

on choosing festivals wisely

The festivals our CREATOR¹ ordained for Israel are several, and are based around HIS Holy Calendar. Links to agriculture and lunar months should hardly surprise us when YHVH created Man and “put Him in the Garden of Eden to tend it and to guard it.”² YHVH made us for HIS Own Glory, and designed Man to be the most splendid of the Gardeners. There are three pilgrimage festivals or Chag (חג pron. khag) during the course of the year. The Calendar given by GOD starts with the ripening of barley in Israel, when the barley is *abiv* or has reached a state of ripeness nearly ready for harvest. The new moon after *abiv* barley begins a new year.³ Major festivals in the first, third and seventh lunar months following *abiv* barley are part of the life of Israel, of the people GOD chose to inherit the covenant of friendship HE granted to Avraham. Chapter 23 of Leviticus starts with the keeping of Yom Shabbat (resting on Saturday). It then summarises Passover and First-fruits, the Feast of Weeks, Yom Teruah (Shouting), Yom Kippur (Atonement) and Asif (Ingathering). While most Jews and Christians have adopted other cultures to some degree, there are still people who remain steadfast in keeping the festivals ordained by GOD, as did YESU, our MASTER. To follow HIM the more completely, we should know what those festivals are and choose our celebrations more wisely.

what month is it, anyway?

While the books of Moses speak of the first, second, third and seventh months of the year, some names have become associated with them. The first month is naturally enough called *Abiv*. The *Rabbanites*⁴ have adopted Babylonian names like *Nissan* and *Tammuz*. They also start the seventh month as New Year among their many traditions. Suffice it to say again that the beginning of months was defined by GOD at the time HE brought Israel out of Egypt. Evidence of *abiv* barley + new moon = the start of a new year. The *Rabbanites* departed from examining the barley to establish the beginning of months each year. Perhaps they will get back to it one day, but some of their numbers heap scorn upon the *Karaites* for this very practice.⁵ The *Karaites* continue to search in the Land of Israel for *abiv* barley in order to be assured that the new moon is the start of a new year. In early 2005, the *Karaite* and *Rabbanite* determinations for *Abiv* were not the same with much clamour from some people. In 2013, the first day of Unleavened Bread differed between them by two days. For me? *Abiv* barley + new moon = start of new year. *Abiv* barley is a prelude to a new year and to Passover. GOD made it simple. I heeded the *Karaites* to get the correct timing.

the first lunar month

The commandments related to keeping of *Chag HaMatsot* (חג המצות), the Pilgrimage Festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread, are found in Exodus Ch.12 and 13 with recounting in Deuteronomy 16. We learn of the wave offering in Leviticus 23. In preparation for Passover, all leaven must be removed from the homes, even from all the land of Israel.⁶ Parents are to recount the Exodus from Egypt on the first night of the festival.⁷ Our MASTER YESU’s warning “**Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod**”⁸ makes a good additional reading for the same evening as we teach our children to stay close to GOD rather than any religious or political elites.

...? from whence came 'easter' ? Around the time of Passover each year, there is a pagan feast called 'easter'. In the KJV 'authorised' translation of the Bible, where Herod had arrested the Apostle Simon Barjonas we find: *And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.*⁹

¹ full CAPITALS like this are reserved for DIVINE PERSON and not meant to be “loud”

² see Genesis 2:15

³ see Exodus 12:1, also Exodus 9:31-32 and 23:15

⁴ a loose term for the rabbis of modern Judaism as protectors of traditions that have been established in the long history of their “oral law” as fixed in writing in the Talmud

⁵ see http://www.therefinersfire.org/aviv_search.htm for an example of such scorn and additional unfounded assertions calling for the use of the vernal equinox as a primary reference for setting Passover.

⁶ see Exodus 12:15,19 and 13:7

⁷ see Exodus 13:8

⁸ see Mark 8:15

⁹ Acts 12:4, King James Version, Project Gutenberg EBook 7999

What is this word 'easter' written in the KJV with a capital 'E'? The English word comes from the Anglo-Saxon *eastre* or *estera*, a teutonic 'goddess' of the sexual impulse that sacrifices were offered to in April. It was just one more ugly mistake among many by KJV compilers to use the name of a local orgy instead of giving a proper translation.

