

# Question: “How Do I Find Meaning in the Feasts of the Lord?”



How do I find meaning in the Feasts of the Lord?

(I won't accept any comments about Christmas and Easter, or digs at our mainstream Christian brothers and sisters or Christianity because that is not the point of this message and never should be. We have spent too much time looking in the rearview mirror and not enough focusing on our Biblical heritage.)

One of the most common questions I get before the Feasts – and I am not making fun or anyone or criticizing here because I struggle with this as well – is the result of a mindset that was trained into us in mainstream Christianity and therefore is entirely understandable and natural. In fact, it is terribly difficult to break out of because we don't even realize that the question itself is not the right question but instead a symptom of a much larger problem.

“How do I find meaning in the Feasts/how do I make the Feasts meaningful for X.”

Now that didn't seem like a strange question, did it? Of course not. We were brought up in a commercialized mess around Christmas and Easter, and the slogans abounded – “don't forget the true meaning.” We therefore just naturally learned to think about modern Christian observances in those terms, because it really was hard to think about the “true meaning” in the midst of an incredibly secular holiday that bore little

resemblance to anything that Yeshua (Jesus) or the apostles would have done in their lives. As individualists, it is vitally important to us that we find personal meaning in what we do, and we don't like doing things that don't have meaning to us – as though God should only be acknowledged in praise if we are in the mood, despite our need and obligation to acknowledge His glory even when we don't "feel it."

So when we find out about the Feasts, we are very used to holidays that were tailor made to "have meaning for us" and were frankly designed to appeal to all our desires for fulfillment through entertainment, gift giving and receiving, celebration dinners, wonderful family times, lavish decorations designed to engage the senses, etc. We are used to "holy days" being a lot of fun by modern standards. We lost sight of why God's holy days were actually enjoyable to His people in Yeshua's day.

Feasts in Yeshua's day were enjoyable because all the people in the Land, and some from far off Lands, had all come together to worship the King of kings and Lord of lords. That was a good enough reason for them to be joyful – it thrilled their hearts to hear the Levites sing Psalms and play instruments. It was meaningful for them to watch the daily Tamid offerings in God's honor. The meaning of the Feasts was not about them, their enjoyment or personal fulfillment – they naturally felt enjoyment and were personally fulfilled because their God was being exalted. They heard His Name being praised and that was enough, they found joy in it. They saw the Temple ceremonies, and that was enough, they found joy in it.

Ancient people intrinsically understood that worship was not about themselves and they didn't need to find deep meaning in it – they knew the God/god/goddess was deserving of all honor, glory, and praise and it gave them joy when that was being performed. They worshiped not as individuals but as a community, on the same day and doing the same exact things and that oneness gave their praise all the meaning it needed.

We, on the other hand, are just shamelessly individualistic and we seek out the meaning for ourselves, for personal

reasons to get us in the mood. It is very important “what this means to me, ” and that feeling is amplified when we no longer have the shared cultural experiences of Christmas and Easter when even the secular world joins in the celebration to one extent or another; we still derive meaning and satisfaction and relief when we are joined with many other voices in what we are doing, as if that lends a sense of legitimacy in our psyche.

When we switch over to the Feasts, we find ourselves in a pickle with Biblical days that look incredibly foreign to us and are not designed to appeal to our traditional sensibilities of what it looks like to honor God; we often unconsciously seek that same sort of meaning in the new/old as we did in the Christian celebrations. Add to that the unfortunate tendency of too many to tear down absolutely anything “traditional” – often due to a lack of understanding – and people feel empty and drifting. On top of that, some desire to “only do what Scripture says” when Scripture gives us about 30 minutes worth of instructions and leaves us flat the rest of the day. I don’t know about you, but I can only eat and drink so much before I am not joyful anymore.

We have a problem – we subconsciously want to find meaning in the Feasts on Christian terms while pushing away Christianity and want to find our Hebrew Roots without looking at how the Jews do things. We end up, all too frequently, between worlds – turning our noses up at anything that looks Christian while still seeking out the kinds of joy we had at Christmas and Easter, and shunning anything Jewish while deeply desiring the obvious joy that they take in the Feasts.

End game: we are still approaching things the same old way we did as individualistic Western Christians, except that we no longer have the joy that they have and we refuse to move on to the way community-centered Jews do things and don’t have their obvious joy in worshiping God either. We denounce their traditions and “Halakah” and are forced to make up our own based on what little is written in Scriptures – and then lament that we find little joy or meaning in them. Food for thought, “Why is our Halakah, our made up traditions based on

what we think the text is saying, any superior to theirs?"

