

Christian Faith and Practice Through...Mo'edim

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.
Genesis 1:14,15 NASB

Well, I told you after I finished with the feasts I would talk about the cycles (seasons, feasts or festivals) inherent in the "appointed times" or *mo'edim* (moe-eh-deem – translated above by the word "seasons"), so here it is. For all us rookies who are still doing our best to follow all of the Word and free ourselves from slavery to the doctrines of men, this article will hopefully provide some small guidance. If it seems like a complicated task to implement Torah, or if you can't figure out exactly where to start, these articles are for you. Sorting through all the language and what the Bible says and what other people say can be a little confusing. I prefer to encourage starting somewhere, anywhere, and adding more as you learn more. Hear and obey what the Word specifically teaches, then grab hold of other traditional or cultural stuff as you go and as you want.

But this isn't so much about what to do, or how to do it, as it is a description of how all the appointments fit together. The rhythm set up by the weekly Sabbath and the monthly new moon and the placement of the annual feasts help to regulate our lives, and help condition us for running races and fighting good fights. All of God's commands are essential for building strong bones and muscles, for improving morale, bolstering the spirit, and for overall maturation.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16 NASB

Even the commands we can't understand at first are critical to our conditioning. I think it was Vince Lombardi who said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all" (sort of quoting Hamlet). He could have been taking a page from God's Torah, because working out with His Instructions is the key to a stronger faith walk and elimination of fear. It is not called the Book of Life for nothing; indeed it is nourishing life and health to all of our parts.

The word "disciple" means one who follows a discipline, and the Father's discipline (or discipleship) program, including His feasts or festivals, is the best ever designed. No man has ever done as well to put together a discipleship system that is so perfect for our needs. Compared to the Formula One racing machine of Torah, man's best system is a bicycle. And no matter how hard you pedal, one manpower won't keep up with 800 horsepower. So using a man's system instead of God's is like trying to win the Grand Prix with a Schwinn. And I would much rather race with the best than pedal with the rest.

The reason why the engine of Torah runs so well is God's authority. The power of God is the fuel for His Torah, so His engine is guaranteed to work perfectly. When a man designs a system, its fuel is only the authority of the man who made it. And that's no real kind of power at all. People like Gary Smalley or Bill Gothard mean well, and much of what they teach can be fairly good stuff. But men's opinions (including mine) can't change anyone, only God's Word can.

We are not afraid of God's system if we make a mistake (consequences, of course, are another matter entirely), because we have accepted His payment of our entry fee. Falling short of His plan is like being able to walk away after slamming our racecar into a wall (kids, do not try this at home).

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. Hebrews 2:14,15 NASB

This doesn't mean that the multiplication of laws is what helps to disciple us, but that God's design is best and we shouldn't modify it. Many people have tried to "help God out" by adding to or subtracting from what He gave us. No matter how well meaning, the result is to destroy what God gave and render the system ineffective. More laws are not the answer; obedience to the existing laws is enough. Why? Because the basic issue is obedience – always has been since the Garden of Eden. The problem is with people, not God or His Words.

Our love for Him is reflected in our willing obedience to His Instructions even without being driven by the lash of having to win. If we fall short we can just re-tune our engine and try again. We've already won, so we can race for the pure joy of racing. Losing the race is unthinkable if we stay dedicated to His Way of running it. Unless, that is, we get caught polishing the paint.

I could write a book, and many others have, concerning all the meaning inherent in the appointed times of our Father. But let me give you a few cautionary words before we take off and grab a handful of those meanings. Remember that most of the Jewish leaders in the first century were fully aware of all the details involved with the feasts, but refused to see the Messiah standing right in front of them. It's a good thing He wasn't a bus or they'd of been run over (I know, they kind of were anyway). There is much to be gained from an intense study and practice of the Word as applied to the Feasts, but there is such a thing as going overboard. While many of the details of themes and traditions are good and true, there are probably some that are not true simply because we don't have the Messiah here to explain them to us. So try to get as much as you can out of rabbinical interpretations and culture without losing sight of the Big Picture.

