

Knowing Times and Seasons

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Chapter 1

Natural and Spiritual Seasons

Before we look at the Spiritual Seasons and Divinely appointed Times of God, we need to lay a foundation. That foundation will be found in the natural seasons, for it's a principle that the Natural Realm speaks to us of the Spiritual Realm. This is why the seven Feasts of the Lord (Lev 23:4-43) are associated with agricultural seasons. And of course the Feasts in the "natural" speak of their fulfillment in the "spiritual" through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the natural flow of seasons there's clearly a pattern; Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring. This never changes except perhaps for the shortening or lengthening of some seasons occasionally. Even the seven days of the week are patterned for us, with the last day becoming a day of rest, the Sabbath. (It's important to note that only the seventh day of the biblical week was given a name; the other six days are simply known as the "first day", the "second day", etc. [Gen 1:5 / 2:3 and Exo 20:11]. This highlights the importance and sanctity of the day.)

So patterns become vital in our understanding of spiritual issues. We recall that Moses wrote down the pattern for the building of the Tabernacle Tent (Exo 25:8-9), just as David handed onto his son Solomon, a pattern for the building of the first Temple (1 Chron 28:11-12).

As we read Scripture it's obvious that patterns occur over and over, especially in the Old Testament and finally surfacing in the New.

"These things became examples [Lit: a shape, pattern] for us, so that we may not lust after evil, even as those indeed lusted." 1 Cor 10:6

“...who serve the pattern of and shadow of heavenly things, even as Moses was divinely warned, being about to make the tabernacle: For He says, See that you make all things according to the pattern being shown to you in the mount...” Heb 8:5

According to Leviticus the Tabernacle pattern was recorded in exacting detail. Why? Because the Lord desired that we should understand patterns and thereby have insight into His mind and purpose. Even the placing of the Tabernacle furniture shows a fascinating pattern, as does the layout of Solomon's Temple (See my study manual “From Tent to Bride”). Great truths can be found hidden in patterns, if only we had eyes to see and hearts willing to search.

Now, back to the natural seasons. Scripture indicates that the four seasons of the year began AFTER the universal flood of Noah's time. Prior to the flood there was a fairly constant temperature together with a gentle vapor that daily watered the earth, there being no rainfall at that time (Gen 2:4-6). From creation until the flood there was neither rain nor seasons as we now know them.

It was after the flood that the arrangement of seasons were established unceasingly, just as God declared to Noah. This regularity is what's called “the Principle of Uniformity” by scientists. However, this was instituted (and promised) by God to be a regulated sequence of Seasons, together with a fixed cycle of Day and Night periods (Gen 8:22) - a pattern ordered for quite specific purposes by God Himself.

Though these seasonal patterns are now part of what is called “natural” it was in fact ordered by “the Divine”. Here we have the beginnings of the great conflict between the theory of evolution and the biblical account of a divine creation. Scripture tells us that seasonal patterns were instituted as far back as Creation itself: “And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be **for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.**” Gen 1:14

“Seasons” here doesn't mean the four seasons we identify now, because as we've seen, that didn't happen until after the Flood. In the above text it refers to the generality of order in relation to the sun and moon, and probably stars. “**He appointed the moon for seasons; and the sun knows its going down.**”Psa 104:19

There are obviously seasons and periods that are controlled by God through the influence of celestial bodies like the sun, moon and stars. Consider the monthly menstrual cycle of a woman, the daily tides of the oceans, the effect of a full moon on fishing, animal breeding times, bird migrations, etc. All these, and much more, are governed by God's providential ruling over “the luminaries” to effect the daily business of life on earth.

Interestingly these are directly associated with “signs” (Gen 1:14). The word refers to that which is a “signal, beacon, monument, prodigy, evidence, mark, miracle, or token” (Strong's H226). The Hebrew is based on an associated word meaning “to come” (H255), indicating that something or someone is yet to come, of which the luminaries give assent. Some have seen in these signs evidence of the coming of the Messiah (“The Witness of the Stars” by E. W. Bullinger).

As we've seen, the seasons belong to the Lord God of the universe. They are entirely and completely in the hands of our God. Yes, man may influence them due to his bad

environmental practices, but generally the four seasons that God has set, still continue on. Likewise too are His specially appointed divine seasons; these having a particular unique fulfillment in God's grand purpose.

The Lord's will is continually being done on the earth by those whom He has called out to do this task. He moves sovereignly over all things in heaven and earth; it is He who appoints times and it is He who fulfils them. It is also He who reveals such things to His faithful ones even before they are brought to pass. The Apostolic Ones play a particular role in this, for they, in harmony with the Prophetic Ones, are those who will piece together such knowledge.

We who live temporarily in this earth realm have our lives dictated by the natural seasons. In most places there are the normal four seasons we have come to know so well, but in other places there are only two discernible seasonal changes, such as in the extreme polar caps, and the tropics.

Nevertheless our familiarity with the four seasons causes us to do certain activities at certain times entirely dependent on whether it's hot or cold outside. In regard to plant life, we know when it's time to plant bulbs, sow seed, when to fertilize, etc. And when we do plant the seed, we do so knowing there's a certain period of waiting required, and we are content to allow the seed to follow its set course of hibernation awaiting the moment of bursting forth.