Of course, we find no joy! – If our goal is to find meaning for ourselves when the meaning is and always has been the exaltation of God through community psalms, prayers, dancing, feasting and yes, traditions – then we will fail. If our goal is simply to not do things in a Jewish or Christian way and presume that what we come up with will be more “authentic” then again, the focus is on ourselves and our own efforts. We spend anti-holy days – days devoted to not doing this or that instead of days devoted to God. It feels righteous at first, but all too often our efforts are fear-based, and an exercise in futility – and they become self-righteous instead.

Feasts are not about us; they are about the worship we owe to the Creator, to come together as one on set days and be united in our praises. That is what we should take joy in, the way that collective praise thunders through the universe on set days. It isn't about us – it's a celebration of what He has done for us.

Is there meaning in the Feasts beyond that? Of course – historically and spiritually, at the plain text as well as in the deepest mystical levels, there is a fountain of meaning deeper than the universe itself – but first, we have to learn to take joy in something that, at its most basic and profound levels, is all about Him. We must learn to worship without any part of it being about us.

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## **The Amidah: Approaching God as King and Provider**



The Amidah Pt 2  
The Patron/Client Context of Prayer

For the next few months, we will be exploring all the places where the **Amidah**, also known as **The Eighteen**, or **standing prayers**, show up in the New Testament, but first I want to give the context of what these

prayers meant in the ancient world. To begin, I happened upon a realization last week that has changed everything for me even though I have been praying them for some time now.

It started with a strange dream about my going back to school – I had a class schedule and from 6:30 to 7:30 three nights a week I saw that I had “music lessons.” That was it, with no accompanying description. So, I went to my bookshelf that first night and grabbed Mowinckel’s *Psalms in Israel’s Worship*. Decided to read it from the beginning this time and not just pick and choose chapters. The first chapter had a special note that about knocked me over:

In Hebrew, the Psalms are called *Tehillim* – and *Tehillim* is derived from the word *hillel*, meaning:

“the utterance of **shouts of joy** and **exultation** arising from an overwhelming feeling of **exaltation** and **strength** and **pride**...implies **shouting** in **honor** of somebody.” pg 219 Note:1 (emphasis mine)

The Psalms were an integral part of Israel’s prayer book, incorporated into the Temple service and quoted prolifically in both the liturgical prayers and rituals during the first and second Temple times. The Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls bear witness to the usage of these Psalms in the Temple on specific days and at specific festivals, as do other contemporary writings. It is only in relatively modern times that both Jewish and Christian scholars removed the Psalms from this context with subtitles such as, “Composed by David after his adultery with Bathsheba” when we find no such

ancient associations. Indeed, it became a popular pastime to try and guess which Psalms were written by who and what life event to match them up with, as opposed to viewing them with regards to the Temple and its services. But these associations are not in the original text; they are really just legends created by scholars.

That being said, I looked once again at the Amidah prayers with new eyes based on Mowinckel's note.

Psalms – uttered as shouts of joy, exultation combined with feelings of strength and pride – in honor of God. This clearly fits in with the ancient honor/shame culture of Scriptural times – when honoring a God or a King meant to lavish them with praise for their excellence; laud their achievements; proclaim the height and breadth and depth of their authority. It also meant to present all one's petitions at their feet as though they and they alone had the ability to open their hand and supply every need.

This is the essence of the patron/client context of the ancient world – where money meant nothing compared to prestige, and money would be freely spent to purchase greater levels of renown. Let me explain:

In the first century (probably back to the dawn of time, really), those who were in need – be they artisans or farmers, people seeking appointment to office or alms – would gather in the courtyard of a great house and petition the lord or lady of that house to supply their need. The great lord or lady was called a **patron**, or a **benefactor**, and they graciously extended their hand to meet the need of the petitioner, called a **client**. Although this was a gift given freely (no I am not making this language up), it was universally understood that the person who received that gift was expected to give back to their benefactor. The artist would dedicate their works; the farmer would return the blessing with food for their sponsor's table; the man who received a good word and who was placed

into a position of authority used it for the benefit of the patron; the beggar did what all of them were expected to do – proclaim the glory and increase the good reputation of the great man or woman who had met their need. In return, the patron, seeing that his gift had not been met with ingratitude, would be very pleased to meet another need in the future and the cycle would continue. This relationship had a name – **charis** – and in the Epistles of Paul, that is the word translated as **grace**.

Paul used this specific cultural relationship to explain our mutual relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). In it, he described what Jews already knew- God, and God alone is our great patron and Yeshua the Divine Mediator between God and man. The prayers of the Temple and synagogue are spoken in the language and tone of grateful petitioners before their Patron King, Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them, Author of Life, Salvation, Redemption, Forgiveness and All That Is Good. Like the Herald in a royal court, the prayers first address the Patron Sovereign in adoration, and then the audience shifts and the worshipper starts addressing all of Creation, and then turns attention back again to address the Master. I am going to borrow some text from [chabad.org](http://chabad.org) to show you what happens in the prayers and how it reflects the honor and royalty of our Great God and King:

As in a true royal court, the petitioner **steps forward into the presence of the King** and then **bends the knee and bows** as he proclaims:

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d and G-d of our fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac and G-d of Jacob, the great, mighty and awesome G-d, exalted G-d, who bestows bountiful kindness, who creates all things, who remembers the piety of the Patriarchs, and who, in love, brings a redeemer to their children's children, for the sake of His Name.

