

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #17

God's Appointed Times for Worship

Kenny Kitzke

LawstSheep Ministries

Blessed be you on the Lord's Sabbath Day!

In this 52-week series I feel blessed to honor and praise the Lord of the Sabbath. One of the ways to honor Jesus is to worship God as children on the days the LORD appointed for holy convocations. Naturally, this includes the weekly Sabbath day of rest with a holy convocation and worship on the seventh day of the week which we now call Saturday.

But, just as important, is our group communal worship on the annual holy days that the LORD appointed as memorials to Him and to His Son. They occur during the three annual Feasts of the LORD which were initially given to Israel to be observed FOREVER in God's Promised Land.

Of course, these Feasts have an historic basis for the nation of Israel. As such, they were only shadows of things to come. They foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, first as our spotless Passover Lamb, next as our risen High Priest and finally at His second coming when He returns with glory as King over all the earth and LORD of all!

In observing the Feasts of the LORD, we not only obey, worship and glorify God, we have the chance to share with family and friends God's future plan of salvation revealed in those feasts and holy days. God intervened personally to save His chosen people Israel from bondage and death in Egypt and He delivered them to His physical Promised Land flowing with milk and honey.

God again personally intervened through His Son to offer salvation to ALL mankind who will believe in His Son as their Savior covered by His shed blood on the doorposts of our life. God will save all those believers, called the church of God in Jesus Christ, from bondage to sin and its death penalty and will deliver them to a spiritual Kingdom of God and a new heavenly Jerusalem flowing with love, peace and joy forever and ever.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Feasts and Holy Days of the LORD. And, they go on to foretell events in God's plan yet to come. This includes the return of Jesus as King of kings at the end of this age, and the world as we have known it, with the establishment of the new and renewed eternal heavens and earth.

Through His feasts and holy days, the LORD also communicates what will happen to those who refuse to believe in His Son as their Savior. Who isn't interested in knowing what the future holds for those who will eventually be judged by Jesus as to eternal life or death beyond this present mortal existence?

In this program, I will begin to address how to determine God's appointed times for these feasts and holy days. Is there a problem here needing discussion? Well, "no" and "yes!" "No" in the sense that God plainly gives us the appointed months and the days for His feasts and holy days. For example, we know from the Bible that God appointed Abib 15 as the first holy day of the year during His Feast of Unleavened Bread. And, we know that God appointed Tishri 15 as the first day of His Feast of Tabernacles.

But, "yes" there is a problem in the sense that it is NOT perfectly clear from the Bible how one determines when those months and days are on TODAY'S Gregorian calendar; the one now used by men in every corner of the earth.

The Feasts of the LORD, and His appointed holy days of worship, were given to Israel by God through Moses at Mt. Sinai. Moses wrote down God's instructions in Hebrew in what is called the Pentateuch, meaning the first five books of the Bible.

Obviously, Moses knew how to determine the timing of God's appointed times of worship. There was a "calendar," or a way for keeping track of time, that God either gave to Moses or had established by command and practice beginning perhaps with Adam and Eve and being passed down through the Patriarchs. Moses, and the leaders of Israel, must have understood God's calendar so that they could properly proclaim the Feasts of the LORD to the Israelites as commanded by God.

And, at the time of Jesus, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem apparently still knew how to determine when to keep the appointed holy days of worship of the LORD. If they had it wrong, I would think that Jesus, or one of His Apostles, would have preached about it, or written a letter of correction, to the current and future believers in Christ for any deviations from what God had commanded them to do. I see no such sacred "calendar" corrections written by Jesus or His apostles in the Bible.

So, if the Jews knew how to determine and proclaim God's commanded appointed times for group worship during the ministry of Jesus, they must still know it and do it correctly today, right? This was my first inclination when I was led to keep the Feasts of the LORD. I could simply get a Jewish rabbinical calendar, or a little wallet card printed by a feast-keeping Church, that has all the appointed times on it. I could use it for the days of worship commanded by the LORD. It was a piece of cake.

In fact, that is what I did for almost a decade. I did not know any better. I did what my religious leaders said to do. Surely, they would have it figured out. I did not know that the modern Jewish calendar for the Feasts and the Holy Days of the LORD is NOT what Moses proclaimed and is NOT what Jesus kept. I am not sure whether my Church leaders understood that or not. They may have been like the blind leading the blind into a ditch.