This may be so in the natural realm, but it shouldn't necessarily be so in the spiritual. While indeed there are seasons of "waiting" and seasons of "reflection" in the spiritual, it's wise to constantly be vigilant and alert in these quiet seasons. In the natural we are content and even tolerant of these cold seasons, but it should not be so during the spiritually barren seasons.

In the Word we are exhorted to remain active during all the seasons that come our way. As hard as it is during the "barren" seasons we should not allow ourselves to become barren within our spirit-man, and simply wait until a better season comes upon us. No, in the spiritual realm we are to still seek for any opportunity to sow a seed into someone's life, or to cultivate something in our own life, and to seek for a reaping where possible. So many of us have allowed a cold spiritual season to dictate to our inner-man and we've become inactive, almost waiting for better times with a negativity that robs us. Our thought is, "Times will get better, I just have to hold on and get through this season of lifelessness".

This however will not do for those who desire to move into spiritual maturity. There's a need for us to bring our inner-man to attention, to take stock, to make a decision that we WILL draw from such barren seasons all the beneficial lessons that we possibly can. It's important that we don't waste our sorrows, but learn to discern what's going on with our emotions. I like how Francis Frangipane puts it:

"There will be times when, to obey God's will, we must fight our very instincts for survival. Plan on it. There will be seasons when you will hurt terribly or be deeply troubled inside. Perhaps even facing severe depression, yet to fulfill God's will, you cannot excuse yourself because of heart sickness. In utter defiance of your own feelings, you will have to say, "Yes" to God. It is at this juncture, beloved, that true spiritual progress is being made."

Once more it has to do with times and seasons, and particular our response to them. Most of us **react** to situations rather than **respond**; a mature person in the Lord is one who has learnt to respond to issues and not be dictated to by the issues.

All believers will experience these barren seasons, but let us not think that Satan has sent them. It may feel like he has, and obviously he'll take advantage of us during such times, but it is God, our God, who ordains both the natural and spiritual seasons. Paul discovered this precious truth: **"But I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..."** Phlp 1:12

Don't blame every season of discontent on Satan. In God's mysterious yet wonderful purpose, there are seasons of "The Opposites", and God would have us realize this early-on in our walk with Him. Think for a moment: perhaps you're a person who enjoys the warmth of the sun, bright blue skies, and the abundance of leafy trees that give shade. If you're such a person, as you soak up the sun and gently smile at the clear blue sky, you mind may well say "God is good to me - I so enjoy this kind of perfect weather".

But what happens when the cold and damp of winter arrives, and the rain makes you feel miserable, the biting wind truly does give you a shudder, and the grey monotonous skies seem heavy above you. Does your mind then say "Satan has sent this miserable weather, and I don't like it one bit".

Of course not. We accept that at one period it's simply time for the sun and birds, the blue sky and lovely evenings, just as we accept that the season has changed and now the cold has come and the days are dark and somber. We don't think that God has sent one and Satan the other. That would be ludicrous! So why do so many people think that God only sends the good times and Satan sends the bad? If we accept that in the natural seasons there are opposites, why don't we accept it in the spiritual seasons?

Any believer who has walked the walk for some time will soon know that the Christian life isn't easy. It has many struggles, many valleys and peaks, many triumphs and certainly many sorrows. But ALL the opposites are in fact part of God's purpose, and it is He who "works all things together for good..." (Rms 8:28). God allows the difficult seasons to come for our maturing, not to burden us down and cause unnecessary anxiety.

Part of this maturing depends on adjusting to the different spiritual seasons we find ourselves in. It's a requirement of spiritual maturity that we both discern what's going on, learn from it, and seek God's counsel about it. We are to use our time wisely, appropriately, and to ever be ready in response to the season we find ourselves in. Note what Jesus the Pattern Son has to say about this: **"My time is not yet here, but your time is always ready."** Jhn 7:6

One of the great characteristics of maturity is how we use our time, and how we respond to the seasons of life, whether good or difficult. We are apt to be more content with the changing seasons in the natural than we are in the change of spiritual seasons. This must be addressed if we are to advance in spiritual maturity.

As we've seen earlier, there are many types of seasons, both natural and human, which are influenced by the gravitational pull of the various celestial bodies. What we are now to consider is how the word "seasons" can be used literally or figuratively to describe periods of

time determined by God according to His grander purposes. Some of these different types of seasons are found throughout Scripture.

“I will give the rain of your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, and your wine, and your oil.” Deut 11:14

“And he (the righteous man) shall be like a tree planted by the rivulets of waters, which will give its fruit in its seasons, and its leaf will not wither, and all which he does will prosper.” Psa 1:3

“All of them (the creatures) wait for You to give them their food in due season.” Psa 104:27

“O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and in the night-season, and there is no rest for me.” Psa 22:2

“To all there is an appointed time, a season, even a time for every purpose under the heavens.” Eccles 3:1

“For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season).” 2 Cor 7:8

“Preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season, convict, warn, encourage with all long-suffering and teaching.” 2 Tim 4:2

“Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through many temptations.” 1 Pet 1:6

So we find that “seasons” can be used with a wide variety of meanings, ranging from the natural through to the spiritual. In the natural we are more or less assured at the approximate length of a particular season, but this isn’t so in the spiritual. While we know very well that summer will last approximately three to four months, we can never be sure how long a spiritual season might last.

