



**A GUIDE TO THE BIBLICAL
HOLIDAY SEASONS**

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UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

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Segments from the Aramaic Targums are taken from, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel On the Pentateuch With The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum From the Chaldee* by J.W. Etheridge and can be accessed freely online at <http://targum.info/targumic-texts/pentateuchal-targumim>

I believe in:

God the Father, Almighty
In Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord
Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary
Crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried;
The third day He rose from the dead
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of the Father
From there He shall judge the living and the dead
And in the Holy Spirit
The holy people of God
The forgiveness of sins
The resurrection of the body
The life everlasting

Immediate thanks must go to God, who has allowed me to write this volume.

Secondly thanks must go to my wife, the long-suffering proof reader.

I would like to thank the people of our regular Church who have held our family in high regard and tolerated us, despite some of our 'weirdness'.

Special thanks go to my mother (you know who you are), Jean Johnson, the Coopers and all those who have driven us to this endeavour (if only to avoid teaching from a pulpit). Big thanks also to Norman & Mark for proof reading and giving good constructive input.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1 Chronicles	1 Chron.	Hebrews	Heb.
1 Corinthians	1 Cor.	Hosea	Hos.
1 John	1 Jn.	Isaiah	Is.
1 Kings	1 Kgs.	James	Jam.
1 Peter	1 Pet.	Jeremiah	Jer.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Job	Job
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Joel	Joel
1 Timothy	1 Tim.	John	Jn.
2 Chronicles	2 Chron.	Jonah	Jon.
2 Corinthians	2 Cor.	Joshua	Josh.
2 John	2 Jn.	Jude	Jude
2 Kings	2 Kgs.	Judges	Jdg.
2 Peter	2 Pet.	Lamentations	Lam.
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Leviticus	Lev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.	Luke	Lk.
2 Timothy	2 Tim.	Malachi	Mal.
3 John	3 Jn.	Mark	Mk.
Acts	Acts	Matthew	Matt.
Amos	Amos	Micah	Mic.
Colossians	Col.	Nahum	Nah.
Daniel	Dan.	Nehemiah	Neh.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Numbers	Num.
Ecclesiastes	Ecc.	Obadiah	Ob.
Ephesians	Eph.	Philemon	Phile.
Esther	Esther	Philippians	Phlp.
Exodus	Ex.	Proverbs	Prov.
Ezekiel	Ezek.	Psalms	Ps.
Ezra	Ezra	Revelation	Rev.
Galatians	Gal.	Romans	Rom.
Genesis	Gen.	Ruth	Ruth
Habakkuk	Hab.	Song of Solomon	SoS
Haggai	Hagg.	Titus	Tit.
Zechariah	Zech.	Zephaniah	Zeph.

CONTENTS

1	The Blurb	5
2	Scriptures and extra-biblical texts	11
3	The Land and the calendar	19
4	Oh no, Leviticus.....	27
5	Sabbath.....	45
6	Passover	69
7	Unleavened Bread.....	101
8	Firstfruits	109
9	Pentecost.....	117
10	Trumpets.....	139
11	Day of Atonement	151
12	Tabernacles	173
13	Hanukkah.....	187
14	Conclusion.....	192
15	Recommended reading.....	193
16	References	196

CHAPTER 1 - THE BLURB

First and foremost, if you are not a fan of personalised books where authors write about themselves, then this book may not be for you. If on the other hand, you enjoy the familiar approach, then this may be just up your street. Its pages will contain theological difficulties and probable contradictions (both real and apparent) as I attempt to resolve some of the issues our family has encountered in adjusting our 'version' of Christianity. So this small volume which you are now holding will show real life scenarios, anxieties and problems which when read by you will hopefully lead to you not feeling so theologically isolated or at a loss for explaining your new found convictions.

Now, unless you are in a sheltered congregation, (or a cave), you cannot help but have noticed that something is happening amongst the people of God regardless of the denomination to which you belong. Even the uneventful watching of the Christian television stations such as the ever popular GodTV has begun to pick up the trend. There appears to be an ever increasing number of programmes which look at the relevance of the nation of Israel to the Christian Church.

