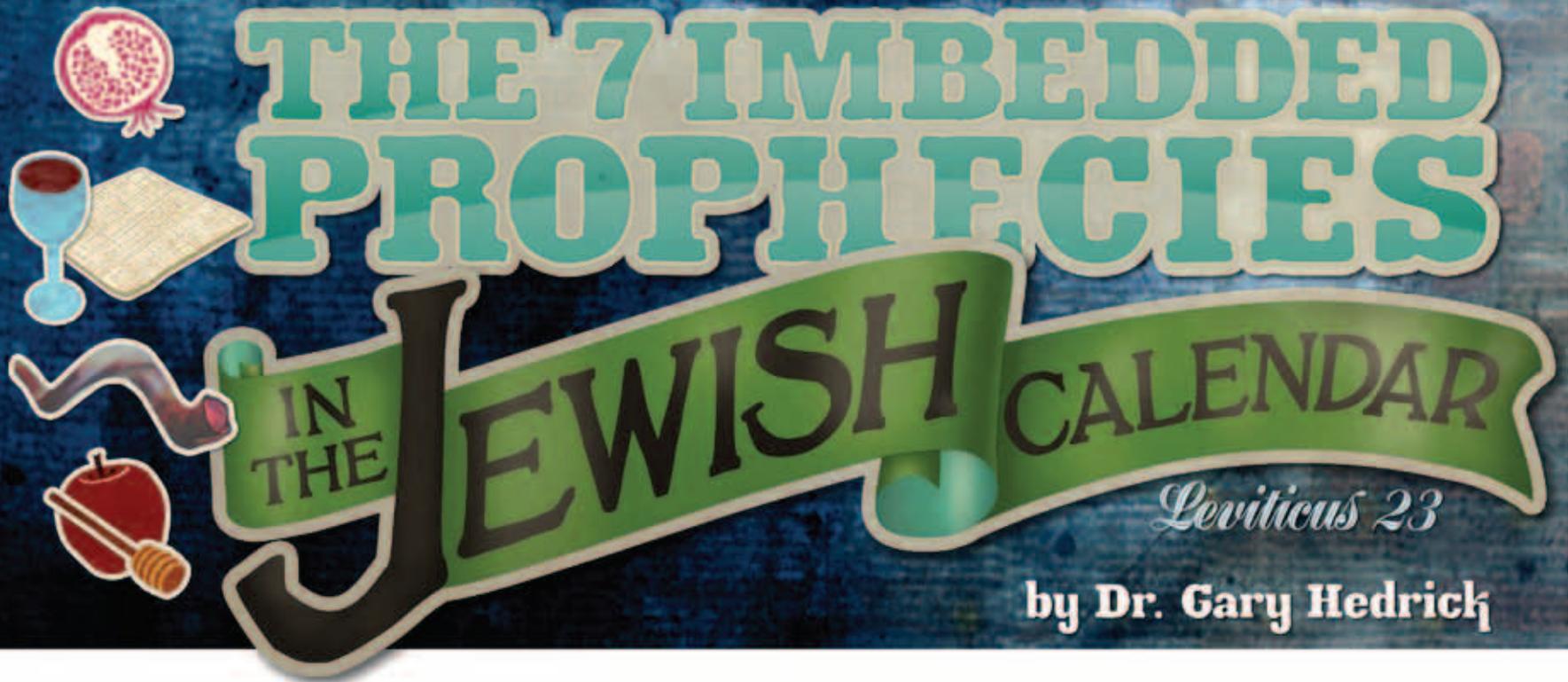




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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



Believe it or not, some of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible were written by Moses. That's right—Moses.

If this surprises you, you're not alone. For most of us, the term "prophecy" brings to mind the writings of people like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, or the Apostles Paul, Peter, or John—just to name a few.

Moses, however, doesn't usually make the list. It's really too bad because the Torah contains several of the most important prophetic passages in the entire Bible.

One of those passages is found in Leviticus 23, where Moses sets forth a series of annual festivals that God commanded Israel to observe. Seven remarkable prophecies are imbedded in these recurring events on the Jewish calendar.

Purpose of the Feasts

Three Hebrew words are used to describe these annual observances. The first word is *mo'ed* (מועד), which appears in Verse 2 and means "a set time" or "an appointment." It's the same idea as making an appointment to see your doctor or your hairdresser. When you

make a *mo'ed*, you're setting a meeting time. Both you and the other person are agreeing to show up in the same place at the same time.