The Word of God is hung about with many Jewish flavored decorations that have very profound meaning and application, and I do not want to take anything away from our brethren. But there are also trappings that are not Scriptural. The Torah is God's and belongs to all of His people. It is not Jewish, and neither are the Feasts. Let us give credit, respect and even deference to our older Jewish brothers and sisters, let us not begrudge them their place at the head of the table; but remember also they are not the final word on what is right. When a meaningful application is drawn from the Word it is wonderful. When we share these with one another and we help to make each other's walk richer and more fruitful I get really psyched up too. But when these applications become a rule that is placed on an equal footing with Torah and we judge each other by their presence or lack then we have gone too far. Keep in mind that these are appointments with God (Leviticus 23:2), not appointments with people of Jewish persuasion.

Terms describing the Feasts. *Mo'ed* is a Hebrew word meaning literally "appointed time" or appointment (I Samuel 20:35); appointed place (Joshua 8:14); appointed sign (Joshua 20:38); or

appointed day (I Samuel 13:11). This word is also sometimes translated “times and seasons” or “set time,” (II Samuel 20:5) and was first used in our Genesis 1:14 reference above. God set the stars and planets in place specifically to help us regulate our relationship with Him through the times and seasons. There is every scriptural reason to believe that God also uses the “set times” as markers for intervention into the affairs of men.

“When I select an appointed time, it is I who judge with equity. The earth and all who dwell in it melt; it is I who have firmly set its pillars.” Selah. Psalm 75:2,3 NASB

You will arise and have compassion on Zion; for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come. Psalm 102:13 NASB

The mo’edim have three aspects: past, present, and future. We are reminded what God did for us, what He is doing for us, and especially what He will do for us. The word “remember” means “to speak or act on behalf of” so we speak and act on behalf of what He has done, is doing, and will do for His people. Ain’t it great? We can actually “remember” the future! We remind ourselves and teach others of His past actions in history and comfort one another with what He will do. And we personally apply the messages from both past and future in daily living.

Another word to describe what we do in the feasts is “rehearse.” By “acting out” the elements of His plans that are yet to come, we teach our children and witness to the world of His coming intervention. We give glory to Him because of His love, wisdom and power displayed for us when He intervened in the affairs of men, and for His promises to intervene in a more permanent fashion soon. These appointments are part of His Word we proclaim so others “hear and fear.”

“Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’ Deuteronomy 4:10 NASB

‘It will be to Me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.’ Jeremiah 33:9 NASB

Another term for the mo’edim is “holy convocation” (actually one of the activities included in the practice). The Hebrew words are mi’qrah qodesh (mee-kraw koe-desh), meaning literally an “assembly of sanctified ones.” God instructs us to gather together on specific feast days (Shabbat, first and seventh day of hag haMatzah, Shavuot, Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, first and eighth day of Sukkot – about 59 days a year normally). This is probably one of the things the writer of Hebrews was referring to when he said not to forsake it.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Hebrews 10:25 NASB

The word “gathering” (similar to assembly) also means “harvesting,” which applies to both crops and people, for instance those who belong to Him at the end of the age.

It will be even like the reaper gathering the standing grain, as his arm harvests the ears, Or it will be like one gleaning ears of grain in the valley of Rephaim. Isaiah 17:5 NASB

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. II Thessalonians 2:1 NASB

So when we gather together we are not only fulfilling His feast instructions to us but foreshadowing our eventual, permanent gathering together also. The prophetic rehearsal portion of the mo'edim continues to forewarn unbelievers of God's intentions and comfort His people with promises of continued care and protection.

He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end. Daniel 8:19 NASB (compare also Daniel 11:27,29)

"Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time. Daniel 11:35 NASB

"For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay." Habakkuk 2:3 NASB

Motivation for observing the mo'edim. A very important factor in being able to receive any benefit from the feasts, or the whole Word for that matter, is our motivation. Without trusting obedience (faith), it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), and therefore receive any benefit from what He tells us to do. Trusting means that the one we place our trust in is worthy of that trust, and can and will follow through on His Word to us. Obedience springs from that trust, because if God IS as He says He is it would follow that we should actually DO what He says to do. Do not think that we can put some strings on our belt loops (tzitzit) or follow the feasts to the letter, then act any way we choose, and expect to please God with our practice.