He bends the knee and bows again as he says:

O King, (You are) a helper, a savior, and a shield. Blessed are You L-rd, Shield of Abraham.

You are mighty forever, my L-rd; You resurrect the dead; You are powerful to save.

This would happen in courtyards all over the world in ancient times as people drew near to pay tribute to their patrons in praise, for the sake of their honor. Now watch the intended audience change to humanity and all of Creation:

He sustains the living with loving kindness, resurrects the dead with great mercy, supports the falling, heals the sick, releases the bound, and fulfills His trust to those who sleep in the dust.

This would also happen in the ancient world – those who received patronage wouldn't just thank and praise their patron, they would tell everyone about the patron's greatness and generosity. Again, the audience shifts back to God in adoration:

Who is like You, mighty One! And who can be compared to You, King, who brings death and restores life, and causes deliverance to spring forth!

The prayers, all eighteen sections, go back and forth like this during the Feast liturgies as the Nation gathers to pay tribute to our God and King with one voice, in one accord – speaking to Him and to all Creation. Proclaiming the adoration of the one who has given us so much, speaking with absolute respect, and speaking those praises to the world as well. But there's more:

After proclaiming faith in God's abilities, generosity, and promises, we come before Him with every conceivable need that we, as an entire nation, have. We pray for all of us as one

people – these are not selfish prayers, but selfless prayers for the common good. These petitions, far from being “gimme gimme” prayers, are proclamations straight out of Scripture of God’s promises and our request that He act on our collective behalf. The Amidah, far from being a series of vain repetitions, acknowledges God as the One who controls absolutely everything – by coming to Him with all of our needs, we are saying that He is all we need. We have no need of other gods before Him, or beside Him. He is our all in all.

This was how one showed respect in the ancient world, and it was a good system – much superior to the one we have today where we so easily forget and walk away from those who been generous to us as soon as they annoy us, or because we can’t be bothered to thank them. The patron/client system was one of absolute loyalty – people in the ancient world would be ashamed not to give back to their benefactor. Not so with us, we feel entitled to take and take and take and so the Amidah seems foreign to us. We don’t know how to properly thank and treat even the mere men and women who have given much to us, and so we look at such prayers to God as excessive.

They aren’t excessive; we are simply stingy with our gratitude. I want you to think about that – because we are not stingy with our requests, just with our thankfulness. Is God our King? Do we treat Him with less attention than we would lavish on a celebrity or traveling dignitary? Can we praise Him too much? Can it be excessive to proclaim the truth about His attributes daily?

Tell me, would a King who hates “excessive” praise be surrounded with angels who cry out “Holy, holy, holy,” 24/7/365 forever? I am thinking the answer to that would be no – although really, how can one excessively praise God in the first place? Such a thing is impossible.

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# The Amidah and the New Testament I: Long Prayers and Vain Repetitions?



Is there any truth to the accusation that the liturgical prayers of the synagogues amount to the “vain repetitions” and long prayers” or, as other translations render it “many words” or “empty words” which we hear about in the New Testament?

Mark 12:38-40 And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and **for a pretense** make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

Matthew 6:5-13 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to **stand and pray** in the synagogues and at the street corners, **that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you; they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, **do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their **many words**. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.”

These verses are often spoken in an attack against the Standing Prayers, the Amidah or Shemoneh Esrei (the Eighteen) that we still see today in Judaism. However, some translation problems and missing pieces of context are very troublesome in that regard. Have we been too quick to discount the prayers?

(1) First of all, I want to discuss the Matthew verses – especially the “do not heap up empty phrases like the Gentiles.” I chose the ESV because some other versions use the phrase “vain repetitions” instead. The word in Greek is βατταλογήσητε – meaning “to prattle” – which is itself defined as “to talk in an inconsequential way.” Older translations like the KJV say “vain repetitions” but we have a problem, because it is not supported by the word choice, nor the text and it is frankly ridiculous to presume that the translators were attacking all formalized prayer because, at the time, Protestants prayed out of formalized prayer books – just as Catholics and Jews did. No, the repetitions are not the problem – the vain nature of them is the problem.

It is possible that the KJV translators had an anti-semitic or anti-Catholic agenda here, and given the times, I would not be shocked if this was the case as they already showed their hands in their very selective translation of *ekklesia* negatively as *synagogue* and positively as *church*. These were, after all, men of their times as are all translators.

