*Introduction*

As we come, God willing, to consider this series on the Feasts of the LORD we need to understand or at least have some understanding about our Father God and His dealing with His people Israel, and His people, the Church.

In just the same way that many Jews will not accept the New Testament because they do not consider Jesus to be their Messiah but are still looking for him to appear and therefore only hold to the Old Testament, so we, as Christians can often take the view that we only need the New Testament because Jesus has made a new covenant through his death upon the cross and His resurrection from the grave, and the OT is no longer applicable to us.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Old testament is not just an account of Jewish history, but a detailed account of how God deals with his people, provides for his people and protects his people.

It is an account that teaches that God is in full control of all that is happening in the world and that history and the future will pan out precisely as He has said it would and will.

It is also an account of the types of Christ, the rehearsals of his first and second comings and the fact that he is the fulfilment of the expected Messiah.

When Abraham took Isaac up Mt Moriah in order to sacrifice him to the Lord and God provided the ram, we see not only a picture of the Christ who would be killed, but it happened at the same place.

Mt Moriah along with Mt Ophel and Mt Zion are the three mountains on which the City of David, Jerusalem is built and Mt Moriah is where the place of the Skull is situated.

In the wilderness the brazen serpent being lifted up was a picture of Christ being lifted up upon the cross.

When the Israelites camped in the wilderness, they were instructed how to camp around the tabernacle in their tribes. The number of each tribe was such that when they camped as instructed they formed a cross.

We could go on but there is not time. Sufficient to say that if we ignore the Old Testament we miss out on so much about our caring Father and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

So as we look at the Feasts of the LORD, and please notice I didn’t call them the feast of Israel. The Israelites keep them, but they are Gods appointed feasts, we will see that God’s redemptive plan, His blessings and provision and the Messiah’s first and second advents are all part of the pattern of these amazing feasts.

Everything that God does is carefully planned. The feasts were not something He thought up once the Israelites had left Egypt, but were something that was ordained before the world was formed.

When we go back to the creation in Genesis, we read

***GE 1:14-19 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights--the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the fourth day.***

God created a world that had a cycle to it, a yearly cycle of seasons. Over the centuries we have gone away from Gods cycle and calendar to our own calendar.

We have forgotten many of his commands which were meant for our good and the good of the land and have become a world where there is famine and need in the third world to where there is never ending craving for more and greed in the Western world that has created a rich and a poor society, a worn out world that is not coping with our demands and one which is groaning under the weight of sin.

But when Israel was a nation and preparing to cross over into the Promised land God instructed the Israelites how they were to live and work in a way which would be beneficial and a blessing.

Right at the very beginning when God created the world in 6 days we read that He rested on the 7th day. In the same way at the beginning of Leviticus 23:3 we read

***LEV 23:3 " `There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.***

Just as God rested, so He wanted them to rest and wants us to rest. Rest is good for us, despite what some would think.

The number 7 occurs many times in the Scriptures and has a lot of significance in the life cycle.

The first command that God gives to Moses for the people is that they are to work for 6 days and rest on the 7th. Why? Because God has designed us that way, did you know that your heartbeat automatically slows down on the 7th day! It’s part of your makeup. But God wants you to come together to worship Him, to have quality family time and to rest because it’s good for us.

Every 7th year was to be a sabbatical year for the land. That meant that you planted your crops for six years and then let the land lie on the 7th year, let it rest and recover. They were allowed to eat what grew naturally but that was all, that would keep them going.

After 49years (7x7) they were to have a Year of Jubilee. This was the year that all land would revert back to its original owner. This was God’s way of making sure all had opportunity. It was equality at its best. If you got into desperate times and needed to sell your land, you would get it back at the Jubilee.

God even told them that if they kept to this way of planting he would provide them with such an abundant crop on year six that it would last them 3 years.

***LEV 25:18-22 " `Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.***

The problem was that they never did this. That is why the Israelites were taken into captivity for 70 years by the Babylonians. So that the land could rest and have all its owed Sabbaths.

God’s promise for obedience was

***LEV 26:3-13 " `If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.***

***" `I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.***

***" `I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.***

If we were to keep on reading this chapter we would see the punishment for disobedience.

If we as a nation today, kept to these laws, would we also not see blessing? Of course we would. When we were a God fearing nation with God at the centre of our laws and way of living we were great, but today, the glory has gone because we are disobedient.

The Sabbath was a weekly, 7 yearly and 50th year rest for the land and for us.

But God also appointed 7 feasts. Some of them had already been introduced to the Israelites just prior and as they left Egypt, others were to be brought in when they had their first harvest in the Promised Land.

But they were all appointed by God to be held at specific times in the year. In fact God restarted their year and gave them a new calendar.

Today the Jews have a religious year and a civil year. Their religious year begins on Nisan 1 at the new moon. Our March 12th this year.

The Jewish calendar is designed on the Lunar cycle and therefore is a 360 day year.

God told Moses that This was to be the start of their new year and that on the 10th day they were to take a lamb without spot of blemish and keep it until the 14th whereupon at twilight they were to slaughter the lamb and eat it, taking its blood and placing it upon the doorposts and lintel so that when the angel of death that was to come that evening saw it, he would Passover and no one would be harmed.

This was the beginning of the Passover feast, the oldest of the feasts.

It was at this time that the Israelites were to become a nation of people set apart for God, they would be different, do things differently, according to God’s holy laws.

Next week, DV, we will look at this feast in depth to see the full significance of it.

As we go through the feast cycle we will see that there are 7 feasts, showing a completeness, the feasts were for the Israelites – *moed*, or rehearsals for something still to come.

You see in those early days things were not written down, so God provided a way by which people could remember, what better than to regularly re-enact a story so that you will not forget and so you can keep it unchanged for future generations.

Jesus was a Jew, we often forget that, He was brought up as a Jew and therefore, with his father Joseph would have kept the feasts, to the letter, and we shall see this.

The feasts are also prophetic. The feasts are divided into the Spring and the fall feasts.

The Spring feasts are Passover, Unleavened bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost. These feasts have been fulfilled by Christ prophetically and literally along with Pentecost and the beginning of the Church. We will see that we are now in what is known as the Church age, the time between Christ’s Ascension and His second coming for the saints in the clouds known as the rapture. The fall feasts, Trumpets, Yom Kippur (day of atonement) and the feast of Tabernacles are still future but will be literally fulfilled by Christ at his appearing.

*Conclusion*

The feasts will show the redemptive plan of God that is still available today. It was in existence prior to the creation of the world and came into effect just after the fall when God shed the blood of an animal, believed to be that of a bullock, in order to make a covering for Adam and Eve and continued through the wilderness experience and throughout the Temple era of Israel with sacrifices being given and blood shed for the forgiveness of sin year in and year out. It culminated in the once and for all time sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross, the Passover Lamb.

Only His blood can cleanse from all our sins, all the other sacrifices throughout the ages were temporary, they could not take away our sin, just, for a time, cover it. But Christ’s blood has that cleansing power. Those who come to Christ, confessing their sins and wanting to be forgiven can wash themselves in His precious blood.

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb of God?

Or are you still in your sin?

It’s not who you are that matters but who you trust in..

It’s not what you do that matters, but what Christ has done

The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, have you taken hold of that gift and made it yours?

Amen.