In the reference below the Father reminds us that just following a few rules will not please Him. If we follow every single rule He made for a feast, but harbor iniquity in our hearts, then observing a feast is useless. Sodom and Gomorrah in the reference below are other names for people who "honor him with their lips but their hearts are far from him" (Isaiah 29:13), in this instance applying to hypocritical Isra'el.

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even

though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.”
Isaiah 1:10-15 NASB

Why does the Father hate the offerings, sacrifices, and appointed times (feasts)? Does this mean we are to eliminate the Torah? Or is it that the practice of the Torah was corrupted with presuming on His grace, the filth of evil deeds and disobedience? See what the Lord says to us later in the same reference.

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. How the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your drink diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves; everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow’s plea come before them. (Isaiah 1:16-23 NASB)

Our Father is not kidding around here. The outward observance of the feasts could be perfect, and still not pleasing to God because we forget that ALL of His Word is to be observed in perfect balance without showing any partiality.

Themes in the Mo’edim. Each of the appointments has themes associated with them. The themes have become an integrated part of the celebrations, built up by association with the first use of a term, meanings of words, the first events, the time of year, and subsequent related events happening at the same time. For instance, when the Father says that Yom Teruah is a “day of blowing,” then sounding the shofar in other places becomes associated with this action. Another comparison can be drawn from how the Pesach Lamb is understood first to be an actual lamb and also Yahshua the Lamb of God. Our Father uses these types of things to illustrate His spiritual realities for us (see John 3).

Another way that themes become associated with the mo’edim is through prophecy. Our Father makes and fulfills prophecy around the feasts, using the elements of the feast to inform His people about what is going to happen, helping us to persevere in times of adversity. He reminds us that He is always in control, knowing (and declaring) the end from the beginning, and encouraging us to overcome. Through the recurring pattern of annual appointments with Him, salted throughout with various themes relating to His character and attributes, He reveals Himself to His people. He is the Center, the Rock, our Redeemer; on Him we can rely, we can trust and obey with full confidence that He doesn’t fail and He will never leave nor forsake those who place that confidence unreservedly in Him.

The major themes for Pesach (Passover) are redemption, renewal, salvation, and freedom. A picture is given to us of the people of God being released from Egypt to worship Him through a series of plagues visited on the Egyptians. The final plague was the death of all first-born children in houses (literally) that were not protected through obedience by marking the

doorframe with the blood of a lamb. Egypt is symbolic of the evil world system (or sin), the blood of the lamb was foreshadowing the Blood of the Messiah (the Lamb of God), and the meal is symbolic of the flesh of the Messiah, which Yahshua (Jesus) declares to be His Word in John 6. At first the appointment was for remembering Egypt and freedom, and to look forward to the Messiah. After the resurrection, the feast reminds us of His sacrifice (Luke 22:19) that saved us from the curses of sin, and we look forward to eventual permanent freedom of body, soul, and spirit in the final form of the Kingdom. In the meantime, through this appointment we celebrate our present release from captivity and rejoice in the freedom of bond service to our Father. This is part of our sanctification process, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the prize of the upward calling of God in Yahshua haMashiach (Jesus the Messiah) (Philippians 3:13,14).

With all due respect (which I admit is very little) to the boneheads who are afraid some will be “Left Behind,” this may very well be a picture of our future deliverance. The plagues bear a remarkable resemblance to the plagues in the book of the Revelation, and for those who have eyes to see both processes appear to be nearly identical. What if events were to happen in an entirely different fashion than that popularized in current so-called “Christian fiction?” What a concept! I don’t think they realize just how much fiction they are producing.