(2) What is being attacked here – the prayers themselves? No, the intentions and heart condition of the person who is praying! Don't read over the caveats, "*For a pretext*" and "*that they may be seen by others*" and the implication that they are **only** praying when in public – that when alone in their room they do **not** pray and would not bother to pray if alone. Someone who is truly devoted will pray whether they are at the synagogue or home alone.

(3) Are the phrases in the prayer books (whether Jewish, Catholic or Protestant) "**empty?**" Well, if they are taken from Scripture the answer is "Absolutely not!" Having never actually prayed out of a Catholic prayerbook or the Protestant Common Book of Prayer, I can't speak to those, and it is beside the point as well as off topic (please, **please** no diatribes against them in the comments), but I can speak to the Amidah.

There are no empty or careless words in the Amidah prayers – they are taken from Scripture, inspired by Scripture, and repeat the promises and admonishments of Scripture. The Amidah Prayers pretty much speaking God's own words right back to Him in praise and petition.

(4) The Amidah prayers are spoken silently, under the breath, and so no one should be able to make a show of praying them – that's the point of them, they are private, and yet corporate, all at once. No extra points for sounding super spiritual and emotional while praying.

(5) The "Lord's Prayer" is, in and of itself, a short version of the Amidah, the Standing Prayer. It would have provided a way for the Am Ha'aretz to pray three times a day without reciting the entire long version of the prayer – and quite possibly getting into trouble at work because many Jews in those days were slaves. If we are going to attack prayers that are by their very format repetitive – we would naturally have to start with that one as more people repeat that prayer than

any other in the Judeo-Christian world. If we hold that prayer to the same standards that have been used against the Amidah – then we can't pray it in public, or with others, or in our assemblies – in fact, we can only legalistically do it alone in a room with the door closed. Do we truly think that Yeshua (Jesus) was telling people to only pray that prayer in a room alone with the doors closed or was He making a larger point here?

I submit that He was, in fact, making some grand statements –

“Don't just prattle on and make God listen to it and think that because you are praying in an “organic” manner that God will hear you. God already knows what we are thinking – when we pray, it needs to be more about Him than about us.”

“There is a time for pouring out your heart to God and a time for acknowledging Him as King and God corporately (with one voice) and privately. Both are necessary to our spiritual life.”

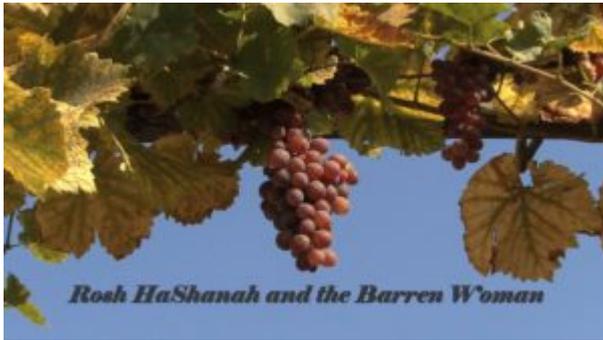
“Don't pray in order to look impressive, just don't.”

“If you are only willing to pray when other people are around, well, that's just messed up.”

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## **Rosh HaShanah and the Barren Woman**

The period from Tishri 1 to Tishri 10, Rosh HaShanah (or Yom



Teruah) to Yom haKippurim, is identified with the Coronation/Enthronement of God as King as well as with righteous judgment and enactments of vindication and restoration. We see this nowhere

so beautifully as in the Scriptural readings of Rosh HaShanah; the stories of the birth and life of Sarah's only child in Gen 21 and 22, and in the Haftarah reading of barren Hannah's cries to the Lord and subsequent deliverance. Both of these rich histories contain God's vindication of their honor, of Sarah's before Hagar and Hannah's in sight of the perennially fertile concubine Penninah in I Sam chapters 1 and 2.

These women and these particular children tell us the grand story of our King and how He works, not through those to whom the world would like to ascribe honor, but often in direct opposition to the world's ideas about who is and is not blessed and worthy.

(Being barren myself, life in religious spheres was rather like one of Dante's fictional levels of hell. People say insanely cruel things in ignorance – and sometimes even on purpose. I smile to myself now, however – all those years ago and even after the wonderful adoption of our sons, while enduring those comments – I had a dream that my husband and I would have 100 children, none of them biological. I wondered how it could happen even up until about a year ago, and now I minister to children from all over the world through books and videos. The world does not see as God sees.)

Women who have children often take it for granted that it is some automatic badge of God's favor; yet what percentage of fertile women were mentioned in the Bible (associated with their children) by name, and how many barren women are called to our attention? Do we hear about the righteousness of David's mother, do we even know her name? No. We do, however,

all know the name of the woman who would be vindicated through the birth of the prophet who anointed him as king. Was it not barren Rachel's son Joseph, and not Reuben, who saved his people?