Rabbinical Judaism admits it changed the sacred calendar given by God to Moses. Once I realized this, my conscience, by the Holy Spirit of God, drove me to find a way to determine the true appointed times which were consistent with the commands of the

LORD and the practice of Jesus. I wanted to follow God and Jesus; not the rabbis of Judaism. They were descended historically from the very Pharisees that Jesus called “vipers” and whose father He said was Satan. Were those who rejected the Savior who was sent by God to them, both then and now, the ones for me to trust in determining when and how to keep the commanded Feasts of the LORD?

Prayerfully, I set out to study the word of God, especially the Pentateuch, which was personally dictated to Moses by the LORD, God. Surely, if when the LORD gave Moses the appointed times for holy convocations, would He not have made it clear to Moses how to determine them from year to year? Our God is not the author of confusion.

However, I quickly found out that it was not as clear cut as I had hoped. We just can’t go to a single verse in scripture that tells us exactly how to determine the appointed times of the LORD. It takes some digging; a little here and a little there, to piece together the puzzle of God’s own calendar for keeping time. So, while God did not author confusion, men surely did in interpreting His word and setting times. And, men who translated the word of God added their own confusion into our English Bibles. So, even when we dutifully read and quote from our English Bibles, we can be learning and preaching falsely.

I will share with you what I have learned so far. I admit to being fallible. I have had no visions about this. If you perceive error in my current understanding, I do pray you will contact me and we can reason together in the search for the Truth of God and Jesus.

Well, the best place to start building a foundation of understanding is with the word of God. We find His answer to how to determine His holy days given in Gen. 1: 14:

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons and for days and years;

The two great lights God put in the heavens are the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. God also said that they would be for signs and seasons and for days and years. And, it was so. It still is. And, in observing them is the secret to His holy days.

The Bible describes many heavenly body “signs” that show God’s power and authority over His creation. Some are historic, others are prophetic. The reference to them being for “days” I believe to be very clear. This is a function of the sun periodically “rising” and “setting.” This period of 24 “hours” is very precise and stable for all practical purposes.

I believe the sun’s steady and reliable appearing each day was given for us to know when the seventh day of a week was to be kept as a holy day, set apart by the Lord of the Sabbath, to our great God and Father. It is to remind us of the creation week, including the day of rest which God gave to us created earthly humans for an example to be followed to remember Him.

Now, there are two other terms God used in this verse for which the lights in the heavens that He created would be useful to His creation. One was for “seasons.” Now, it is clear that most of the livable earth, and certainly the land of Israel, has what we call seasons; namely spring, summer, fall and winter. And, it seems pretty clear that the sun, the greater light, and what fraction of the 24-hour day it is visible on the earth, rules these seasons.

Unfortunately, the word translated as “seasons” in our English Bibles, whether intentionally or unintentionally I do not know, really clouds the message God was sending His people. The Hebrew word is Strong’s #4150 and is “mowed.” It means an appointed, or fixed time, for a community group assembly before God. It is the exact same word used to describe the Feasts of the Lord in Lev. 23: 4 which is correctly rendered in the NKJV:

*These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at their **appointed times**.*

Could it be any more clear, my friends? Could you have any doubt that the lights in the heavens from the very time of God’s great and very good creation were intended to one day be used to determine the days appointed for the worship of God by the people of God? It is awesome and amazing! But, you would never make the connection from just reading your English Bible. About all you could conclude is that God intended there to be seasons on the face of the earth; something of more concern to weather forecasting than to worship!

If the very word of God, and the Holy Spirit, does not convict your heart on this matter, I do not suppose anything I could say would convince you that God indeed gave us specific days of the year to assemble for worship before Him.

But, if the written truth of God now revealed moves your spirit to investigate this subject more thoroughly, then we must deal with one more issue. When are the appointed times? And, going back to Genesis 1, how do the lights in the heavens determine “years” as God claimed?

Well, certainly God had a method in mind. By Genesis 5 we find God indicating that when Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image and he named him Seth. Adam lived another 800 years and had other sons and daughters and finally died at a ripe old age of 930 years.

Now, don’t you wonder how God measured years of human life on the earth back then? Did God teach Adam in the Garden of Eden how to count the years that they had lived? What criteria would Adam use? Did they keep track of months or days way back then to figure out when a year had ended and a new one had started? Did Adam celebrate birthdays as we would know them today?