This is where our faith is really tested because we simply don’t know how long we’re in a particular season for, especially if it’s a “barren winter” season, the so-called “dark night of the soul” experience.

So what’s needed is an understanding of how to personally deal with each spiritual season. Usually most of us are pretty good at giving advice to someone else who’s going through a rough patch, but if we’re honest we often don’t apply that same advice to our own situation.

Actually I find that giving “advice” is generally unhelpful; the more accurate biblical type of help is “counsel” based firmly on the Word. Note that I didn’t say “counseling” but “counsel”.

“For I did not keep back from declaring to you all the counsel of God.” Acts 20:27

Here the word “counsel” means “consolation, deliberation” and also (God’s) “will or purpose.” In context Paul is declaring the purpose of God’s plan of salvation, but the basic meaning of the word is still helpful for us to consider here. Only once in the New Testament does the

word mean “decision”, once it means “motives”, four times it means “plan”, but five times it means “purpose”.

So to give somebody biblical counsel means to declare to them God’s purpose and plan. It’s to this purpose that their problem should be anchored. Once we can link our problems with God’s declared purpose, then we see clearly to move forward. However if we focus on the problem without putting it into the context of the divine purpose, we’re likely to go around in circles.

So biblical counsel is better than human advice. Giving human advice isn’t always helpful because it’s based on man’s experience, often devoid of the truth of God’s grander purposes. “Counsel” has behind it the idea of reaching an end through a practical solution. It’s through consulting the principles in the Word of God (often with the assistance of a mature believer) that enables us to deliberate the issues and arrive at a beneficial answer to our situation.

That’s why “counsel” is usually found as the object of a verb, expressing the idea “to take” or “to give”. The idea behind biblical counsel is not to try and solve the problem of somebody who might be going through a dry spiritual season; rather it’s the “giving” of biblical counsel about how to respond when we do find ourselves in such seasons. Then, it’s up to us individually to “take” the counsel, based on eternal principles, and to implement them in our own lives. By doing this our seemingly barren spiritual season is put into a greater context and we see things as they truly are - in light of God’s greater purpose.

Ideally it would help if we’ve been through a similar experience to the person we’re trying to help; but if that’s not the case, then we can always safely revert to what the Word counsels about situations. Naturally we’re not going to find something in the Word that fits even situation of modern life, but you can be sure that the principles are there. So I encourage people to look for principles in the Word that will help them through, not ready-made answers to the problems of modern life as if the Bible is a kind of “Self-Help Dictionary of 1,001 Instant Answers”.

The “giving” of biblically accurate principles based firmly on the Word of God, followed through by the “taking-in” of this counsel, will always ensure a way ahead. It also has the by-product of not making the counselor the focus, because all the counselor has really done is to fathom out the riches of the Word and offered them as a solution. We see this kind of counsel throughout Proverbs, and a study of this book will greatly enlighten us.

One of the most pressing needs of the Church today is the adjusting of the mind to God’s purposes. We who live in the western world are beset by an attitude that screams at us, “Be an individual”, “Do your own thing”, “Don’t let anyone judge you”, “Stick up for your rights”.

This is not a biblical mentality; it is human wisdom and it’s fraught with danger because it actually sets us against God. There’s an urgent need for the Church to take stock, re-visit the Word of God, be willing to adjust to it, and move on in obedience. By doing so we’ll have a much better chance of discerning the various seasons that come our way, both good and bad. For example, it’s hopeless to think we can navigate the treacherous reefs of a barren spiritual season if we’re not firmly on-board the vessel the Lord has provided for us.

Noah in the ark is a good encouragement for us. He didn't have all knowledge about what the flood was going to accomplish. He obeyed, he trusted in his God, and he waited out the difficult season he was in. His place in the whole scenario was to trust and obey; God would see to the rest. It was only after the flood that Noah began to understand the season he was in, and even then it was still step-by-step.

So it is for us now. Many of the spiritual seasons we find ourselves in bewilder us. We get confused, we cry out for God to intervene, and at times He seems a very long way off. The season we find ourselves in tends to make us focus on self. Have you ever noticed that? When things come against us and the normally comfortable walk of faith is suddenly pushed aside by some tragedy, problem or illness - our immediate reaction is to focus on self. "Why is this happening to ME?" "What have I done to deserve this?" "Doesn't God care about ME?" "Look at MY situation?"

This is really the same as when we physically hurt ourselves. Cut your finger with a knife, knock your knee on the tow bar of your car, sprain an ankle. Where does your thought fly? To where the pain is. That's where our attention goes to, to the problem area; we focus on the spot where the pain is. This is quite normal and there's nothing wrong in it. But it does serve as a lesson for us when we're injured in our soul life, when a domestic problem arises, or someone at Church betrays you, or a loved-one is diagnosed with cancer, etc.