Sarah, Rebekkah, Rachel, Samson's mother (pretty sure her name was withheld to protect her virtue because dang, that boy..), Hannah, and Elizabeth – all were barren. These were women who are remembered and who gave birth after all hope was lost, and not to normal kids, but instead to amazing men of God. Only David's wife Michael, out of all the women in Scripture, was cursed with barrenness after mocking her husband – whereas we see that Jezebel never had need of a fertility doctor, or Athaliah for that matter and she killed all of her children!

To drive the point home that more is not always desirable and that worldly standards of honor are relative and sometimes deceptive, take a look at the end of the Scripture reading in the portions about the birth of Isaac. In Genesis 22, we see the fecundity of Abraham's brother Nahor in league with his wife and concubine. Together these three had twelve sons, only one being notable, but not for the usual reasons that a son is counted as notable. One of the sons became the father of the Matriarch Rebekkah. From Abraham sprang many great nations from relatively few, and from his brother Nahor sprang a granddaughter who would become Israel's mother. I am confident that, given a choice, he and his wife would rather have given birth to a son who would be noted for more than siring a girl – times being what they were.

Is this to say that barren women are somehow superior to the fertile – certainly not, that would be silly – but I am saying that the actions of our King tell us that we cannot judge the value of a woman by whether or not she bears children young – or at all. The picture painted through these carefully chosen Scripture readings is larger than simply childbearing – this is about the fruit that a woman bears and the vindication that comes as a result of it. We will all be judged and will be

rewarded according to what we produce, by the King who has written all of our actions in His Book of Remembrance. That of fruit can be generated in youth, for certain, but age is no barrier – sometimes the best first fruits come from a presumably barren and shameful tree.

A fertile woman might bear ten wretched children (just ask Haman), and a noble woman may produce only one, or none – as in the case of the prophetess Anna who was day by day at the Temple (Luke 2:36-38).

It is the desire of our flesh to look at whatever we have, whether it be a lot of kids, money, worldly success, popularity, etc., as a sign of God's favor. The truest sign of God's favor, however, is to be found in the good fruit He allows us and inspires and alters us to produce – starting on the inside. Without Him, there is no acceptable fruit. Sarah was probably barren for over 70 years, Rebekkah for 40 years, and so on and so on. I am sure they tried, but unlike the other women around them, they could not just place their faith in their flesh to produce that fruit. Make no mistake – finding out that we cannot place our faith in the flesh is a positive thing that few people in this life truly realize. We have been called to the same kind of life – we can't just go through the motions in our flesh and call it good, no matter how amazing the result looks from the outside. To produce something excellent, we must see ourselves as barren trees in need of that divine intervention.

These women had to live by faith, and not by flesh – and they showed us the way. They had to wait on God's timing and pruning to produce, not just ordinary fruit, but exceptional fruit. It is a model for every one of us, male and female; to produce something that is mature and good takes time and, generally, a lot of anguish. It won't happen just because we want it to, or when we want it – impatient flesh is how you get an Ishmael or the forgotten children of Penninah, not an Isaac or a Samuel.

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# New Moon, Full Moon? Psalm 81 and its Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShannah Context



So, first of all, make sure you read the bibliography at the end if you want access to the source material I have been studying lately.

Second, I use Yom Teruah and Rosh HaShanah interchangeably – why? Because Tishri 1 is given no official name in Scripture – it is a concealed day, as I will show. Both names are traditional descriptions because of the nature of the day – which is multi-dimensional, but I will save that for a future blogpost. (If you are interested now in why it is considered the beginning of one of the Biblical new years, my Context for Kids video on [Torah Portion Phineas](#) actually explains this)

Third, I want to explain what a Targum is – the Targumim were Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible for the common people during times that were roughly contemporary with the writing of the Gospels and Epistles. The Scripture would be read in Hebrew in the synagogue and then the paraphrase was given in Aramaic – but don't fret about the word paraphrase, all that means is that the Targumim show us how the Scriptures were commonly understood in the days of Yeshua/Jesus. In other words, they were a form of commentary. I am including the text

here of Psalm 81, which I ask you to read, focusing on the first five verses:

## Psalm 81 ([translated by Edward M Cook and available here](#))

1. For praise; on *the lyre that comes from Gath, composed* by Asaph.
2. Give praise in the presence of God, our strength; shout in the presence of the God of Jacob.
3. Lift up *the voice in* praise, and set out timbrels, the lyre *whose sound is* sweet with harps.
4. [Blow the horn in the month of Tishri, in the month in which the day of our festivals is concealed.](#)
5. For *he made a covenant* for Israel; it is a *legal* ruling of the God of Jacob.
6. He made it a testimony *for* Joseph, *who did not go near the wife of his master*; on *that day* he went out of the prison and ruled over all the land of Egypt. The tongue I did not know I *have taught [and] heard*.
7. I have removed his shoulder from servitude; his hands were taken away from *casting clay into* a pot.
8. In *the time of the distress of Egypt*, you called and I delivered you; I made you *fast* in the secret place *where my presence is, where wheels of fire call out before him*; I tested you by the waters of Dispute forever.
9. Hear, O my people, and I will bear witness for you, O Israel if you will *accept my word*.
10. There shall not be among you *worshippers of a foreign idol*, and you shall not bow down to a profane *idol*.
11. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open wide your mouth *with the words of Torah*, and I will fill it *with all good things*.
12. But my people did not *receive* my voice, and Israel did not want *my word*.
13. And I expelled them for the *thoughts* of their heart, they went away in their *wicked* counsel.

14. Would that my people had listened to me – that Israel would walk in my ways!
15. In a little while, I will humble their enemies, and I will turn my *strong blow* against their enemies.
16. The enemies of the Lord will be false to him, and their *harshness* will last forever.
17. But he will feed him with the *best of wheat bread*: and I will satisfy you with honey from the rock.

This is what is called an enthronement Psalm, and according to the Aramaic Targum above, it was sung on Tishri 1. When was it sung? In what is called the “Mussaf” – the special services of a Feast Day which included special sacrifices, Psalms, and on Tishri 1, the blowing of trumpets (over and over and over again). The Targums are important not because they provide an alternate text that is somehow superior to the Hebrew, but because they sometimes explain things that are no longer known to modern readers. But in this case, does the Targum line up with the Hebrew, or does the English? I can tell you right now – it does not line up with English translations of 81.3 which are often mistakenly used as part of the whole calendar debate when in fact they have nothing to do with it:

English: Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. (ESV (2001))

Aramaic: Blow the horn in the month *of Tishri*, in the month in which the day of our festivals is concealed.

LXX (Septuagint – 3rd C BCE) – Blow the trumpet at the new moon, in the glorious day of your feast.

Hebrew: תִּקְוּ וְחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר , בְּכֶסֶד לַיּוֹם חַגְגֵנוּ ; בְּכֶסֶד לַיּוֹם חַגְגֵנוּ בְּכֶסֶד לַיּוֹם חַגְגֵנוּ  
 תִּקְוּ וְחֹדֶשׁ שׁוֹפָר, or, transliterated **tikku v'chodesh shofar, b'kesseh l'yom chaggenu**

**tikku v'chodesh shofar** – no big mystery here – blow the shofar at the new moon, which agrees with both versions reasonably enough. What about the second part of the verse? Does it say

“full moon” or is that simply a traditional interpretation?

If you can read Hebrew or are familiar at least with words, *l'yom chaggenu* should be easily identified as *our feast-day*. This leaves one more word, *kesseh* – which does not mean full moon in this context (remember that Strongs will only tell you how a word is translated). It is from the lemma kaf samek aleph – related to words meaning *throne as well as covering*, and as the throne of Israel was always covered over with a canopy, a chuppah, therefore that throne was a *concealed* throne (just as the BRANCH of David, the Messianic King, was concealed). Psalm 81 was an enthronement Psalm, and when we read the Mussaf liturgy for Rosh HaShanah, we see it literally overflowing with overtones of the Messianic enthronement in the Last Day. So which version matches the original Hebrew the best? – Not shockingly, it is the Aramaic paraphrase written during the days when the Temple was still standing and all in attendance could hear this Psalm and understand its meaning.

Now as for the Targum – why did the paraphrase state “Tishri, in the month in which the day of our festivals is concealed?” Very simply, we know from Rosh HaShannah 2 (starting in 2.5) the process by which the new moon sightings were determined and the new month consecrated during Temple times. Until that validated sighting and consecration happened, the specific days of the festivals in the month of Tishri were *concealed*, unknown. The witnesses would come to the Temple and would then be individually questioned on exactly what the moon looked like when they saw it, which way they were facing, how high in the sky it was and which direction it was leaning. Not until they had matching testimony did the Head of the Sanhedrin call out “It is sanctified,” followed by a positive response from the rest of the Court, and the new month would be official – what was concealed was suddenly revealed! Very Messianic!

An understanding of Jewish eschatology and Feast language is vital to being able to eliminate so much of the modern

controversies about the Scriptures. Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, John and many others wrote within this context of intimately knowing about the Temple, the Feasts and the language surrounding them, and they used it without the need to explain it. Sadly, we did not grow up knowing this context and so we read and often fill holes with modern concepts without even knowing we are doing it. Knowledge is increasing, as Scripture promised, and we are blessed to live in such a time that being a scholar has never been easier – IF we know where to look for our answers.