At present more and more materials are beginning to be produced which teach about the Jewish Jesus in his Jewish context. Within the last month of beginning to write, my wife and I have even participated in an online audio-visual teleconference bringing together some of the leading figures in this new movement. I feel it is better we use the word movement as it seems that the concept of the Jewish Jesus is beginning to cross the denominational lines. Some people have suggested that what we are seeing may even become a watershed moment in Jewish-Christian relations and possibly even lead to a reformation of the Reformation in elements of both its doctrine and practise. Whether this happens in reality of course, is another subject altogether, for discussion in a hundred years time by those who have replaced us.

Some people have highlighted scholar NT (Tom) Wright as helping in this overall view by re-examining the writings of the Apostle Paul. Indeed some of these books are proving immensely popular even finding their way into magazines such as Christianity Today.¹ Ed Sanders in his book Paul and Palestinian Judaism has caused the academic Christian community to look again at everything it thinks it knows about the different forms of biblical Judaism.²

Unfortunately, as in any new movement, there is a vast amount of rubbish being taught at the same time; these are not so much untruths as half-truths and people who do not read widely may well be taken in by every wind of doctrine. This should not surprise us as every new movement has its oddballs.

Before the text gets going though, you should ask yourself; do I really need another book on the biblical feast days? The bookshelf has half a dozen already, so what is so special about this one? The answer is that it is not written by some nerdy academic who uses big words, citing Church Fathers whom you have never heard of and who are mostly consigned to the dim and distant past of Church history. That said though, this text will probably cite not just biblical references but also extra-biblical sources – more of this later. The book will attempt to explain everything as it goes, so very little should prove difficult; except maybe calendar controversies, the timing of Easter and Passover, and the presence of Christmas and other mind bogglingly difficult concepts.

Throughout, references will be provided and wherever possible web links to free resource materials which might help you with further study or reading. I am opting to use these ‘un-academic’ works as it would be really useful if, when reading this book you are able to instantly look at the material to assist your study. The book will also contain drawings, but there is a caveat, neither me, nor my wife have much artistic talent so be sure not to laugh. If you see a picture and think you can do better, feel free to email me and fame and fortune might come your

way. Then again, it might not! Every so often, you might find some portions which whilst sounding similar overall, contain a different nuance. Stick with it, it all will make sense in the end.

About me! I am not a Bible scholar! I am not a theologian! I certainly do not have all the answers! By profession I am a disciple of Jesus who supports his calling by working as a psychiatric nurse in the UK. The training for nursing is actually useful as it teaches you how to research, analyse and critique reference and source materials. Hopefully I will be able to use these skills in compiling this volume.

About my faith! I came to faith in the eighties in my late teens (you can do the maths to work out how old I am). I was saved in an Assembly of God Church. During the early years of my faith I would get quite annoyed by leaders in our congregation who were unable to answer some of the questions I had at the time. It probably didn't help that many of my questions were essentially unanswerable with items on the nature of God and the nature (or natures) of Messiah. Maybe in some respects this book is an attempt to redress those early problems and save other people from the headaches and struggles I went through.

Following a serious accident five years ago, which offered me plenty of time to study, my entire theological framework was turned upside down and shaken up when I came to realise something blindingly obvious; Jesus is a Jew. Now I know this is clear, but up until this point in time, I did not consider his Jewishness to be relevant to my faith. In fact, as far as I had been concerned, Jesus was actually quite non-descript. I do not mean this in an offensive way, just that his ethnicity and own religious persuasion did not have any particular bearing on the way I practised my faith.

On coming to understand the Jewishness of Jesus I began to re-evaluate my beliefs and the way I implemented them in everyday life. I began to read and read quite quickly.

During this time, my wife was having similar troubles with squaring the Jesus of the Bible with what the Church taught and practised.