Another word is *miqra* (מקרא), which means "a calling together" or "convocation" (v. 2). The Lord says these "appointed times" (*mo'edim*) are "sacred assemblies" (*miqra kadosh*).

The third word is *zikkaron* (זכרון), which occurs in Verse 24 and means "a memorial" or "a remembrance." This ancient word has carried over into modern Hebrew in forms that variously mean "memo," "memoirs," and "memorable," among others. A *zikkaron*, then, helps keep us from forgetting.

These three words encompass the character of the seven observances in Leviticus 23: calling, meeting, and reminding. Israel was **called** together as a community, they **met** on a preset and recurring schedule, and they were **reminded** of their calling, responsibilities, and destiny as God's people.

The *mo'edim* are times when God says He wants to meet with His people, Israel. It's hard to understand why the eternal Creator of heaven and earth would want to meet with finite, flawed humans—but He does.

As far back as the Garden of Eden, we find the LORD God (*Yahweh Elohim*) walking “in the cool of the day” and calling for Adam (Gen. 3:8-9). It had evidently become customary for the Lord and Adam to take a stroll together through *Gan Eden* during the early evening hours of each day.

God wanted to be with these people He had created. It’s hard for us to understand because we know that God is complete within Himself. He has neither inadequacies nor emptiness. So He doesn’t “need” us in any ordinary sense of that word. Nonetheless, He *wants* us. That’s why He made us.



So He set seven appointments throughout the year to meet with His people, Israel. These were specific times during the spring and fall of the year when the people of Israel would gather in Jerusalem to do the following things:

- **To worship.** They came together to praise the Lord and to express their gratitude for His goodness. Again, it’s not that He needs our praise or thanks; He formed us from the dust of the ground and He knows this is what we were created to do. Praise and worship complete us and connect us with our Creator in ways that nothing else can.

- **To remember.** As we said earlier, this is one of the meanings of *zikkaron* (“memorial” or “remembrance”). As believers, it’s important not to forget how God brought us to where we are. When we’re in the midst of trials, we need to remember how God, historically, has brought His people through the hardest of times.

- **To give.** God doesn’t need our money or other gifts; after all, He owns everything anyway. Nonetheless, He knows it’s good for us to give something back to Him. When we give, we are acknowledging His lordship in our lives. It shows we understand

Traveling from remote areas of Israel to Jerusalem could take up to a week or more each way. That’s why only three of the annual feasts were obligatory—Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. These were the only times during the year when all adult males were required to present themselves at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Many people call these observances “the feasts of Israel.” Amazon.com currently lists more than 100 books that include that phrase in the title. However, the Bible never calls them “the feasts of Israel”; rather, they are “the feasts of the LORD” (Lev. 23:2, 4, 37, 44; 2 Chron. 2:4; Ezra 3:5). God himself said, “These are My feasts” (Lev. 23:2).

It’s true that the feasts were given to OT Israel (2 Chron. 2:4); however, that doesn’t mean they can’t also be *for* NT believers. (The same thing could be said about the Ten Commandments or any other part of the Torah.)¹ Of course, the feasts are not binding on us today as a legal requirement. But they can teach us a great deal about our relationship to God—and about where we’ve been and where we’re going.

Prophecy in the Feasts

Taking them in chronological order, the first four of these observances were held in the spring and the last three took place in the fall. That’s why we refer to them as the “Spring Feasts” and the “Fall Feasts.”

Each of these seven observances had an immediate application in Moses’ day, but they also pointed to far-off prophetic events. Prophetically speaking, all seven feasts pointed to events that were still in the future when Moses wrote the Torah.

With the advantage of 21st-century hindsight, we can see that the four Spring Feasts pointed to Yeshua’s first coming. The three Fall Feasts continue to point us to the future and Messiah’s Second Coming. A long time has elapsed since His first coming (just as there’s a relatively long time between the spring and fall feasts on the Jewish calendar); however, the Fall Feasts

that everything we have—including every breath of air that fills our lungs—ultimately comes from God. In ancient Israel, there was a sophisticated system of sacrifices and offerings so God’s people could come before Him (in the Tabernacle or Temple) for various purposes.

- **To submit.** Coming before the Lord on a regular basis is a good way to make us accountable to Him. These seven occasions during the year provided an opportunity for everyone to evaluate their priorities and identify areas of their lives that needed improvement.

Messianic Perspectives™

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will find their fulfillment in Messiah's Second Coming just as surely as the Spring Feasts did in His first coming.

Profile of the Feasts

1. Passover (פסח, *Pesach*)

'These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover' (Lev. 23:4-5).

