are indebted to the “Jewish Bible” for important historical records from the creation to the birth of the Messiah, and for valuable background to our faith. But much more! The Messianic prophecies in the OT confirm Y’shua as the Messiah. The prophecies concerning the endtimes and future are also invaluable. Moreover, our civil law has for centuries been based on the ordinances and precepts of both Old and New Testaments. And the promises and blessings in the Old Testament we would never like to discard! So to ignore or downgrade the Old Testament would simply add to our own detriment.

Another question I had, was ...

WHY ARE THERE ONLY 66 BOOKS IN THE BIBLE?

The O.T. has 39 + N.T., 27 making a total of 66. But for a compilation of books that are the divinely-inspired Counsel of God, these numbers do not seem to be complete! Why not, say, 70 books?

(In Scripture we see the significance of 70. Moses appointed seventy elders - Numbers 11:16-25; seventy ‘weeks’ were appointed for Israel - Daniel 9:14; Y’shua appointed seventy disciples - Luke 10:1, 17).

Then, I learned that the Bible is, in fact, composed of 70 books.

The Book of Psalms is actually five books, although they are not usually printed as separate books. The five books have been clubbed together, evidently for convenience. The divisions are shown, however, in most of our Bibles.

Book One: Psalms 1 – 41

Book Two: Psalms 42 – 72

Book Three: Psalms 73 – 89

Book Four: Psalms 90 – 106

Book Five: Psalms 107 – 150

Now another question that used to concern me ...

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH RITUAL IN THE OLD COVENANT, AND VERY LITTLE IN THE NEW?

I have come to realise and appreciate that the rituals were shadows and types of the Messiah and His redemptive plan. Now, since the Messiah has come, there is little need for rituals, for we have the realities. But we must confess that there are quite a few rituals practiced in the NT church – many of them without scriptural warrant. Some rituals are not wrong – they are simply our *modus operandi* – the way we work and express worship and remembrance.

In the Old Testament, many of the rituals were essential for remembrance, and for spiritual edification. Likewise in the New Covenant. But what is wrong is to accept and practise rituals for rituals' sake, or simply to imitate someone else's practices.

The terms of the Old Covenant which were binding on Israel, are not binding on the church because Messiah "makes all things new." (Rev 21:5). And in Messiah "all things have become new." (2 Cor. 5:17)

Then what did the Master mean when He said:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but **to fulfil**. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke will by any means pass away from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18) ?

Does He mean the Law will continue to the end of the world? No, His words indicated that the Law would be annulled when it was fulfilled. And when Y'shua, the *Pesach* Lamb of God, completed the work of atonement and redemption, He proclaimed victoriously: "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30)

That is when He made us alive in Him, and "cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us ... having nailed it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-15)

"For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes *in Him*." (Romans 10:4)

"And you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free. ... If then the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:32, 36)

But does "free" mean we now have freedom to do whatever we want? No! It is freedom to live unto God by His grace - in the power of Messiah's resurrection.

We are not lawless! Many of the principles and guidelines of the Old Testament are repeated in the New. And the New Testament itself has some 1050 exhortations and commands.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not present the members of your *body as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14)

In the New Covenant we are under a higher law ...

"... for **the law of the Spirit of Life in the Messiah, Y'shua**, has set me (*you*) free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, *the sinful nature*, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness

or guise of sinful man *to be an offering* for sin. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh, *the sinful nature*, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:2-4)

So this brings me to one more question ...

WHAT ABOUT “HOLY DAYS” AND FESTIVALS?

The children of Israel were obliged to keep Shabbat - the Sabbath – and the seven annuals festivals - THE FEASTS OF YHWH).

Most Christians celebrate two festivals – Christmas and Easter, and they feel they should attend church for communion and worship on Sundays if possible.

More traditional churches observe the fast of Lent, Pentecost, All Saints Day, and some extra “holy days.”

Some of the “Christian” special days have no Scriptural basis, and some have aspects that are pagan in origin.

The apostle Paul, who has more to say on church practices than other writers, seems to encourage the observance of spiritual events.

“Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new batch *without leaven* - because in reality you are unleavened. For our Passover *Lamb*, the Messiah, has been sacrificed *for us*. **Let us therefore celebrate the feast**, not with old yeast, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

This was the 8-day season of Unleavened Bread including Passover that Paul was referring to.

On one occasion Paul was hurrying to be in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 20:16). In First Corinthians Paul wrote, “Let us celebrate the feast (Passover),” but in Romans, he declares that believers are not bound by special days!

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Master is able to make him stand. One man regards one day as *more sacred* than others; another man regards every day *alike*. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. **He who observes one day as special, does so to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.**” (Romans 14:4-6)

All the festivals of the Old Covenant looked forward to their ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah. And indeed, Y’shua fulfils them all.

The festivals are **not mandatory for the church**, but we can learn a lot from them. And if one desires to observe and enjoy the Festivals of YHWH – by remembering and celebrating the work of Messiah, he is free to do so, and is encouraged to do so. (2 Corinthians 5:7-8). But the New Covenant does not arbitrate for, or against, special days.

WHAT ARE THE FESTIVALS OF THE LORD?

In Leviticus 23 we read of **THE LORD’S APPOINTED TIMES**. These times were the weekly Sabbath, and the seven annual convocations (festivals or feasts, but one was a solemn day of humility).

These times were appointed for, and mandatory for, Israel. All Jewish males were required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year to appear before the LORD. Usually their whole families would go with them, and they were very joyful occasions as the people enjoyed immensely going up to Zion, the City of God. And it was possible for most people as it was no more than 5 or 6 days journey on foot from the most remote parts of Israel to Jerusalem.

Today, *Pesach* is very special to Jews all over the world, and all the hotels of Jerusalem are packed with privileged Israelites from around the world, for the Passover week. But for many Jews in the Diaspora (outside Israel), a journey to Jerusalem is a once-in-a-lifetime experience – as it is for most Christians.

It's just as well that visits to Jerusalem are not mandatory today; there would not be enough planes to carry everyone, and not a fraction of the hotels needed to accommodate them!

Let's look at the festivals and see their significance for believers today. We read about them in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28 & 29. The first three are in the first month of the Biblical calendar - Nisan.

1. PESACH - PASSOVER. 14th Nisan (in March-April)

Pesach commemorated God's great deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. The roots of the Pesach lamb and Pesach meal are in Exodus 12. The name comes from the fact that on the night that Passover was established, the Angel of Death moved over the land of Egypt slaying the eldest child in each Egyptian family. The Israelites were spared because they obeyed God's command to slay an unblemished lamb and to apply its blood to their front doors. When the Angel saw the blood he "passed over" that house.

Israel was commanded to observe the ordinance of Passover perpetually - forever. (Exodus 12:24-25)

The significance of Pesach for the believer is **REDEMPTION**. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed" for us. (1 Corinthians 5:7)

"For you know that it was not with perishable things like silver or gold that you were **redeemed** from the futile way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of the Messiah, a Lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

"The Lord's Supper" of which Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 11:17-28 clearly has its origin in *Pesach*, for during the Passover meal ... Y'shua took bread ...

"and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way, after supper, *He* also *took* the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For **as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup**, you proclaim the Master's death until He comes'." (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)

In this passage Paul is concerned about the **event** rather than the **day**. He makes no specifics about when, or how often, the "breaking of bread" should take place. The

early Christians evidently celebrated the “breaking of the bread” during their fellowship meals.

The “breaking of bread,” like *Pesach*, is a **remembrance** occasion. *Pesach* looks back to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. The “breaking of bread” looks back to Calvary and the believer’s deliverance from spiritual Egypt – the kingdom of darkness.

2. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD. 15th to 21st Nisan

(falls in March-April)

This seven-day season began on the day after Passover. It was a period when no leaven was permitted in the homes of the people. Leaven in scripture represents sin or evil, so the removing of leaven signified the removal of all defilement from Israel. These eight days were to be a time a renewal and commitment to the ways of the LORD.