... What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven, whose name, as pronounced by the people Nineveh, was evidently identical with that now in common use in [England]. That name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar. The worship of Bel and Astarte was very early introduced into Britain, along with the Druids, "the priests of the groves." [...] If Baal was thus worshipped in Britain, it will not be difficult to believe that his consort Astarte was also adored by [the] ancestors, and that from Astarte, whose name in Nineveh was Ishtar, the religious solemnities of April, as now practised, are called by the name of Easter--that month, among our Pagan ancestors, having been called Easter-monath. The festival, of which we read in Church history, under the name of Easter, in the third or fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed [...]¹⁰

The language of Christians the world over is marred by this 'easter' of long-departed religious and political elites. The so-called *Lent season* is also of Babylonian origin. The word *Lent* came from the Saxon word *Lenct*, or *Spring*. What do these and rabbits and eggs have to do with the Passover and the Resurrection of our MESSIAH? Not a blessed thing! If you wish instead to participate in Passover celebrations, do refer first to commandments concerning Gentile participation.¹¹

the second lunar month

In Numbers 9:1-14, we learn also of a duty for those who are unclean at the time of Passover to keep it in like manner during the second lunar month. In fact, one of the most joyous keepings of Passover ever recorded was held by all Israel in the second month at the order of King Hezekiah.¹²

the third lunar month

The third lunar month is where we find the Pilgrimage Festival *Chag HaKatsir* (חַג הַקְצִיר), some call *Shavuot*, Harvest and the Feast of Weeks, which takes place about seven weeks after the first fruits offering of the first lunar month. This is a special Shabbat, spoken of in Exodus 23 and more in Leviticus 23, Numbers 28, and Deuteronomy 16. Do notice that the two loaves making up part of the additional offerings of the day are to be made with yeast. Thus, one must remove all leaven from the Land of Israel before Passover,¹³ and then start a new culture of leaven to be ready before the need arises for it to be used at *Chag HaKatsir*.¹⁴

the seventh lunar month

Yom Teruah (Day of Shouting) - The seventh month starts with the blowing of trumpets, an indicator that the number of harvests to Jubilee and return of land is now one less. The modern Jewish culture refers to the start of the seventh month as "rosh Hashanah" or new year, influenced by pagan Babylonian practices, and it has not improved with age.¹⁵ It is a day for there to be no work and for making much noise.

¹⁰ from Alexander Hislop's 1858 The Two Babylons, Chapter III, section II

¹¹ see Exodus 13:43-49; also discussed in a Legal primer on www.primeconcord.info

¹² read 2Chronicles 30

¹³ see Exodus 13:7 in particular

¹⁴ a web search for *natural leaven* will take you to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sourdough> which contains a short description of the process.

¹⁵ From http://www.karaite-korner.org/yom_teruah.shtml "From very early times the Babylonians had a lunar-solar calendar very similar to the biblical calendar. The result was that Yom Teruah often fell out on the same day as the Babylonian New Years festival known as "Akitu". Akitu fell out on the 1st day of Tishrei which coincided with Yom Teruah on the 1st day of the Seventh Month. The fact that the Jews had started calling the Seventh Month by the Babylonian name Tishrei paved the way for turning Yom Teruah into a Jewish Akitu."

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) - The evening of the ninth day of the seventh month is the start of a full night and full day each year when we are to humble ourselves. It is certainly a time for reflection about our place in HIS Universe. It is the Day of Atonement. It is the subject of Leviticus chapter 16 and touched upon elsewhere. Most observing this day will fast sunset to sunset from all food, some even from water and more. The JPS translation calls for self-denial. The Lamsa translation from the Aramaic calls this day *the Sabbath of Sabbaths for you* and calls for us to humble ourselves. The penalty for not doing so is to be cut off from one's people. In keeping the foremost Commandment daily, loving YHVH with all your heart, and all your soul and all diligence, it becomes easier at Yom Kippur to look at our small selves and consider how we have done during the year. How well have we been keeping HIS Commandments? Instead of looking at a fashionable carbon footprint, what does our blood footprint look like? Have we avoided blood as HE meant us to? How have we treated the descendants of Yakov? How well, indeed, have we treated ourselves? It is a time for serious reflection. Atonement for the sins of the nation has been by the blood of the innocent life. In our modern days, the Holy Blood of YESU the Righteous is used to cover over sin where GOD so chooses. Yom Kippur is a day for sober reflection upon our small selves and who we are in eternity.