The first of the Spring Feasts is Passover. In Moses' time, it was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month, *Abib* (which was renamed Nisan during the Babylonian Captivity).

Passover recalled the events of the Exodus, when God used Moses to deliver His people, Israel, from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 12:1-14).

When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to free God's people, God sent the king a series of incentives called "plagues." The tenth and final plague was the death of the firstborn (Ex. 7:14—11:10; 12:29-32).

To avoid the death of the firstborn, the head of each family had to brush the blood of a lamb on the lintel and two doorposts of their dwelling (Ex. 12:12-13). The Lord said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (v. 13). That's why this observance became known as Passover—because the Destroyer "passed over" the houses of Israel when he saw the blood of the lambs.

For ancient Israel, then, Passover pointed prophetically to the sacrifice of Yeshua, whose shed blood would save and protect His people. John the Baptist declared that Yeshua was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Therefore, it was no coincidence that Yeshua was crucified during the time when the nation was observing Passover (Matt. 26:2).

In the NT, Paul wrote, "The [Messiah], our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Destroyer, whoever or whatever he may be, has no power over us if we have applied (figuratively, by faith) the blood of Messiah Yeshua to the "doorposts" of our hearts (1 Peter 1:19).

THE FEASTS OF YAHWEH

PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT

Spring Feasts

(Leviticus 23:4-22)

1	Passover (<i>Pesach</i>) Fulfilled by Yeshua (Jesus) when He was crucified c. AD 30 (Nisan 14, 3790).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Feast of Unleavened Bread (<i>Hag HaMatzot</i>) Fulfilled by Yeshua when He was buried c. AD 30 (Nisan 15-22, 3790).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	Feast of Firstfruits (<i>Hag HaBikkurim</i>) Fulfilled by Yeshua at His Resurrection c. AD 30 (sundown, Nisan 16, 3790).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Feast of Pentecost (<i>Hag Shavu'ot</i>) Fulfilled by <i>Ruach HaKodesh</i> (the Holy Spirit) on the day of Pentecost c. AD 30 (Sivan 6, 3790).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The *Ekklesia* Period (Church Age)

(*Tkufat HaKehila*) 2000+ Years

Purpose: the Good News of the Jewish Messiah goes forth as a "light to the Gentiles," declaring God's salvation "to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6) as He calls a people for Himself out from among both Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:24).

Fall Feasts

(Leviticus 23:23-36)

5	Feast of Trumpets (<i>Yom Truah</i>) Will be fulfilled when Yeshua returns to earth in His Second Coming (two phases, seven years apart) (Tishri 1).	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Day of Atonement (<i>Yom HaKippurim</i>) Will be fulfilled when "all Israel" is saved at the end of the Tribulation Period (Tishri 10).	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Feast of Tabernacles (<i>Hag HaSukkot</i>) Will be fulfilled during the coming Messianic Age (Millennium) when God once again "tabernacles" among His people (Rev. 21:3; cp. John 1:14) (Tishri 15).	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Unleavened Bread (חג המצות, *Hag HaMatzot*)

Moses made a very clear distinction between Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover was on the 14th of Nisan and the first day of Unleavened Bread began on the 15th:

‘And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it’ (Lev. 23:6-8).

Moses said that Passover was on Nisan 14 (which started at sundown on Nisan 13). Then Unleavened Bread started 24 hours later (at sundown on Nisan 14, when Nisan 15 began) and continued for seven days.²

For one week, they ate unleavened bread (*matzah*). Leaven (Heb., *chametz*) symbolizes sin in the Bible; therefore, the *matzah* pointed to the Messiah, who had to be sinless. That’s why the Passover lamb had to be spotless, or without defect; He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48).

Yeshua himself, at His last Passover, explained the symbolism of the *matzah* when He broke it and said to the disciples, “Take, eat; this is My body” (Matt. 26:26). The breaking of the bread, of course, pointed to His approaching crucifixion and death.

Today, during the traditional observance of the Passover Seder, the leader takes three pieces of *matzah* and places them in a little cloth bag called a *matzah tash*. The *matzah tash* has three pockets—and one piece goes into each one.

According to the rabbis, the three *matzot* represent the priests, the Levites, and the people of Israel. But messianic believers have a different interpretation. We think that those three *matzot* represent the three Persons of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the *Ruach HaQodesh* (Holy Spirit). Here’s why. During the Seder, the middle piece of *matzah* is taken out and broken in half. One half is broken into olive-sized bits and distributed to everyone at the table. The other half, known as the *afikomen* (אפיקומן), is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden away for later.