Like many new to this movement, the stumbling block was often the traditional reading of the Apostle Paul. Since then, we have encountered some really good teachers who have helped significantly in explaining Paul from a pro-Jewish and pro-Torah perspective. In this regard, we would just like to say thanks here to Tom Lancaster and all the staff at First Fruits of Zion, though they are in no manner involved in the content or publication of this book.³ Thanks also must go to Tim Hegg of Torah Resource.⁴

We came to the conclusion that we wanted to live more like Jesus lived. Our first step, Sabbath! My family thought I had gone mad and asked me when I was planning on going the whole hog and become Jewish; even more so when we gave up eating bacon, gammon and pork chops. We even stopped eating the customary prawn cocktail in Thousand Island dressing. This was a big one! Do not misunderstand me. We do not eat kosher, but we have significantly altered what we do eat. Shopping is an entirely new experience. Now, not everyone is led down this path and so issues like this become one of conscience.

Like many others who have gone this way before us and the many that will no doubt come after us, the difficulties which might be encountered can vary greatly depending upon your stubbornness and the congregation or denominational structure to which you belong. For us, our regular Sunday morning and rest of the week congregation were very pro-Israel anyway (on the whole) and we were occasionally referred to within our Church as the congregation's spiritual Jews. A statement I have attempted to address and redress on a number of occasions.

People to whom we have spoken have expressed frustration at the lack of how-to and idiot's guide type material there is. Of course you can read Leviticus twenty three but when it

talks about sacrificing various animals things get difficult. No one wants to butcher a sheep in their back yard, regardless of whether it would impinge the Torah's rulings or not; though our little boy would love to see a dinosaur do the job!

Some have also become disillusioned with conventional Christianity and chosen to withdraw from it completely, going their own ways and setting up little churches of their own, or worse they have rejected Christianity altogether and made formal conversions to Judaism, rejecting the very person who brought them this far. We cannot recommend the former approach as our faith is one of community. Traditions are all well and good, but if you do not have a tradition that goes further than your own select group, you run into the danger of becoming just another Christian sect or worse, you leave the rails altogether. Traditions work best when adopted by the majority so they can be passed on from generation to generation. As it says in the well known Bible passage,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.⁵

So, that's us, email us about you.⁶

Before we can get going we need to lay some groundwork about the Bibles we own and their origins. Then we can finally get into the nitty gritty of the study. It is hoped that this book will provide not merely facts about the feasts themselves but also information that allows them to be understood within their greater context. Hopefully you will understand what we

mean when we look at the section on the calendars and the land of Israel.

My personal preference is for books to have as few words as possible but plenty of illustrations and funny pictures (such as Calvin & Hobbes);⁷ unfortunately it would break my budget in publishing, so you'll have to make do with a pretty typeface an occasional dropped capital and simple illustrations. At times, the book may not seem like a study guide and it is possible you may think you're reading a religious novel. Don't be put off; there is power in storytelling.

p.s. For those unfamiliar with Calvin & Hobbes, it has nothing to do with the famous bible guy from a few hundred years ago. Calvin is a six year old boy who asks the same kinds of questions expressed by some of the greatest philosophers ever known. Here are some of his better quotes...

** I'm not dumb. I just have a command of thoroughly useless information.*

** The secret to good self-esteem is to lower your expectations to the point where they're already met?*

** We're so busy watching out for what's just ahead of us that we don't take time to enjoy where we are."*

** It's hard to be religious when certain people are never incinerated by bolts of lightning.*

CHAPTER 2 - SCRIPTURES & EXTRA-BIBLICAL TEXTS

OF BOOKS THERE IS NO END

Imagine the scenario, one page of this book per Protestant Bible book. Instantly this book would be 66 pages long. Then add a page for every well known extra-canonical book, and this book is now eighty pages. To make a poor job of it we will only allow five pages for discussion of the Mishnah and ten for the Talmud(s). We now have ninety-five pages. Luckily for you, we are not going to do this!

It would be really easy at this point to write a volume on this subject alone. Many books have been written on the origins, formation and canon of the scriptures and there is no good sense in re-inventing the wheel, simply flick to the references at the rear to find suitable extra study goodies.⁸

If you're anything like me, the genealogies of the Bible are best read at a brisk pace and if you're like some of the people I know, it is to be skipped over altogether. The preface to the Bibles we read is a lot like a genealogy. It is there to be read when there is nothing better to read.