Our minds fly to the problem; we focus on the pain, and it's not very long before we're thinking of all the possible consequences that will soon follow. Financial worries race through the mind; emotional stress builds; how will I cope; my whole life has taken a king hit; life is suddenly in a turmoil; how will I get through the months and years ahead? What throws us off balance is not just the situation and its consequences, but all that surrounds the problem. This weighs us down as much, or even more so, than the actual issue itself. There's a tendency within us to leap from the situation we find ourselves in, to the foreboding consequences that will accompany it.

I recall one very difficult patch we as a family endured. All the above things plagued our minds and we were in a very dark season indeed, with great stress, grief and a heavy sense of despair. We were very much like David when he said:

"I am bent down, I am bowed down exceedingly; I go mourning all the day. My loins are filled with a burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am exceedingly benumbed and crushed. I howl from the groaning of my heart. My Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my power forsakes me! And the light of my eyes is no longer with me." Psa 38:6-10

This was a dark season for all of us. But one night as the awfulness of the situation seemed to get worse, I went outside to put out the rubbish bin for pickup next morning. As I walked back to the house, heavy of heart, I looked up at a clear night sky and saw the myriad stars of the Milky Way in all its beauty. As I looked up my heart cried out to God, not to intervene, not to change things, but to speak. Instantly I heard a deep echo within, that consoling voice that simply said, "The stars will still shine tomorrow."

I knew heaven had spoken. Hope had been imparted. What a relief it brought to my troubled soul! What refreshment it gave to my anxious mind! Even my flesh was relieved from the build-up of stress in it. God had answered, not by delivering us out of the horror of the

season, but by assuring us that whatever the outcome, “the stars would still be shining afterwards”.

You see, they were His stars, He had set them in place, and for me it served as a perfect reminder that He had appointed them for signs and seasons. In the end we were delivered from much of the negativity of the season, but we still had to go through a great deal of it, enduring much heaviness. When that particular season had passed us by, I knew we had to learn from it, as horrible as it was. But He was there, with us in the season, not forsaking us, but speaking hope. God was eliciting a response from us by speaking to us of hope, faithfulness and stability.

All of these very things came to pass out of that season, and it has brought a different level of maturity and discipleship to us. It has also made me become much more aware of the hurt and pain of others, and I am able to more closely identify with people in similar situations. Bless His name! Indeed it is very true:

“...that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel...” Phlp 1:12

I share these things, not to draw undue attention to myself, but to encourage you that whatever seasons might befall us, He is totally and utterly aware of them, and fully aware of our feelings, emotions and pain during such times. Sometimes we can only truly learn something by going through it. I say this not to ignore the reality of the pain and suffering, but to highlight the reality of being transformed by it.

I refuse to speak platitudes to people now; they did me no good when we were suffering and good-minded saints spoke platitudes to us (a little like Job’s friends I suppose). I know their heart was toward our situation but in the end we were going through it, not them. I don’t mean this to be an accusation in any way: loyal Christian friends are extremely supportive and their prayers most valuable. But I now realize what we needed most were words of wise counsel based on Scripture, not advice out of man’s experience. Above all we needed to hear what heaven had to say!

Such episodes in a believer’s life add to the experience and knowledge of understanding seasons and times. I’ve heard it said that African Christians look into another believer’s eyes searching for the Cross. In other words they want to know if you’ve been with Christ “in the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phlp 3:10). Whether the saying is true or not, it certainly makes the point.

The point is, grace is always available in any season; it’s just that in some seasons it’s more apparent than in others. The work of grace upon one’s soul can be seen to act in two distinct ways. One work of the Holy Spirit on the soul is to break down all our self-centeredness. Another work is to exalt Christ as “above all”, particularly over our soul-life. The result of both is for the full salvation of one’s soul, and the glorification of God.

The Lord will use all, and any season, to bring this about. Our seeming difficulty is discerning what the seasons mean, what is to be learnt, and how to stand firm while we undergo the season of change or trial. It’s usually too late to learn the lesson if we haven’t prepared for such times beforehand. This is why dying daily unto one’s soul-life (Lk 9:23) is vital.

It's important to take advantage of the good seasons and beneficial times as they come to us. Use such occasions for the benefit of your soul. Go into the secret place (Psa. 91:1 and Mtt 6:6) and there learn of the Father's ways. By regularly doing this in the good seasons, we prepare ourselves for any difficult season that may come. It's then far easier to stand during the times of uncertainty. Strange as it may seem the best lessons are learnt in seasons of affliction. So we do need to prepare for them. It's in those seasons when temptation, distress, trouble and humiliation abound, that we learn the wonderful secrets of heavenly wisdom. Why? Because during such times we discover our own weakness, the folly of trusting in the flesh, as well as the sustaining power and love of a faithful Father.

I realize only too well that sprouting Bible texts doesn't always bring comfort and relief in seasons of perplexity, whether you're saying them to yourself, or someone else says them to you. Our soul can so easily want to give up, to walk away, to blame God, and yes, even to accuse Him of letting such things happen. But He has called us, and He remains faithful to us.