Chag Asif (חג אסיף - The Festival of Ingathering) – Shortly after Yom Kippur, we find an open-air outdoor camp festival for the entire nation. It is the third of three pilgrimage festivals in the year. It is a time of feasting after the harvest, and living out of doors in a *sukkah* made from leafy branches and palms, leading many to refer to the feast as *Sukkot*. While some say there are only four kinds of branches to be used in making a *sukkah*, I do favour bamboo as well. Some people simply pitch modern tents and set about to enjoy their time with others of like faith. The festival is spoken of in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere. The fifteenth day of the seventh month is the beginning of an eight day festival that starts and ends with a special Shabbat of no work. It is the third quarter of the moon, and in any place with nice weather, it can be an extreme pleasure. There are Christian denominations from North America to Southern Africa who congregate in this way in the seventh month. If you want to choose a festival for yourself or your family to participate in, then you might look to ordering your family holiday calendar to suit this event every year, even at the expense of some of the more customary times. Children attending these events annually in our time could more easily find themselves alive beyond the return of YESU to Jerusalem. It will then be an obligation¹⁶ for the survivors among the nations that went up against Israel to gather for *Chag Asif* each year in Jerusalem, to humble themselves in the city of the Great King. Why not start early meeting up with eternal family at such gatherings in the seventh month, and sharing strength and hope in our own times?

from Asif to *abiv* barley

Between the end of Chag Asif and *Abiv*, there are no special festivals from GOD. There are, however, several celebrations that can be considered part of religious life for many people.

...from whence came *hallowe'en*? - Among the holidays celebrated in notionally Christian countries today, few have stranger histories than *hallowe'en* which commemorates rites and beings at war with the servants of YHVH. It is a mix of pagan customs, religious traditions and superstitions. The earliest *hallowe'en* celebrations took place among the Celts thousands of years ago with priests, the Druids, who sacrificed by fire. November 1 marked New Year's Day, the beginning of the time of "the light that loses, the night that wins." The Scots to the North added a few odd things of their own concerning bonfire ashes and divination by sieves.¹⁷ *All Hallows' Day* was 'transferred' to November 1st by the pope called Gregory IV as a substitute for the pagan Germanic celebrations at that time. When the church appropriated *hallowe'en* as its own, witchcraft emerged as an organized cult in opposition. During the Middle Ages *hallowe'en* became known as 'the night of the witch', when the devil and its followers were said to gather to mock the church's coming festival of *All Saints' Day* on November 1st by performing unholy acts the night before. As the Roman church further embedded this holiday in its religion such enemies found it a way into the lives and superstitious practices of Christians. While *All Hallows'* was a day for religious observance, *All Hallows' Even (hallowe'en)* remained a night for magic and superstition. When the Puritans left their homes and settled in

¹⁶ see Zechariah 14

¹⁷ the Hastings Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion, Volume 11, shows these on pages 11a and 506b in my hardbound volumes published 1926-1928.

America in the 1600's, they did not celebrate *hallowe'en* – they left it behind as a heathen event and the work of the devil. It was not until the 1800s, when the Irish and Scots arrived in large numbers, that *hallowe'en* became a holiday in America.

So, is *hallowe'en* just a nice fun holiday for children? No, it is not. It is another example of how Christianity was paganized during earlier centuries and such practices got through by the uncritical passing down by too many as esteemed tradition. Evil, death, magic and witchcraft are not things to expose children to, at least not for followers of YESU. Revelation 18:4 says ... Then I heard another voice out of heaven say: "***MY people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues, for her sins are a sticky mass piled up to heaven, and GOD has remembered her crimes.***" Let us not leave modern Christian children so comfortable with things handed down that are so completely foreign to the narrow way and the straight gate.

...from whence came Chanukah? - The book 1Maccabees tells of restoring the Temple and a new altar after the defilements of Antiochus Epiphanes. "*Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month in the one hundred forty-eighth year they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.*"¹⁸

...from whence came christmas? - Christmas is said to celebrate the birth of YESU, our MESSIAH. On close inspection, you will find that it does not. Our MESSIAH was likely born in the Autumn.¹⁹ The Roman feast of 25th December is for Tammuz, of the Babylonian religion, and other days such as Lady Day and Epiphany are related to this. YHVH did not tell us to celebrate *Christmas*. Why do people do so? How did it happen? The name *christmas* appeared around 450 CE when the pope called Julius decreed that all catholics must celebrate the birthday of Christ at the same time the heathen were celebrating the saturnalia. It was designated as *Christe-masse*, or *Christ's mass*.