The significance of this season of the Lord, for the believer, is “**HOLINESS TO THE LORD.**” The command is in the New Covenant as well as the Old ...

“YOU SHALL BE SET-APART (HOLY), FOR I AM SET-APART (HOLY).” (Leviticus 11:44. 1 Peter 1:16)

The **sanctifying work of the Messiah** is constantly operating and producing holiness in our lives. But we, like Israel, are called to remove sin from our lives and homes. And more, we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. (Romans 12:1-2)

It would be tremendous if all churches today had a special season of ministry at least once a year, with the theme of holiness, sanctification, surrender, and walking in the Spirit. Selah!

“But now having been freed from sin and having become servants of God, the fruit *and* benefit you receive is in **sanctification**; and the outcome *is* eternal life.” (Romans 6:22)

3. THE WAVING OF THE SHEAF – FIRST FRUITS

This falls on the day after the Sabbath which follows *Pesach* – so it was always on the first day of the week (Sat sunset to Sun sunset). It involved the waving – or presenting - of a sheaf of the **first fruits** of the barley harvest to the LORD. It expressed thankfulness to God for His provision, and it acknowledged His Hand of blessing on the crops of the land.

The significance for the believer of the Waving of the Sheaf on “first day of the week” is the **RESURRECTION** of Y’shua the Messiah.

“Messiah has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep. For just as all *through union* with Adam die, so all *who are in union with* the Messiah will be made alive, but each one in his own order. The Messiah *is* the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at *the time of* His coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

And of course, Y’shua rose from the dead on the first day of the week – sometime after sunset on Saturday, and before dawn on Sunday morning.

So the significance of this event, is ...

I serve a risen Saviour, He’s in the world today.

And more ...

“God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, **made us alive together with the Messiah** - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly *realms* in Messiah Y’shua.” (Ephesians 2:4-6)

We are “in Christ” and are called to walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

4. SHAVUOT - THE FEAST OF WEEKS - (PENTECOST) (falls in May-June)

The fourth festival, Shavuot falls on the 50th day after the waving of the barley sheaf. The Greek word Pentecost means “fifty days.” Shavuot means “weeks.” It occurs in the third month, Sivan (May-June), but the date is variable. It depends on the waving of the sheaf during the week of Unleavened Bread. So it also fell on “the first day of the week.”

Shavuot was a wheat harvest festival and a holy convocation. Two loaves of **leavened** bread were presented to the LORD.

The Jews have a tradition that Shavuot was the day when God gave the Law at Mt Sinai, and the two loaves represent the two tablets. Exodus 19 indicates that Israel arrived in the wilderness of Sinai in the third month (Sivan), but there is no scripture to support the belief that the Law was given on Shavuot.

Prophetically, Shavuot looked forward to THE HARVEST – THE FIRST FRUITS (the formation of THE BODY OF MESSIAH) which was the result of the Messiah laying down His life. As Y’shua said:

“I am telling you the truth; unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone - *all by itself*. But **if it dies, it bears much fruit.**” (John 12:24)

“As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify many, as He will bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:11)

“Having purposed, He brought us forth by the Word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, **the first fruits** among His creatures.” (James 1:18)

The two leavened loaves typify both Jewish and Gentile believers presented together, to God. The leavened bread indicates the church is comprised of redeemed sinners who will not be sinless until the Saviour returns. (1 John 1:10)

The formation of the Church happened exactly on the day of Shavuot (Pentecost) when the Holy Spirit came to indwell and unite the believers in one Body. (Acts 2)

The Waving of the Sheaf and Shavuot are inextricably linked. Christ the firstfruits of the Resurrection, and the Church, the redeemed firstfruits of Y’shua who is “the Resurrection and the Life.” (John 11:25)

The last three appointed seasons were in the seventh month – Tishrei. (they fall in Sept-Oct.)