If we’re right about this and the three *matzot* represent the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then the middle one would represent the Son—the one they take out and break in half. One half is broken up into little pieces so everyone can have a taste, and there’s always enough for everyone. Remember what Yeshua said: “This is my body which is broken for you.”

After the meal, the children go searching for the *afikomen* (the half of the middle *matzah* that was hidden away) and the one who finds it gets a little treat.

Prophetically, then, our Lord Yeshua is our *afikomen*. When He was crucified 2,000 years ago, His body was wrapped in linen and hidden away in a borrowed grave for three days (Nisan 15, 16, and 17).³ Then He was resurrected by the power of God. Anyone who “finds” this resurrected Messiah, and trusts in Him, receives the greatest gift of all—eternal life.

So Passover (one day) and Unleavened Bread (seven days) were originally two distinct (but definitely connected) observances. By the first century (1,400 years after Moses), however, the two observances had been blended into one, seven-day Passover-Unleavened Bread celebration known as “Passover.”

It’s interesting that the New Testament recognizes this change in the Passover celebration when it says, “The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, drew near” (Luke 22:1). Note that Luke says Unleavened Bread was *called* the Passover—but it really wasn’t the Passover. According to the Torah, Passover was on Nisan

14 (starting at sundown on Nisan 13 and continuing for 24 hours). Luke explains that Unleavened Bread (starting on Nisan 15 and continuing for seven days) had been renamed “Passover.” The original Passover was absorbed into the new observance—and the new, seven-day “Passover” started one day later than the old one.

(For more information about the messianic typology of Passover and Unleavened Bread, see our *Passover Haggadah* at MessianicSpecialties.com.)

3. Firstfruits (בכורים, *Bikkurim*)

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest’” (Lev. 23:9-10).

Two Hebrew words designate the Firstfruits: *reysheet* and *bikkurim*. *Reysheet* means “first” or “beginning.” In the Hebrew Bible, it’s found in Genesis 1:1, where it says, “In the beginning.” *Bikkurim* comes from a word that means “a firstling” or “to arrive early.” It referred to the first gleanings from the crops or the first fruit from the orchards.

Firstfruits was observed on the third day after Passover. So these first three Spring Feasts occurred on three successive days:

- Abib/Nisan 14—Passover
- Abib/Nisan 15—The first day of Unleavened Bread
- Abib/Nisan 16—The Feast of Firstfruits



This festival was called “Firstfruits” because it was when the people brought the Lord a portion of the first crops (the fruit of the Land) from their early spring planting. It was an act of gratitude and worship as they acknowledged His goodness to them. Firstfruits was a joyful time because it anticipated the bountiful harvest that would follow later in the year.

Prophetically, Firstfruits points to the Resurrection of the Messiah on the third day after His crucifixion:

But now [Messiah] is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in [Messiah] all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: [Messiah] the firstfruits, afterward those who are [Messiah's] at His coming (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

Just as Firstfruits anticipated a future harvest, the Messiah's resurrection anticipates the future time when He will return and God's people from all the ages will be raised from death unto life (1 Thess. 4:16).

4. Weeks/Pentecost (חג שבועות, Hag Shavu'ot)

‘And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD’ (Lev. 23:15-16).

Shavu'a (שבוע) is the Hebrew word for “week.” It comes from *sheva*, Hebrew for the number “seven,” reflecting the fact that seven days constitute one week. *Shavu'ot* is the plural form (“weeks”).

Shavu'ot is sometimes referred to as Pentecost (from the Greek word for “fiftieth”) because it begins on the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week (v. 16), which would have been a Sunday (the first day of the week). In traditional Judaism, *Shavu'ot* commemorates the giving of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai 50 days after they left Egypt (Ex. 19). It's the last of the Spring Feasts.

Because it fell during the fall harvest, *Shavu'ot* had its own “firstfruits” (Lev. 23:17). This shouldn't be confused with the earlier Firstfruits (vv. 9-10).

Prophetically, *Shavu'ot* pointed to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost—50 days after the Messiah's resurrection (Acts 2:1-4), which occurred sometime after the Sabbath of Passover week (John 20:1-2). Pentecost marked the birth of the New Covenant (or New Testament) Body of Messiah, or what most Christians know as “the Church.”

The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, meaning “a called-out assembly.” It signifies the fact that God has called out a people for Himself from the mass of humanity. Some of His “called-out ones” are Jewish; others are not. Whoever we are, and wherever we come from, we all have the same spiritual standing before God: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in [Messiah] Jesus*” (Gal. 3:28).