Well, the answers to such questions are not given in a direct manner in scripture. We do

need to make some inferences from the tidbits of information about such matters which are revealed throughout the word of God.

My assumption is this: since Adam was placed in a garden, and had to tend the garden, I feel he recognized planting, growing, harvesting and resting seasons much as we would know them still today. He would observe times or seasons where the temperatures and rain changed in regular patterns upon the land. I believe the Garden of Eden was in what we now call the Middle East. I suspect it had seasons just like in the latter days of Moses, then in the days of Jesus, and still in our days today, thousands of years later.

Thus, I conclude that the repeatable behavior of certain annual blooming plants in the garden would have told Adam that another cycle of seasons on the land had come and gone and this period of time was called a “year.” Even today, we could look at a daffodil plant as it emerges from the ground in spring and blossoms to give its cute yellow flower and use the observed occurrence of that natural phenomena to record the arrival of a new year. So, I might say that having seen the daffodils in my yard bloom ten times since the birth of my son Christopher, that ten years have passed by and Chris is now ten years old.

While that system might work pretty well for keeping track of years here in Delmont, Pennsylvania, it might not work as well, or at all, in Helsinki, Finland or in Australia. And, didn’t God say the lights in the heavens would be for determining “years” rather than the growing cycle of plants? Indeed! While plant cycles are related to the activity of the sun, they are not necessarily conclusive or universal over all the earth.

So, instead, we need a more direct observation of the appearance of the sun and the moon to figure out when a new year begins. Let’s see exactly what God has said in His word that is relevant to when a year begins, at least to determine His appointed times for group worship. We find it in Ex 12: 2:

This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

Here we see the LORD giving a command to Moses and his brother Aaron who was the first high priest of Israel. Surely, the high priest of Israel would be able to determine and proclaim the appointed times of the LORD. And, we see an important link between the first month and a new year. So, immediately we find that in God’s eyes, a year does not start based upon solely solar activity. For example, we could not use the day of the astronomical vernal equinox as the sole criteria for the start of a new year on God’s calendar. A month, related to the moon, was also involved to start a year.

So, when did this idea of a “month” come into existence? Well, from Scripture, we see that Noah was apparently aware of months as a way to measure time. Look at its first use in the Bible in Gen. 7: 11:

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and

the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

Here we see evidence of how God intended time to be kept by man. It is a calendar system of a year experienced in the life of a man, a month in that year, and a day in that month. To know how to mark these three rulers of time, we have to look a bit deeper into God's word.

We can start by identifying the first month of a new year on God's calendar. It is plainly given in Ex. 23: 14-15 and is clearly linked to the first of the three appointed Feasts of the LORD:

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt;

Here we learn not only how to identify the first month as Abib, we find out the reason God made this as a memorial month. It was the month that the LORD brought His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt by His mighty hand and with incredible miracles, including the saving blood of the Passover lamb, the parting of the Red Sea and healing the bitter water at Marah.

This was confirmed by Moses according to what God showed him in Ex. 13: 3-4:

And Moses said to the people: Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month of Abib.

From other scriptures, we find that it was the fifteenth day of Abib when the Israelites began their departure from Egypt. So, it is no wonder that Abib 15 begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread where no leavened bread is to be eaten for seven days.

If there is any remaining doubt about the appointed day and month to remember the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, we should be assured by Ex. 34: 18:

Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

So far, so good you say, but, Brother Kenny, you still have not told me how I can know which month of any given year is the first month which is called Abib so that we have the correct appointed month! Well, are you ready? There is an answer; but again, it takes a little extra study beyond our English Bibles to figure this out.

The secret is to understand that Abib is not ONLY the name given to this first month on

God's calendar. The Hebrew word "abib" actually refers to a stage of development of the barley that grows in this region of the world. A better translation of the Hebrew would be "in the month of THE abib" Consider Ex 9: 31-32 which describes the devastation to grain crops caused by the plague of hail when Israel was still in Egypt:

Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they are late crops.

The Hebrew word that was translated "in the head" is indeed "abib." Do you get it, my friends? It was the state of development of the ears of barley that uniquely qualified the first month of a new year on God's sacred and holy day memorial calendar. Now, do you see the reason I mentioned the value of an annual plant like a daffodil that in its kind develops naturally only once a year?

