

## Happy Holy Days!

In our English language the word "holiday" comes from Anglo-Saxon etymological roots from *hālig* holy + *dæg* day. The word goes back much further than the usage ascribed by the Anglo-Saxon people of Britannia. The word goes all the way back to the Bible days, actually before the New Testament and into the world of the Old Testament Days. In the Jewish world there are seven main events ascribed as the original "holy days."

These holy days are (1) ***The Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot***, which means "booths." This takes place in September or October. It celebrates the journey of the Jews through the wilderness of forty years. To this day the men will construct booths to symbolically represent their temporary dwellings during this time. The people of God celebrated God's protection, provision and faithfulness.

(2) ***The Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah*** is the beginning of the Jewish New Year and is celebrated the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishri (September or October). The ancient ram's horn is sounded to call people together to repent of their sins. It is a day when solemn soul-introspection takes place followed by repentance and receiving forgiveness. It is a day to remember God's judgment, while simultaneously looking forward and hoping to obtain God's mercy in the coming year. Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of what is called *The High Holy Days*. These are ten days ending with *The Day of Atonement* or *Yom Kippur*. It is believed that God writes down in the books your destiny for the upcoming year. The books record if you are to prosper or even die. During these days "getting right" is important because on *The Day of Atonement*, the year is sealed.

(3) ***The Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur*** is considered (even today) to be the highest and holiest in the Jewish calendar. It is celebrated on the tenth day of the Hebrew month, Tishri (September or October). In the Old Testament it was the one and only day that the High Priest would enter into The Holy of Holies and offer the blood of the sacrifice upon the altar. After the blood was offered, a goat was released symbolically carrying the people's sins away and this "scapegoat" never returned again. Because it is believed that God seals the books determining one's future for the year, the Jews wish each other a "Good Signing" (in the Book of Life called *Chatima Tova*).

(4) ***The Passover or Pesach*** tells much in the name itself. In Exodus 12:13 it says, "*And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.*" Passover commemorates the liberation of the people of God from bondage to freedom. It celebrates the re-birth of Israel and deliverance from Egypt. It was a radical act in which the firstborn, from livestock to the son of Pharaoh, died as the angel of death passed by. And the doors that had the blood applied on the post and lintel (in the shape of a cross) were literally "passed over." This is what *Pesach* means, "to pass over." Today, the Jewish people during *Passover* take part in a meal known as the Seder, which incorporates the retelling of the story of Exodus and God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Each participant of the Passover Seder attempts to experience, in a personal way, a national celebration of freedom through God's intervention and deliverance. *Passover* begins on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month Nissan (March or April) and continues for eight days. Originally, *Passover* began at twilight on the fourteenth day of Nissan (Leviticus 23:5), and the next day, the fifteenth, the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* would begin and continue for seven days (Leviticus 23:6). *Hag HaMatzah* or *The Feast of Unleavened Bread* and *Yom HaBikkurim* or *Firstfruits* are both mentioned in Leviticus twenty-three as separate feasts, however, today Jews celebrate all three (including *Passover*) as part of the eight-day *Passover* holiday.

(5) ***Pentecost or Shavout*** is a time of great rejoicing! It has many names in the Bible. It is called *The Feast of Weeks*, *The Feast of Harvest* or *The Latter Firstfruits*. God commanded the Jews

to count seven full weeks (or 49 days) beginning on the second day of *Passover*, and then present offerings of grain to the Lord as a lasting ordinance. *Shavout* occurs on the fiftieth day after *Passover*, acquiring the name *Latter Firstfruits*, because it is the time the new grain of the summer wheat harvest in Israel is presented in joyous celebration. The celebration is also understood as *Matin Torah*, "giving of the Law." Jews believe that it was exactly at this time that God gave the Ten Commandments or Torah to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai. *Pentecost* is celebrated on the fiftieth day after *Passover*, or the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan (May or June).

(6) *The Feast of Lots or Purim* celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from an attempted genocide by wicked Haman. The heroine of this holiday is the Jewish Queen Esther and the hero is her older cousin, Mordecai, serving as her life coach and spiritual mentor. It is ironic that the name given is "*Purim*", which means "lots", because it was through the monthly casting of lots that Haman determined to destroy the Jews. He set the date for the destruction of the Jews, but due to God's over-reaching design, Haman reaped what he sowed and he died on the day he assigned for the people of God to die (Esther 9:24,25). Today *Purim* is celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar (February or March). It is a wonderfully joyous holiday celebrating God's Providence and survival of the Jewish people.

(7) *The Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah* is also known as the *Festival of Lights*. King Antiochus IV, the Greek Seleucid King ruling over Israel, abominably and mockingly sacrificed a pig on the Holy Altar of God in the Temple. To add insult to injury to these people who refused to bow down to man (as a god) he took this defiling blood and placed it on the scrolls of Scripture and the furniture of the Temple. This began the great Maccabean rebellion led by Judah Maccabee (nicknamed The Hammer) who received the zeal from his father (Matthias) who effectively transferred his heroic warrior spirit to all of his sons. When victory over the Greek overlords was obtained, the Jews appropriately rededicated the Temple of God.

Because most of the oil was defiled by the Greeks, there was only enough (holy) oil for one day after lighting the Menorah; it would take a week for sacred oil to be processed and purified. But a true miracle happened - the menorah remained lit for eight consecutive nights, thus receiving the name of the celebratory name, *The Festival of Lights*. Although this holiday was instigated between the Old and New Testaments, it was observed by Jesus according to John 10:22,23. *Hanukkah* celebrates the importance of true worship and belief in miracles. It is celebrated during the Hebrew month Kislev (November or December). It begins on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev and lasts for eight days. Due the proximity and the type of celebration, *Hanukkah* operates in tandem with Christmas.

As a Christian minister of the Gospel I would be remiss not to say that all of these "Holy Days" are prophetic of Jesus! We may sound the *Trumpets* because we have received *Passover* from death to life on the *Day of Atonement*. Satan, like Haman, was foiled. The very act of the cross lifted in a macabre way like Hamon's gallows represents a turn of events – a place of execution now speaking to us of victory while spelling doom and eternal defeat to the Devil. "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD*" (Proverbs 16:33). The cross is our *Purim*! And even as the beginning of the Law is celebrated by *Pentecost*, we have in Jesus Christ the beginning of the New Testament. Historically, the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day after the Passover, which took place on the Day of the Crucifixion of our Lord. And now Christians, the dwelling place of God on earth, are dedicated, like the Temple of old, as living miracles - a perpetual *Festival of Lights*. Through Christ we become light-bearers to the uttermost parts of the world. Therefore, let us not forget to go to our *Tabernacles* (Churches) on Sunday and celebrate God's provision, protection and faithfulness to us during our temporary dwelling on earth until we get to our eternal home in Heaven. "*For all the promises of God in him (Jesus) are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*" (II Corinthians 1:20).

So when the atheists and secularists complain about the usage of the phrase Merry Christmas, insisting that we must use the word Happy Holidays, I smile and I say, "Happy Holidays, Happy Holy Days, Merry Christmas and God bless us everyone! And oh, by the way, Happy New Year!

- Pastor Pope -

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