So we find ourselves holding on when there seems to be little to hold onto. We almost want to throw it all away, yet strangely we keep on coming back. The Bible seems veiled to us, empty of power even; but still we look at that Book on the table and feel guilt because we know that in it are the truths that will fill the void. We want so much to come out of this dry, barren, deathly season, but we know so frustratingly well, that we cannot hasten its time. Slowly we begin to understand the eternal truth that "the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority" can be counted on (Acts 1:7). And when He sends the season of favor, nothing but nothing, can hold it back!

The seasons of one's life, like the seasons of creation, will continue under the awesome oversight of our Father in heaven. Take heart, we are being taught by Him and sooner or later all whom He has called will know the full measure of that special season when He sends "rain and fruitful seasons to us from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Acts 14:17

Chapter 2

The Hebrew view of Time

"And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years."
Gen 1:14

The "luminaries" in the heavens (lit: skies) were to serve as an observable natural chronometer for mankind, showing the division and calculation of the three main units of time: Days, Months, and Years. Now just as we needed to lay a foundation of the natural seasons in order to understand the spiritual seasons, so too we need to follow the same principle in dealing with these three units of time. It wouldn't help at all to begin our study of spiritual cycles (appointed times) by using our western (or Gregorian) calendar in attempting to understand time cycles. We need to identify the way in which the Hebrew mind used calendars, which was based on a lunar cycle and not a solar cycle (as in the Western or Gregorian calendar).

Some background will help here. The Hebrews kept time in a rather unique fashion based upon what God had said to them rather than by man's ingenuity, science or philosophical thinking. The sacred calendar (Exo12:1-2) was how their relationship with God functioned, and their civil or agricultural calendar was how commercial and daily life operated. It was the sacred calendar that reminded Israel of its great historical events and divine encounters.

In this modern era Judaism still preserves itself through the functioning of festivals and holy-days, even without the presence of a Temple or Priesthood. All that makes historic Judaism tangible can be found in its adherence to the yearly cycle of feasts and fasts prescribed by God Himself. The Jewish faith is kept intact by a regulated, structured and finely-timed set of practices celebrating their history.

Locked into these cycles is a specific way of keeping time. The Hebrew mindset is firmly embedded in "time" and counts it from one specific event - the creation of the universe. Paradoxically this "timing" and all the events of Israel that occurred within it, is regarded as "timeless". For the Hebrew mind to live in the world, in time and space, is a response to an event or a series of events - namely, God's dealings with them. All the occasions when God met with Israel, challenged Israel, blessed Israel, and chastised Israel; all these are remembered and even rehearsed in the holy-days of Judaism. It's like a timeless calendar anchored to time.

Our western mind-set in regard to "time" is based on the idea of linear time. Imagine world history as a horizontal line with the left hand side being the "beginning" and the right hand end of the line representing the "end". In between we have certain periods and events marked off, such as the age of the dinosaurs, the age of certain empires (like the Roman, Greek, etc), the age of the industrial revolution, the age of the space race, etc.

We've all seen these time-lines in school books for example. That's how we in the west consider time to be: a straight line, beginning at some point and ending at another. Even our own lives are seen in this fashion. Next time you're at a funeral listen to the eulogy and you can be sure that in people's mind that's how they're thinking about the deceased's life - like a horizontal timeline, from birth through to death.

The person giving the eulogy usually starts with the time and place of "Sam's" birth. Where he went to school, what his first job was, his favorite holiday spot. We think of the time dear old Sam met his future wife, Mary, and married. Then they moved from one city to start work in another and there they had the good fortune to meet some neighbors who introduced Sam to golf. Sam was so taken with this sport that he won many trophies. This brought more money in, so Sam and Mary bought a bigger house and travelled a lot. In their travels they...etc. You get the story I'm sure.

What's happening in this type of linear thinking? Life is dictated mainly by outside, and often, impersonal circumstances. Something causes Sam and Mary to embark on another stage of life. Cause and effect. It's a scientific principle we're so familiar with we hardly even consciously think about it. All human life is dictated by this "cause-and-effect" principle; it's inescapable. But this is NOT how the Hebrew mind considers one's time-line, especially in relation to eternal things.

The Hebrew idea of time (corporate and personal) is linked to how an individual or a group (e.g. the nation of Israel) **responds** to an event of which they are generally passive

recipients. Hence the story of God's dealings with His chosen people, Israel, were (and still are) associated with a non-human event outside of their control, the "Day" (or "Days") of Creation.

It's in the **responding** to the event that's important, not the **re-acting** to its happening. In the west we're more likely to ask the question "What's the point of our existence on earth?" (a rather abstract and detached question), whereas the Hebrew mind would ask "What does God want me to do while I'm here on earth?" (a very practical and personal question).

Westerners aren't connected to the greater picture as much as those with a Hebrew mind-set. The Hebrew or Biblical view of time is to do with God's acts in history and our response to them. The Biblical texts are predominately to show forth the rhythms of God's redemptive purpose and their transforming power when we respond to them. The Hebrew mind-set sees a God who is able to transform both humanity and the world, actions that He performed and which require us to either respond to or react against them. In other words, God acts and this action requires us to think through what it means to us, not in a remote philosophical way, but through us engaging with it in intimacy and trust.