God is explaining to those who will listen, that the barley was destroyed during the hail because of its vulnerable state of development. As any experienced farmer would know, when the barley grain begins to ripen, it takes on a light yellowish hue and becomes brittle. This stage is called abib. In the early stage of development the grain is a darker green color and is flexible. It would have withstood the hail. So, the more advanced developed barley was destroyed whereas the less developed later wheat grain survived the hail.

In a couple of more weeks, as the barley further develops, it will become ripe and ready for harvest. The link to the Feast of Unleavened Bread is that the barley must be ripe in order to roast it and make fine flour for the wave offering commanded during the feast.

This is why as we watch the year go by in Israel, we must look at the end of the twelfth month of the current year to discern if the barley is in the abib stage of development. If not, a thirteenth month must be added to the current year before a new year, and the first month of that year called Abib, can be declared or proclaimed on God's calendar.

It is vital to understand that the proclamation for the month of Abib, and the month to celebrate Passover during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is dependent upon the availability of suitable barely grain to parch in fire and make flour for the wave offering.

A casual Bible reader may reason that the Feast of Unleavened Bread must be in the right SEASON of the year; namely spring as we would define it today. Such reasoning by men may find one defining the first month of a new year as being the first one AFTER the vernal equinox. This is a scientific way we define the start of "spring" today. But, the word of God makes no point at all about holding the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring.

The concept of the astrological vernal equinox is not even mentioned in Scripture though it was known to even ancient men and in Egypt during the captivity of Israel. Yet, we have many feast goers who think this way based on what men have told them, or perhaps

how their own Bible incorrectly uses the term “season.”

It is the appointed times of God’s holy convocations by which we remember His saving Israel and learn how He can save all mankind that is the important thing to celebrate. The season we see on our modern calendar, or by astronomical calculations from the US Naval Observatory, is NOT the key purpose of these celebrations. They are related but secondary. Some folks just use the calendar of modern rabbinic Judaism based on astronomy and seasons which pays no attention at all to the stage of the barley for the commanded Feast of the LORD. Isn’t this ironic?

Of course, not all the barley, especially if planted rather than wild, ripens in the land of Israel at the same time. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the first-fruit offerings brought by individual farmers can vary in ripeness anywhere from its early green stage to its abib stage to the stage of fully ripe, fully headed, grain. If fully ripe, the grain may be brought to the priest "crushed" or "coarsely ground". This is what is meant in Lev 2: 14:

If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits green heads of grain roasted in fire, grain beaten from full heads.

Now, when you study this verse in the Hebrew, you find how uninformed the KJV translators are about Hebrew agricultural terms applicable to Israel and to the Feasts of the Lord. The Hebrew term for the crushed grain is “carmel” referring to hardened full head grain that can be beaten and ground whereas the abib grain must be roasted first.

In our example, full heads really refer to carmel grain. Yet, you will find carmel grain also translated as “green ears” or “green heads” which is also used to describe the abib grain in other verses. The truth is we are dealing with poor translations that confuse the stages of the barley related to the wave offering. Those trying to make “headway” on just what month begins a new sacred year of feasts and holy convocations also can be easily confused from their own Bibles.

One feast keeper, whom I highly respect in most doctrine, said she can’t find any guidance in her Bible about how to determine which month is the first month of Abib. And, from this program, it is easy to sympathize with her plight. She claims to be tired of hearing different “opinions of men” as each new sacred year approaches of when to celebrate the holy days of the LORD. So, she succumbs in default to the modern Jewish calendar which she KNOWS is NOT Biblical because it has the most adherents with whom to fellowship. I don’t get it. If quantity is the key to God’s ways of worship, she should be ignoring the Feasts of the LORD, and the Lord of the Sabbath, and be keeping the most popular holidays of Christianity, no matter how unscriptural they might be.

All one can do is continue to search for the Truth of God and hope the Holy Spirit will convert our minds. Next Sabbath we will continue with this and other important calendar issues that one must work through to conform to the commandments of God. God does indeed reveal the knowledge for His people to be of one mind about when to worship

Him along with other followers of Jesus, the self-proclaimed Lord of the Sabbath. But, who actually has ears to hear and eyes to see?