5. YOM TRUAH – THE DAY OF TRUMPETS. 1st Tishrei.

The first of Tishrei is also called Rosh Hashanah (New Year), as this day begins the new year of the civil calendar. The Biblical new year, however, began on 1st of Nisan. (Exodus 12:2)

The Biblical festival was the **day of blowing trumpets**. The exact reason for this day is not given except to say that it was “a reminder.” In Israel, trumpets were blown on feast days, and for special occasions, including, coronations, processions, announcements, warnings, awe, the Day of the Lord, and the preparation for war.

A general Jewish explanation is that the trumpets on this day called the people to prepare for the Day of Atonement which would occur on the 10th of the month. The 1st to 10th were called “days of awe,” and “days of penitence.”

For the believer Yom Truah foreshadows the great prophetic event - the coming of Messiah, with the sound of trumpets, to gather His Bride to the Father’s House and to the Marriage of the Lamb.

“For the Master Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with **the trumpet call of God**. Then the dead in Christ - *those who died in union with the Messiah* - shall rise first. Then we, the living *believers* who remain, will *simultaneously* be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Master in the air. And so we will be with the Master for ever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

6. YOM KIPPUR – THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. 10th Tishrei. (falls in Sept-Oct.)

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day on the Jewish calendar. It looks back to the old dispensation when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies on this day, with the blood of the bull and the goat, to make atonement for the sins of the people committed over the past year. Kippur comes from the word “covering.”

This is a day when the people are obliged to humble themselves and to “afflict their souls.” The Scriptures do not call it a fast day, but by the time of the second temple, fasting became common on Yom Kippur.

For the believer, atonement has been accomplished, once and for all, at Calvary. Read Romans 5:17:

“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Master, Y’shua the Messiah, through whom we have now received **the atonement – the reconciliation.**” (Romans 5:17)

“He (Y’shua) does not have the daily necessity that the *Aaronic* high priests had, of offering up sacrifices, first for their own sins and then for the people’s *sins*, because *Y’shua offered Himself once and for all as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind.*” (Hebrews 7:27)

“But when Christ, *the Messiah* appeared as High Priest of the better things to come, *and that are now here*, He *entered* into the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with *human hands*, that is to say, not of this *material* creation. **He entered once and for all into the Holy of Holies in Heaven.** *And He entered*, not by virtue of the blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of His own blood, having secured eternal redemption *for us.*” (Hebrews 9:11-12)

*Christ has for sin atonement made,
HalleluYah! What a Saviour!*

For Israel, a day is coming when their eyes will be opened, and they will enter into the blessing of the atonement that Y’shua has made.

“In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:1)

The significance of Yom Kippur for the believer is that we now have the privilege to come into the Most Holy Place in Heaven through Y’shua our great High Priest because He has made atonement.

“Therefore, brethren, since **we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Y’shua** - by a new and living way which He consecrated *and opened* for us - *a way* through the curtain, that is, *through* His flesh - *His torn body*, and *since we have such* a great *high priest ministering* over the household of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

7. SUKKOT – THE FEAST OF BOOTHS. 15th to 22nd Tishrei.

This is an eight-day season which is also called The Feast of Tabernacles. It looks back to the wilderness journey when Israel lived in booths (or tents). But the festival has a prophetic theme. It looks forward to the time when “the tabernacle of David” will be raised up, and it also looks ahead to the kingdom age when Messiah will sit on David’s throne and rule the earth with a rod of iron, and when Israel dwells in safety. It anticipates the time when God will once more tabernacle – dwell - amongst His people. (Ezek. 37:26-28)

The tragedy is that when God tabernacled in Israel, in the Person of the Messiah, most of the leaders of the Jews did not recognise Him, but rejected Him. Y’shua was indeed the true temple of God, and was filled with the Sh’khinah - the glory of God. The significance of Sukkot for the believer is real; every believer is a tabernacle, and God dwells in them.

“Do you not know that you are a Dwelling Place (tabernacle) of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

And there is this glorious prophetic significance of Sukkot – the Millennial and the Eternal reality:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘See now, the **tabernacle of God is with men**, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and *YHWH Elohim* Himself shall be with them - their God.’” (Revelation 21:3)

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom, and might and honour and glory and blessing.” (Revelation 5:12)

Amen, and Amen!!