The origin of our Bible (particular our favourite one) ought to be understood by those reading it; indeed all believers ought to have a general grasp of which Bible they read and where it came from. Sadly, very few people in my own experience read the front matter in their Bibles. They do not know which manuscript(s) it is based on, where it comes from or how it appeared. If truth be known most Christians are not really that bothered and this is a great shame.

So we know which books are in our Bibles, but do we know what is left out, or even why?

What do we mean when we say extra biblical texts? Well, the canon of scripture as we have it now did not really come into being until around the fourth century.⁹ Even when it was being debated upon there was much disagreement over books we now take for granted. It would make a great novel for Dan Brown!

He may be working on it already! Also, when the Church was in its formative years, many of the New Testament writings simply did not exist. In fact when the New Testament was being written, even the Old Testament canon was still not completely set.¹⁰ This fact often comes as somewhat of a surprise to readers who have not studied the origins of the canon of scripture.

SPEAKING IN OTHER TONGUES

It has been said that languages were never my strong point. There is an old joke that a person who speaks two languages is bi-lingual and that a person who speaks only one is English. I have a local accent, so some people probably think my score should be less than one. So why do I tell you this? Whilst much of the Old Testament was originally written in an ancient form of Hebrew lettering, some portions were written in Aramaic. These two languages are closely related; in fact when you see a modern Torah scroll or Jewish road sign, the lettering is actually Aramaic even if the language is Hebrew. Weird! Luther, the famous protestant reformer stated that the Hebrew language was the pure water that constitutes the spring of the scriptures, Greek; the stream which flows from it and Latin was the muddy puddle at the bottom. What he would have thought of English is anyone's guess, but there cannot be any substitute for casual readers of the scriptures to become as acquainted as possible with the language of the bible, even if only by way of a Strong's bible dictionary.

LANGUAGE OF ANGELS

For the early Church, especially after the age of the Apostles, the de-facto version of the scriptures was the Septuagint. If you are unsure what this means just keep on reading.

Within the differing forms of Judaism today, there exists only one accepted text. It is a standard text. What this means is, if you go into any church, you'll find people who read the NIV, some who read the ESV and some who read the NKJV.

Occasionally you might meet someone of an older generation who still reads the KJV. Rarely, someone might possess a copy of the Message. Fortunately, this is a rare occasion!

On entering the synagogue however, the Torah scroll which is kept in a large box called an ark will be taken out and read from. No matter which synagogue you attend or visit, the only text accepted as being completely authoritative is the Masoretic Text. In some respects this is a very good thing as it reduces the confusion which comes from having multiple bible versions. But if truth is known, most Jews do not know how to read Hebrew to an acceptable standard.¹¹ Due to this fact, many Jewish people who are serious about their faith will probably own a bible at home. Within Jewish circles, the two most popular versions are probably the Jewish Publication Society Bible Tanakh and the Artscroll series Tanach. (This is not a spelling error between the two, just the individual organisations transliteration style.)

Whilst having a standard text is useful, it also has the potential ability to close ones eyes to modern research and archaeology such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls are ancient, probably the oldest known texts of the Old Testament to be found. There are some differences between the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls, but I would direct the reader to the appendices at the rear if you wish to find out more.

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME!

A couple of hundred years before Jesus was born the great political power of the day wanted a copy of the Torah for his great library. His name was King Ptolemy and he reigned from 283-246 b.c.e. Tradition has it that a collection of 70 or 72 scholars translated the Hebrew Torah scroll into Greek. Amazingly, despite all the scholars working separately they all produced exactly the same text including the same deliberate error.¹² It is a nice tradition, though there is little real proof to substantiate the claim. At the time of the request only the Torah was permitted

to be translated, nothing more.¹³ This translation is called the Septuagint, often abbreviated simply to LXX (Latin numbers; L=50; X=10; X=10 therefore LXX=70).¹⁴

At first everyone thought it a good idea, but later when copies of varying quality began to circulate with the Prophets and Writings in Greek, rifts were already beginning to open between the Jewish (Christian) faith and the Gentile section of the congregation. As the division deepened, the finger of blame was often pointed at the Septuagint. As further time passed, the Septuagint seriously fell out of favour amongst Jews, but was widely received by the now predominantly Christian (and Gentile) Church. Even with this in mind some within the Church itself called for the removal of spurious copies, requesting versions from the Jews which had not been tampered with.¹⁵