Themes associated with Hag HaMatzah (hahg-ha-maht-saw, Unleavened Bread) include cleansing (baptism); sanctification; purity; removing sin and Yahshua as our *mikveh* (baptism). All yeast (or leaven, which symbolizes sin) is removed from the house, which teaches us about purification, sanctification, and leaving sin behind (in Egypt, as it were). In place of sin we live on the Word of God, the Bread of Life, Yahshua our Messiah (the unleavened bread). There is also a baptism (symbolized by going through the Red Sea), which helps us understand cleansing and identification with YHVH. The Sea is a *mikveh* (Hebrew for literally “a gathering of waters,” the place where baptisms take place) which IS Yahshua. He is our baptism, our identity, our cleansing. One of these days we will experience a final cleansing and entry into the eternal reality of the Kingdom.

HaBikkurim (hah-bic-er-eem, First Fruits) starts the beginning of counting the weeks until Shavuot; and includes the offering to God of the first fruits of the spring harvest. Yahshua (Jesus) offered Himself as the first fruits of the resurrection according to Paul (I Corinthians 15:23). Those of us who belong to Him are also a sort of “first fruits” according to James 1:18.

Shavuot (shaw-voo-oat, Pentecost) gives us the themes of reception of instructions for holy living (His Word) from the “breath” (Holy Spirit) of God (man does not live by bread alone); the Akeidah (ah-kay-daw or the binding of Isaac) and the first (or left) trump of redemption. The first Shavuot in Exodus 19 and the Shavuot in Acts chapter 2 are very similar. Both have flames (or lightnings) symbolizing purification, both have the Spirit of God moving (breath = wind = words), and at both the Words of God were delivered for us to live by. At the first Shavuot people died, at the other people lived. The Word at the first one was delivered on stone tablets; in Acts it was written on the heart. This feast is also called the Feast of Weeks because we count about seven weeks between it and First Fruits.

The Akeidah is the story of the binding of Isaac, and of Abraham's obedience in offering him as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). It figures into both Shavuot and Yom Teruah, but its association with Shavuot comes from the voice of God represented as a shofar sounding louder and louder (Exodus 19:16,19), and horns are also reminders of the sin of the golden calf worship (Exodus 32, idolatry). It is a picture of the sacrifice made by the Father using His Son (Yahshua) for our redemption. The ram caught by its horns (two) was the substitute, just as Yahshua (Jesus) was the substitute for us. The first horn (left horn) symbolizes the first redemption.

Yom Teruah has a veritable plethora (fancy way of saying a whole bunch) of themes. There is a king's coronation (who is our king, the calf or God?) perhaps best pictured in Daniel 7:9,10,13,14 (related to Revelation 4:1,2), where books are opened and judgment is made (that's why this scene is associated with this holy day), and the Son of Man is given a kingdom (dominion and glory). The meaning of the word Teruah means "awake" or "shout," and Yom Teruah literally means "Day of Awakening Blast" (or shout). So we wake up from the sleep of sin to repentance, or from spiritual lack of awareness to resurrection.

Other themes that I don't have space to talk about here are marriage; concealment, and the last (or right) trump of the Akeidah. Sweetness is prominent in the food we eat; my wife Susan likes to call this the "feast of Sugar." Scripture includes Isaiah 27:13; Isaiah 52:1 and I Corinthians 15:52. These are prophetic of resurrection, our gathering together with Him, our "wedding" with Him, and our being hidden on the Day of Wrath (Yom Kippur). Remember that God switched this month with the month of Pesach. Even though many call this the "head of the year" (Rosh HaShanah), it really is in the seventh month. Also, even though now it is a two-day event (because of its starting right smack on the new moon), it is supposed to be only one day long.

Yom Kippur (yohm-key-poor, Day of Atonement), although solemn, has only a few but very important themes. The main theme is Atonement/Judgment. For believers there is atonement, and for those who do not have a sacrifice (the Messiah) there is only judgment. Those who do not repent before this day can only see "smoke and burning," but believers have access to His presence through the Messiah. The shofar is also sounded on this day but with a different meaning. As a matter of fact it is called the shofar haGadol, "the Great Trump." You might recognize this from a statement of Yahshua (Jesus) in Matthew 24:31.