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References: not all of these were used in this blog (\*\* next to the ones I am using), but just to give you some recommended reading if you are interested in the topic:

\*\*[The Lost Key Series](#) – Joseph Good – this series is indispensable, revealing the Fall Feast language hidden in plain sight all over Scripture

\*\*The Complete Artscroll Machzor – Mussaf service

\*\*The Psalms in Israel's Worship – Sigmund Mowinkel – the gold standard of authority on Psalms in worship. Written in the early 60's by a Christian theologian, he might just be the most quoted Christian scholar in the Jewish world. Yes, he's just that good.

\*\*Ancient Israel Vol 1 – Roland de Vaux – Part II Chap 5 – The Person of the King. This book talks about the enthronement ceremonies of ancient Israel.

Tractate Rosh haShanah

Rosh HaShannah and the Messianic Kingdom to Come – Joseph Good

\*\*The Book of our Heritage Vol 1 – Eliyahu Kitov

Entering the High Holy Days – Reuven Hammer

The High Holy Days – Reuven Kieval

The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days  
– Abraham Bloch

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## The Forty Days of Teshuva and the Temptation of Messiah



Hat tip to my Temple Teacher Joseph Good, who taught me much of this – and a whole lot more that I just cannot share with you because it would be a one thousand part blog. If this interests you, this is just a

small taste (a very small taste) of his teaching series [The Gathering](#) (click on the red link) and worth every penny to people who want to understand the New Testament and especially Revelation, which was written in Temple language according to Jewish eschatological beliefs at the time.

The Jewish Gospels of Matthew through John, as well as the Epistles and especially Revelation, are filled with references to the Jewish eschatological beliefs of the first century – if one knows the language. Sadly, this language has hardly been studied by our Christian forefathers over the centuries, giving way to beliefs grounded in what people presume the authors were talking about and resulting in a lot of popular speculation without serious scholarship – of which I myself have been more than guilty. Thus instead of being witness to the oft repeated Day of the Lord, the Millennial reign of

Messiah beginning with the tribulation, John was instead having a vision on a Sunday. The “Last Trumpet” referenced over and over again in Jewish writings as being the Last Trumpet blown in the Rosh Hashannah Temple ceremony becomes simply a random blast from Heaven calling home the elect, and the Great Trumpet of Yom Kippur gets lumped in with the seventh Trumpet of Revelation or the aforementioned Last Trumpet of Rosh HaShannah as though they were one in the same! We hear words like ‘arise’ and ‘awake’ and because we are not familiar with what the authors knew – the Temple ceremonies – we utterly miss and misinterpret what we are reading. We do not know when the ‘gates’ were opened and closed or when the ‘books’ were opened and closed. Whole theologies have sprung up in Christianity, Messianic Judaism, and in the Hebrew Roots movement, that utterly ignore the context that we find throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and extra-biblical Second Temple writings – but we do a great disservice to Jews like John the Apostle when we ignore what they knew, what our ancestors chose to walk away from or forget, or maybe never had a chance to know in the first place.

This has been sadly coupled with a growing and disturbing tendency to write off everything concerned with Judaism as having its roots in Babylonian religion – without a demand for the burden of proof to be presented. Having studied Babylonian religion, which we now know a great deal about because of the archaeological and linguistic advances of the past century and a half, I fail to see the connections. Babylon was no more overtly pagan than any other Ancient Near Eastern culture, and in some ways it was a good deal less pagan (it is hard to imagine anyone being more pagan than the Hittites). In Scripture, it is Egypt and Canaan which were repeatedly associated with paganism, whereas Babylon was associated with government in rebellion, commerce, pride, and warfare. In any event, the more I study the Jewish liturgies associated with the Feasts (which are a witness to the prayers and songs offered up to God during His feasts), the more I see the

language showing up in the Gospels and Epistles. Yeshua (Jesus) Himself makes repeated positive references to the Amidah (standing) prayers in His sermons (I will be detailing these in future blogs) as well as to many of the rituals practiced during the Feasts that pointed directly towards Himself.

Tomorrow begins the First of Elul, the beginning of the 40 days of corporate national repentance leading up to Yom Kippur (a practice based on the Book of Haggai, where in chapter one we see God repeatedly calling the returned Israelites to “Consider their ways” beginning on the first day of the sixth month, Elul 1). Many people will not participate, which I have no problem with, but some of those will cite as their reason Babylonian origins as though it is a proven fact, and I do have a problem with that. As someone who used to say those same things, I am embarrassed to admit that I was simply repeating what I had heard from everyone else – without actually studying the overwhelming amount of information we now have on the subject. They will draw upon the “40 days of weeping for Tammuz” which is an outright myth. Tammuz was not wept for over a period of 40 days – I have read the major research on Tammuz (Dumuzi), and every myth associated with him and his wife Ishtar (Inanna) and there is nothing there to suggest such a thing – despite many religious internet sites making said claims as though there is in fact proof. There was certainly weeping, but not out of any sense of repentance, and it was not for 40 days. If you would like to read what the research actually does say about the agricultural cycle and sympathetic weeping in the Tammuz cult, [click here](#).