"That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival, is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin. In Egypt, the son of Isis, the Egyptian title for the queen of heaven, was born at this very time, "about the time of the winter solstice." The very name by which Christmas is popularly known among ourselves--Yule-day --proves at once its Pagan and Babylonian origin. "Yule" is the Chaldee name for an "infant" or "little child"; and as the 25th of December was called by our Pagan Anglo-Saxon ancestors, "Yule-day," or the "Child's day," and the night that preceded it, "Mother-night," long before they came in contact with Christianity, that sufficiently proves its real character."²⁰

Few seem to know that the *christmas tree* also had its origin in Babylon's mystery religion. It was used to represent Tammuz, the name meaning a sprout. Ancient coins have been found picturing a tree stump representing the dead Nimrod and a small tree growing nearby representing Tammuz. The feast of saturnalia, lasting about a week, was held at this time of the winter solstice, accompanied with much merrymaking, wild revelry and debauchery. In the Babylonian religion, lights were kindled in late December and burned to early January where "epiphany" normally gets celebrated around 6th of January. Around the year 230 CE, the 'church father' Tertullian noted: "*By us, who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the*

¹⁸ see 1Macc 4:52-55; the *one hundred forty-eighth year* being around 164 BCE.

¹⁹ YESU was born around either March –or- September from what little we know. In Luke 1:5 we learn that Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, was a priest of the course of Abijah. The services of Abijah in the Temple twice each year were around the 10th week of the year and again in the latter rains. A number of verses giving the timing of events of the birth of John and then YESU allow us to assert that YESU was likeliest born in the Autumn around the time of *Chag Asif*. There are men who insist that YESU must have been born during that festival but our Biblical evidence is not precise enough to affirm this. We can, however, say that YESU was Not born on 25th December.

²⁰ from Hislop, The Two Babylons, Chapter III Section I

Christians.”²¹ While late December remains a time of family travel and family gatherings, I have long-since stopped participating in religious festivals of the season.

...but what about Nicanor and Purim? - The festival day of Nicanor, at times a day of fasting just before Purim, has been largely overshadowed by Purim itself.²² The Book of Esther recounts the triumph of Mordecai over Haman and allies against Israel in the days of King Achashverosh, who *ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia*.²³ Like many other Jewish remembrances sprinkled throughout the year, Purim is a nice memorial, and an excellent Bible study for group festivities. Provided we do not mistake it for one of the festivals given us by statute from YHVH, then I can even recommend this one and have personally enjoyed participating in readings, re-enactments and praise to GOD for HIS Great blessings.

...and what of those feasts of Islam? - No Islamic holiday is found in the Books of Moses. They are a new thing. While Islam’s *Al-Quran* mentions the Prophet Moses often, Islam does not seek nor will it find a foundation in Torah. The Islamic calendar is not re-set based upon an agricultural event while YHVH re-sets the months using barley. Islamic festivals are held without regard to season, moving earlier compared with solar calendars by about ten days per year. As familiar as I am with those festivals, I leave them here otherwise un-discussed and, yet further, un-recommended.

will you choose your festivals more wisely?

Christians who love YHVH with all their heart will withdraw in due course from pagan-born celebrations handed down to them, shocked at what the world does in HIS Name. They will not contribute to the perpetuation of 'easter' but may look to celebrating the Passover in a Torah-abiding manner and celebrating YESU’s Resurrection in the same week. They will not contribute to the perpetuation of *hallowe’en* in any way. They will not add their voices to *the ancient yule-tide carol*, or sing out *oh, Xmas tree, how beautiful thy branches!* They will not run in the direction of Islamic or pantheistic holidays. Instead they will look to YESU Whom we are called to follow. HE obeyed Torah and celebrated the festivals ordained by GOD. You can follow YESU, and walk as HE walked. Or you can follow someone or something else. The choice is yours. Try dropping one or more of the pagan-born traditional festivals. See if there are wholesome local folk festivals that celebrate agricultural harvests. Why not even go further to celebrate Sukkot with others who set their annual vacation calendars specifically for it?

GOD, in HIS Great Wisdom, gave all creatures free choice. While we could not choose our parents, we can choose to count Noah and Methuselah, Hanoah and Adam among our ancestors, with due respect and satisfaction. We are free to choose our favoured seasons and colours, our friends and foods. We are likewise free to choose what festivals we participate in, and to what extent. During some two decades, I went very gradually from not knowing anything about the festivals ordained by GOD, to observing almost nothing else. My choices changed slowly as I became better informed. These notes are my reflection on that slow and painless process of letting go of some things, and embracing others as I got older. I look back with growing satisfaction upon real rests on real Shabbats, and observing days that are special to GOD at their appointed times. It has been another quietly joyful part of the journey back to HIM.

a migrant labourer

*somewhere on the Sichuan plateau
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²¹ in Hislop’s book, the saying is attributed to Tertullian, *De Idololatria*, c.14, vol i, pg 682, underlining is mine.

²² Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 1926-1928 printings, volume 5, page 866a

²³ see Book of Esther 1:1