Sukkot (sue-coat, Feast of Tabernacles) – resurrection; rewards; rest; thanksgiving; rejoicing; celebration; also called the Season of Our Joy and the Feast of Nations. Some scriptures that are associated with this feast are Isaiah 26:17-21; Psalm 27:5; and Psalm 47:5 (ascended = coronation, shouts of joy, trumpets). This could be called God's Camping Trip because of traveling to Jerusalem and living in tents. We live in tents during this time to remind us that Yahshua dwelt with us for a while, and we will dwell with Him when He sets up His Kingdom and reigns from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. We have joy now because we are free in Him, and we will be even freer when He comes and we are with Him.

The eighth feast on our list is Shabbat (shah-baht, Sabbath), which has strong themes of rest and fellowship. The first Shabbat was observed by God Himself and recorded for us in Genesis 2:1-3. There seems to be something supernatural in obeying the Father's instructions on this (which is true for all of His instructions or Torah, but we "feel" it more here). Resting on this particular

day has peculiar far-reaching aspects to it. It reaches deep into your soul, and unwinds you in a way that brings peace and contentment to every fiber of your being. Part of this could be from “resonating” with the Father’s Spirit because of obedience. Part of it could be that we “do” what we see the Father “do,” and that creates a spiritual bond with Abba (our “daddy”) through which flows His presence or peace (shalom). Or part of it could be that your own physical rhythms move at the same rhythm that the Father set with an end of the week rest. Hmm. It couldn’t be that He built you and knows what you need, could it? Nah, that can’t be it.

Yahshua (Jesus) in the Mo’edim. Jesus is the focus of the mo’edim, the beginning and the goal. In the mo’edim we are privileged to physically connect with our Redeemer. To worship God with all our mind, soul and strength includes anything we can physically change to honor His Word to us.

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts— they came from you, O Zion; the reproach of exile is a burden on them.” Zephaniah 3:17,18 NASB

I have already highlighted some of the ways that Yahshua is found in the feasts, but here is a summary. Yahshua is our Pesach lamb (passover), the unleavened bread we live on (haMatzah), the promise of our eventual resurrection (haBikkurim). He is the one who gives us His Word to live by through the power of His Torah and His Spirit (Shavuot). We blow shofars to wake people up to repent and come to Him, and He is the bridegroom that will come for His bride and also the soon to be crowned King (Yom Teruah). We remember the atonement He makes for us, and fast and pray that the judgment is postponed as long as possible so as many as possible will also accept His blood for payment of sins and come to Him (Yom Kippur). He lived in a human body, or tabernacled among us sharing our temptations, trials, and afflictions. We know that we also dwell in tabernacles (our bodies), and we are only here for a little while, and will eventually dwell in a place that will be so harmless we will not need houses (Sukkot).

Discipleship in the mo’edim. The feasts influence our discipleship by their themes. Through Pesach we declare our freedom from sin, and if there is any lingering problems we can declare freedom from those as we go. It is interesting to note that the seven days of hag haMatzot (Unleavened Bread) give us a running start to drop a bad habit, and the 49 days up to Shavuot (Pentecost) help to cement the new behavior. We are to realize that we are representatives (First Fruits) of the harvest through the Messiah to the Father, and He brings us to Shavuot to reinforce our Father’s will for holy living on earth as it is in heaven. Because we don’t continue in His Word or Will, or are otherwise defiled by the world, we need to repent and be re-cleansed (Yom Teruah) and restored (Yom Kippur), then after passing under the rod of discipline (Yom Kippur) we live happily ever after in His Will (millennial kingdom and beyond). As these events are repeated each year, we practice His presence, we are reminded of His power and promises, and we are encouraged to persevere through tribulation and overcome the world.

May your rhythms be His rhythms
 Bruce Scott Bertram
 Won’t Make It To Mainstream Ministries