But we do see a forty day episode at the very beginning of the ministry of Messiah that is very important. After His baptism in the Jordan, Yeshua is led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days. I believe that this time period is precisely this forty days of repentance for a couple of reasons:

(1) Although many Jewish writings of the Second Temple Period

proposed that Messiah will come on Yom Teruah (which is the day that kings were coronated), Yeshua Himself said that He would return to Jerusalem to reign on Yom Kippur after the Birthpangs of the Messiah (called the tribulation in Christianity):

Matthew 24:<sup>29</sup> “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a **loud trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

In Hebrew, this ‘loud trumpet call’ is not the Last Trumpet of Rosh Hasahhah, but the Tekiah Gedolah – the very loud and long trumpet call that is also associated with the onset of the Jubilee year (I once heard a ‘blast’ that went on for over a minute by a master shofar blower!). As the Jubilee marks the return of ancestral inheritances, and freedom from all debts, this trumpet signals both restoration and freedom. After a forty days absence, Yeshua would have re-emerged after not a one day, but a forty day long time of fasting and prayer, on Yom Kippur – the fortieth day. His first act of ministry was to emerge, as it were on Yom Kippur, foreshadowing His second coming as Messiah ben David, the conquering King.

(2) When John’s disciples see Yeshua, John says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” (John 1:29) and most people have historically taken this to mean the Passover Lamb – however, I am going to post a quote from Oscar Cullmann’s excellent book “The Christology of the New Testament” pg 71:

“But even the Fourth Gospel does not deal only with the necessity of the death of Jesus in general. It contains direct and precise reference to Is 53 in 1:29 and 1:36 in the testimony of John the Baptist: ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ ... that the Aramaic phrase אֲרַמַּיִתָּא אֲרַמַּיִתָּא which means both ‘Lamb of God’ and ‘Servant of God,’ very probably lies behind the Greek expression ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Since the expression, ‘Lamb of God’ is not commonly used in the Old Testament as a designation for the paschal lamb, it is probable that the author of John thought primarily of the *ebed Yahweh*.”

Here we see Cullmann’s excellent argument for Yeshua being referred to, in first century Aramaic terms, as the Servant of God, who takes away the sins of the world. What season was nearly upon them when John the Baptist spoke? The forty days of repentance which would be followed by Yom Kippur, when the sins of the nation would be taken away by the Azazel goat! Although Cullmann, writing in the 1950’s, mistakenly saw the Paschal Lamb according to Christian tradition as a sin sacrifice (which it was not, no mention is ever made of sin – the blood of the paschal Lamb instead marked households as the people of God just as Yeshua’s blood marks the believer), his observation leads to Yeshua instead being compared to the Feast at which He would emerge into the fullness of ministry, having faithfully endured temptation – showing us the way. We also face temptation of course, just not nearly as much! He, being perfect, had to go through a lot more than we could ever handle and hasatan really doesn’t have a free enough schedule to be deeply invested in any of us as individuals.

When I spend the time from Elul 1 to Tishri 10 doing very deep soul searching, I am reminded of Messiah being tempted by the Enemy in the wilderness. In fact, like clockwork, things happen in my life heading up to Elul 1 (starting after Shavuot/Pentecost) that challenge me very deeply – there are generally hardships and betrayals and a lot of craziness that

reveal my still very much alive character flaws – flaws that I am tempted to justify, coping mechanisms that I want to wallow in, grudges that I am tempted to nurse, hardships that I am tempted to celebrate my own personal little pity party over, memories of justice I have denied to others in the past and the restoration I am required to bring, or new dilemmas for which I have no answer. Sometimes there are even successes that tempt me either towards pride or the feeling that I am being vindicated over my enemies. This year I am experiencing all of these at the same time, and I feel as though I am (again) being led into the wilderness in order to deal with them.

But should this not be what happens when we follow Yeshua? When we follow Him, does it not lead us in the same paths that He Himself walked? No, we aren't called to fast for 40 days, but I do feel that we are called into the wilderness of our own souls in order to pray and fight against the temptations of hasatan in this very prophetic season.

I have been asked – “Could this be the inspiration for the Catholic Lent season?” Quite possibly – they traditionally put the Temptation of Messiah in the spring before Passover, and the fasting of Lent mimics the 40 days of Yeshua in the wilderness in preparation for public ministry. That being said, I haven't actually done the footwork to prove the connection so all I can say is, “It does make a logical argument.” Though I have to say, that according to the available material on the subject – I sincerely doubt it was a conscious choice and had more to do with what they thought Yeshua was doing than with what He actually was doing.