Biblical thinking requires us to fix our life to what the Creator and Finisher of all life has purposed. This is why in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, we're encouraged to be mindful of our beginning and our end.

"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies with Christ, even as He elected us in Him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us to adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..." Eph 1:3-5

"If, then, you were raised with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right of God." Col 3:1

"I am pressing on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." Phlp 3:12

Hebrew (and therefore Biblical) thought anchors itself in experiences (natural and spiritual) that are accepted as realities. It's by responding to these realities that one comes to truly "know" - through experience, not through the acquisition of facts and information. To "know" in Hebrew is associated with the words "to listen" (Shama = is a verb meaning "to listen," but can also mean "to obey," or more correctly "to respond". In responding correctly there is true knowledge and practical wisdom).

Interestingly, in some ancient Hebrew thought the seat of intelligence was regarded as residing in the ears, not the brain! For the Hebrew it's the ability to properly listen that comes first, not intelligence. That's why they believed anyone could hear from God as long as they were open to the spiritual experience first, rather than analyze the experience.

Intelligence was believed to be a gift from God to be used wisely, not the ability of the mind to simply gather information and digest it. Knowing something wasn't just the ability to observe and make deductions from that observation, it was by experiencing what you were observing that imparted correct understanding.

For example, in the Hebrew way of understanding, to simply observe a person's behavior wouldn't give you an accurate understanding of them, their beliefs or values. You had to walk with them, experience them, listen to them, live with them, and out of those experiences make a correct deduction about them as a person. Hence Jesus said, "Follow me"; and Paul wrote **"Be imitators of me as I also imitate Christ."** (1 Cor 11:1)

Knowing someone in ancient Hebrew thought involved having an intimate attachment with, and commitment to, that person. So true knowing is a direct result of first-hand experience. This discerning knowledge is therefore more to do with revelation than with analyzing facts. That revelation to rightly hear from God is a gift, which when responded to, brings blessing.

"The LORD has opened my ear and I did not rebel; I did not turn away." (Isa 50:5)

The above verse highlights the importance of having a "listening ear" first, which is only then followed by "obedience" to the given word. So for the Hebrew mind, attentive listening comes prior to doing. Note how the following text illustrates this way of thinking. **"And Moses took the book of the covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, All that the LORD has said, we will do, and be obedient."** (Exo 24:7)

It's like saying; "We will do, THEN we will obey". To our western way of thinking this seems back-to-front. We generally learn something and then act based on the accumulated knowledge. Western thought processes aren't wrong, just different. However when attempting to understand biblical concepts related to Times and Seasons we need to focus more on the Hebraic way of thinking. And as we've seen such thinking relates to a personal encounter with God at a time appointed by Him.

At an appointed time God created the world, at an appointed time He chose Israel, He made known His will at an appointed time, He guided and instructed in appointed seasons. Israel's part in this was to respond by trusting that the One who had spoken was true, faithful and reliable. So that even though "time" is connected initially with a "past" creative act it's also very practical as it unfolds through the events of history "now". For the Hebrew mind, the world is connected to creation, and history is man's experience of this unfolding.

The dimensions of "time" and "space" are not theories to the Hebrew mind, but realities of which they partake and experience. "Time" for the Hebrew mind is definitely not an abstract notion but a reality connected to each individual's life. Hence when celebrating the Passover for example (an event we would call "in the past") the Hebrew mind rehearses the going-forth from Egypt in such a way as to infer that they are personally enacting it "now". The feasts and holy-days are a re-entering of the event, not in "the past" but as a kind of actual event for each succeeding generation.

The Exodus therefore wasn't something that simply happened "to them" way back in Moses' time, but something that keeps on re-happening in this age also. The participant of a Passover celebration is actually re-doing the same thing "now" as it happened "back then". It's as if the participant is personally re-living the Exodus and thus identifying with that great God-directed event.

"In every generation each person should feel as if he personally had come out of Egypt, as it is written: And you shall tell your son in that day saying: This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt." This comes from the

Passover Seder meal, where a participant at the meal asks the father of the household the question “Why are we doing this?” The father’s response is taken from Exo. 13:8 and corporately personalized for those present.

In the west we’re a little familiar with this kind of thinking, when we remember the crucifixion on Good Friday for example. But we don’t carry the same sense of life-rhythm within us that the Jews do in regard to their festivals.

Our celebrations of events like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, religious observances, etc, are somewhat disjointed from the daily rhythm of life. They are more like events that impinge on our life each year; they are like events we view, rather than events we’re anchored to. For us an anniversary of any sort is a joyous celebration of a good event that crops up annually on a time-line; something in the past that happened and now we remember it by “re-viewing” it.