In many respects, the Septuagint is not a word for word translation of the underlying Hebrew text, but rather a paraphrase. There are some significant changes between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text; these include sections being in different locations, word changes and even some verses which do not appear in the Hebrew at all. If your Bible has footnotes in the New Testament, look for ones which have 'LXX' next to them and then look up the actual reference. I think you'll be quite surprised at some of the differences you may encounter.

Within the different strands of Judaism during the period of the early Church, much of the teachings of the Rabbi's and sages were passed on by word of mouth.¹⁶ Now everyone knows what people think; you cannot trust oral transmission, but consider that the New Testament gospels were probably not written until more than thirty years after Jesus' death. This oral transmission leading to the writing of the gospels carried on and is reflected in the writings of the post-apostolic Church Fathers. Besides that, anyone who has served in the Armed Forces, particularly the Navy will know that whispers only break down when it is not a matter of life and death. The scriptures are about life!¹⁷

ARAMAIC: IT'S SEMITIC DIDN'T YOU KNOW?

During the formative years of the Church, besides the already written Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments, other versions and traditions were being passed on orally. One of these was called the Targums (or Targumim). These were essentially Aramaic versions of the Old Testament in paraphrase form with something akin to brief study notes within the text of the scriptures themselves. These were finally written down around the 3-4th century.¹⁸ We even find allusions to the Targumic traditions in the New Testament writings, particularly in the book of Hebrews,¹⁹ but also in the gospels themselves.²⁰ This in and of itself should not really surprise us, as most people of Jesus' day, would have known the myths, legends and traditions that filled their culture.

ONE CANON PLUS ANOTHER CANON MIGHT LEAD TO WAR!

Now after all the books of the OT had been written, other texts were circulating such as Tobit, Esdras, Maccabees and a number of others. Whilst these books never really gained the same authority as the written scriptures, they were popular religious reading material of the day and had a great impact on both Judaism and the emerging Church.²¹ Some early Church leaders went so far as to say they were almost on par with scripture but not quite, though they were recommended for communal reading and study. These texts are referred to sometimes as deuterocanonical works, where 'deutero' means second. So these were texts were viewed as a second canon of scripture.²²

From a New Testament point of view, if we exclude the books currently in our traditional selection, many other books were written. Some were worth the paper they were written on, some less so. Some of these books were popular and were actually counted as scripture for a time, examples might include,

the Didache, Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistles of Clement. Other texts were much more dubious, but serve as useful reading if only to help understand how many early believers viewed subjects such as the Church, the Faith and Christology.²³ This was a time before the Church solidified into a religion in its own right distinct from Judaism.

LAWYERS AND LAW BOOKS

When we look at the pages of the New Testament, we find endless legal disputes. For many years, the legal disputes had been handled orally as well, but in the second century, these oral rulings on how to live out the Torah were finally placed onto paper (or parchment as the case may have been). These instructions on how to practically live out God's teachings were called 'halakhah.'

During the time of Jesus and the Apostles, varying schools of Judaism had some significant disagreements about how to interpret the Torah and what was and was not legal. This process was known as binding and loosing, a phrase you may recognise from the gospel texts. These sayings later committed to writing were known as the Mishnah, which means 'repetition.'

Around two centuries later it was determined that whilst the Mishnah was really good, it often did not provide much in the way of scripture to support the legal rulings. This led to the production of a few more works called the Talmuds. The Talmud consists of the Mishnah and a commentary on it called a 'Gemara.'²⁴ The most popular version of the Talmud is called the Babylonian Talmud. They are multi-volume and are expensive. To own a full set you need an extremely sturdy bookcase and a reinforced bank balance. Still bargains can be had on Amazon and EBay™!

The reason for explaining this material at the outset of the book is because, when my wife and I began to pursue a more biblically based lifestyle, the Bible was not all that useful. Now before you throw the book in the trash in a fit of rage, please

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