I don’t know about you, but when there’s a family celebration or a national observance happening, even though I’m partaking of them, I still feel I’m also watching the process from a distance. I look around, take stock of what’s going on, look at people’s faces, watch the cutting of the cake or people sing the national anthem, etc. I “view” the spectacle as much as participate in it. It’s both an involvement in it as well as a viewing of it happening. It might just be me, but I sense this is how westerners generally partake of such celebrations.

We’re even prone to disassociate our minds for a moment while we look lovingly upon Grandma’s face as she opens her 90th birthday present. We take in how her eyes brighten as she unwraps the gift, the smile on her lips, all the time recalling with fondness something she did for us or said to us way back. In that brief moment we reflect on her, her nature, her character, who she really is. All the while we’re there in the room, packed in with other family members, but a little distant as we mentally draw back and reflect. We’re there participating, but also viewing the scene as if from a short distance. And then someone begins to loudly sing “Happy Birthday” and suddenly we’re back in the room as it were, joining in with the celebrations.

For the Hebrew mind-set an important personal or corporate “life event” is attached to something greater than one’s own life and history. It’s attached to what God has done as far back as the very beginning of time” itself. Paul even says that our personal history is connected to God “before time began” (2 Tim 1:9 and Eph 1:4). What an astonishing thought this is!

So, in this chapter we’re considering the difference between Greek/western thought and Hebrew/eastern thought. Both cultures view their surroundings, lives and values in ways that are fundamentally different to one another. But this doesn’t mean that one is right, and one is wrong. They are merely “different”, but I would stress that in attempting to understand the appointed Times and Seasons of God we should try to think through the Hebrew mind-set to gain the most accurate understanding of our subject. So it will be very helpful to keep some of these ideas in mind as we continue.

Re-capping some main principles now:

1. Greek (western) thought sees history as linear, like a horizontal time-line. Hebrew (eastern) thought sees history more like a rhythm or as cyclical. However this shouldn’t be

taken to mean that the Hebrews believed in history constantly repeating itself, or in the erroneous doctrine of re-incarnation.

2. Greek thought sees the world mainly through the intellect, i.e. abstract thought. Hebrew thought sees the world mainly through experiences of the senses, i.e. “concrete” thought.

3. Greek thought tends to describe objects in relation to their appearance. Hebrew thought describes objects in relation to their function and use.

4. God calls us to respond to His encounters, rather than to react against them. We are to engage, rather than remain aloof from, or reject such encounters.

5. To truly know God is to listen attentively first, before any action is taken. Spiritual knowledge is mainly gained through first-hand experience rather than by accumulating information gained from outside sources.

6. For the Hebrew, festivals and celebrations are not something to simply remember and enjoy, but rather something to “rehearse” and re-visit in each succeeding generation as if they were historically and personally present.

7. We best understand a person not by observing them and accumulating facts about them, but by being with them and becoming committed to them.

8. Life, both individual and corporate, is anchored to the great purposes of God, and so can only be truly understood and appreciated when this view is fostered in the daily or annual cycle of historical life-events.

Chapter 3

The Feasts foreshadow Seasons

“Have I not written to you excellent things; of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth, to those who send to you?” Prov 22:20-21

Truth is certainly “meat in due season” for those who desire to move into maturity. However, truth is only meat if we’re prepared to receive it. Revelatory truth is given step-by-step by the Lord; He waits to see how we respond to that which He has already imparted before giving us the next insight. Obedience to truth has always been a condition of moving on into the more wonderful aspects of the Lord. Therefore I encourage you to be open to as much truth as you can; check it against Scripture; earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit; do not be fearful, but yes, certainly be discerning.

The Lord has said that He will meet with man three times. Israel was therefore commanded to meet God at His appointed Feasts three times a year (see Exo 23:14 and Deut 16:16).

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.”

At these Feasts they were not to come “empty handed”, prophetically meaning they were to come prepared and ready to encounter their God. For Israel this was an “excellent” thing to

do. The following explanation from Strong's concordance deepens the insight to the word "excellent" used by King Solomon in Proverbs 22:20.

Shalosh or *shaw-loshe* from Strong's Hebrew word number 7969, means a triple, i.e. (as a musical instrument) a triangle (perhaps a three-stringed lute); a three-fold measure (perhaps a treble ephah); also (as an officer) a general of the third rank (upward, i.e. the highest): a captain, an instrument of music, great lord, a great measure, a prince, three. So the word in Hebrew for "excellence" has the connotation of "three" or "great measure". Since the Lord is excellent above all things, it's not surprising that He has revealed Himself as three, and desired to meet with man in three dimensions.

In each of these encounters the Lord has promised to meet with us so that we might experience Him in these realms. The three great Feasts are types and shadows of what we are meant to literally enjoy from the Lord. Not only are we to individually experience these truths, but so is the Body of Christ corporately. Note too that these experiences are sequential. We are meant to move into each one progressively as we learn and encounter the different levels and dimensions. The Body will never come into maturity until we engaged each of these revealed truths and live them from the heart. Only then will there be a perfected people having entered into the fullness of the life given by Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus has fulfilled each of these truths in His own life and ministry. The Church historically has already encountered the first two experiences of Passover and Pentecost, and we are now on the verge of meeting with the Lord in the Feast of Tabernacles. The question is: will we personally be prepared to appear before the Father "not empty handed"? May the Spirit of the Living God grant us the wisdom needed to appreciate and experience these truths for ourselves.

Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles

As we have noted, God has said that He will meet with man three times. He has given us symbols of these "meetings" in the three Feasts He ordained Israel to keep, and commanded that they not appear before Him "empty handed". They were not simply to witness the Feasts, nor just to participate in them. They had to bring something costly! How sad that many Christians hope to come to these Feasts today thinking they don't have to pay a price. Certainly all of God's works toward us are of grace. They are free, unmerited, and undeserved; but nevertheless given by Him as a great act of divine generosity. This is grace! How dare we then think we can simply walk into His Presence and partake of these wonderful Feasts laid before us without due consideration of the truths they hold.

It will require the laying down of our own soul-life, our ambitions, our desires; even our own opinions must be crucified. This is what we bring in our hands when we come to His Feasts. As we study them it's paramount that we learn of them in order to BECOME them! The Feasts were for ancient Israel to keep; they are for the Church to "become"!

As we look at these Feasts we'll see that they have been perfectly ordered in their timing, their symbolism and their sequence, to give us the clearest possible understanding of what God intends for us to experience in His appointed seasons.

In Scripture we find there are actually seven Feasts of the Lord all contained in three separate seasons. The seven feasts are: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened

Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits [together known as “**Passover**”]; the Feast of Weeks [called “**Pentecost**”]; the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles [collectively called “**Tabernacles**”] Lev 23:4-34. Prophetically the number “seven” stands for perfection, and “three” stands for excellence. So we have something of perfection contained in excellence.

Why study these Feasts? First because the Lord said they were His Feasts (Lev 23:2) and anything belonging to the Lord has great treasure inherit within it. Second, because the Feasts are symbols (or types) of what was to come later they are of utmost importance.

Jesus fulfilled these three Feasts in His own life time in a personal sense, and corporately the Body of Christ has already experienced two of them (Passover and Pentecost), and we now await the third and final Feast!

An important aspect of the typology of the Feasts is that each individual Christian is meant to experience these in a personal sense. Passover is the born-again experience; Pentecost is the infilling of the Holy Spirit; and Tabernacles is coming into full maturity. Hence the first Feast speaks of Jesus; the second, of the Holy Spirit; and the third, of the Father.

This is why we need to both understand the Feasts, and personally experience them! Great treasure and innumerable blessings wait for those who spiritually attend and experience these Feasts today!

The seven Feasts of the Lord are in fact God’s timetable. The word “feast” comes from the Hebrew meaning “an appointed or set time or season”. In these Feasts we have God’s redemptive plan as it wonderfully reveals the ministry and work of the Messiah. To have an understand of these Feasts gives us the ability to appreciate the plan of redemption and Jesus’ role in it. It is through the Feasts that we begin to see the wonder of God’s greater purpose.

By the way, it’s important to understand the difference between God’s PURPOSE and His PLAN. His “purpose” is to bring many sons into glory; this is what Paul’s “mystery” in Ephesians and Colossians is about. God’s “plan” however concerns the redemption found in Christ. They are not the same, neither can we use the terms interchangeably. The “Purpose” is the main thrust, and the “Plan” brings it about for fallen man.

Significantly the total number of “Feasts of the Lord” are seven, which speaks of “completeness”. So the seven Feasts declare to us the fulfillment of God’s purpose accomplished through His plan of redemption. I have more to say in this area in my eBook “The Three Prophetic Feasts”. Here however we’ll just look at a brief overview of these seven amazing Feasts. The following outline gives an insight to the historical and prophetic aspects of all the Feasts. It’s important to understand that the Feasts appear exactly in the order delivered by God to Moses, and that they’ll be fulfilled precisely in that same order.

FEAST OF PASSOVER

Held on the 14th day of Nisan, the first month.

From Egypt to Freedom=from the old life to new.

The lamb’s blood to be shed=the Lamb of God sacrificed.

Lamb's flesh to be eaten=symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

It was in the month of Nisan that the Jews were delivered from Egypt.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Starts on the 15th day, and lasts for 7 days.

Regarded as a joint feast with Passover.

Old Israel (law) gives way to the New (grace); now Bread of Life.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

The 16th day after Passover.

Jesus is the Firstfruits from the dead.

It is the start of the harvest season!

The sheaf was waved before the Lord in the Temple the day after the Sabbath. In fulfillment Jesus was "waved" (=presented) to His Father in " His resurrected state the day after the Sabbath.

FEAST OF PENTECOST

The 50th day after the Passover

Also called the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks

Jesus was on earth for forty days after His resurrection. Ten days later the Holy Spirit was sent upon the Church.

Pentecost was a "new" feast, having "new" meat. (Lev 23:16)

It was a harvest feast. Note that 3,000 came into salvation at Peter's sermon

Pentecost is a harvest but only of the Firstfruits. More to come!

FEAST OF TRUMPETS

Trumpets (shofars) were used for four purpose (see Numbers 10:2-10).

1. A call to assemble
2. Journey to the camps
3. Prepare for war

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