The offering prescribed for *Shavu'ot*—two loaves baked with leaven—anticipated this dual composition (Jews and Gentiles) of the messianic community (or Church). Leaven symbolizes sin; so these leavened loaves represented frail and sinful (yet redeemed) humanity. (The only offerings that couldn't include leaven were the ones that represented the Messiah—because He is sinless.)

Note that both loaves were baked with the same ingredients (flour and leaven). Jewish people, then, aren't really all that different from the rest of us. On the inside, we're the same. We are all sinners in need of salvation. We all come to God in the same way—that is, by placing our faith and trust in Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah. That's why Paul said, “*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him*” (Rom. 10:12).

In much the same way that God breathed the “breath of life” into Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7), He breathed life into the Church on *Shavu'ot*:

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit is the One who animates and empowers the Church: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

This fourth *mo'ed*, the Feast of Weeks, concludes the Spring Feasts.

5. Trumpets (זכרון תרועה, Zik-karon Truah or “Memorial of Trumpet Blasting”)

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD’” (Lev. 23:23-25).

This is *Yom Truah* (“Day of Trumpet Blasting”)—the first of the Fall Feasts. In ancient Israel, it took place after the long summer interlude and marked the fall harvest on the Jewish agricultural calendar (cp. John 4:35).

Another name for this festival is *Rosh HaShanah* (lit., “head of the year”) because it’s considered the Jewish New Year. According to traditional Jewish sources, the world was created on *Rosh HaShanah*. The Jewish calendar is calibrated according to the number of years from this traditional date for Creation. For instance, the year 2011 on the Jewish calendar is the year 5771, which signifies that the ancient sages of Israel thought Adam and Eve were created in the Garden of Eden 5,771 years ago. (However, not many people today take this ancient chronology seriously because of its highly speculative nature.)

In the NT Pauline writings, the blast of a heavenly shofar signals the coming of the Messiah for His bride (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). This is the point in the prophetic narrative where many messianic commentators invoke the pattern of an ancient Jewish wedding—and the parallels are indeed striking.

For example, the NT says the messianic community (or “Church”) is Messiah’s bride (John 3:29; Rev. 22:17). Yeshua said He would first “go and prepare a place” for us—and He would come back later to get us (John 14:2-3). This was the procedure in ancient Jewish weddings.

Back in those days, it was not uncommon for several generations to live together under the same roof. So when the son was about to get married, he would build a dwelling onto the father’s house for him and his bride.

A “place,” then was “prepared” for the new couple. When it was ready, the groom would gather his groomsmen and they would set out in a procession to go meet the bridal party.

No one knew for sure when the groom would come for his bride, so the bridal party always had to remain ready (Matt. 25:1-13). As the groom’s procession approached, their arrival was announced by the sound of a shofar. Then he fetched away his bride and they marched in a festive procession to his father’s house for the wedding.

Following the wedding came the seven days of blessing (*Sheva Berachot*), which may well signify the seven-year period during which we will be in

Heaven with the Lord while the Tribulation unfolds here on earth (Joel 2:31; “day of the LORD,” יום יהוה).

Rosh HaShanah, then, points prophetically to the Rapture and the Second Coming of the Messiah. It also begins the 10-day countdown to the Day of Atonement.

6. Day of Atonement (יום הכפורים, *Yom HaKippurim*)

The Day of Atonement is the most somber day on the Jewish calendar. In ancient Israel, this was when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (or Temple) and sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the Mercy

also on the repentance and faith of the people themselves. Count the number of times the words “you” and “your” (referring to Israel) appear in these three verses:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for **you**; **you** shall afflict **your** souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And **you** shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for **you** before the LORD **your** God” (Lev. 23:26-28; emphasis added).



Seat to make atonement (lit., “a covering”) for the sins of Israel. It was observed on the 10th day of the seventh month (Tishri).

Some theologians insist that the Day of Atonement was ultimately fulfilled in the crucifixion of the Messiah. That would surely be true if the sacrifice itself was the only focus of what happened on that day each year; but it wasn’t. The emphasis on *Yom Kippur* was not only on the sacrifice, but

The Jewish people looked upon the crucified One 2,000 years ago (Zech. 12:10; John 19:37), and they will see Him again: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7).

This time, the Jewish people will look upon Him with deep sorrow and repentance. Collectively, as a nation, they will realize who He truly is and

“all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). That will be the ultimate fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.

Unquestionably, the sacrifice of Yeshua on Calvary is the centerpiece of God’s plan of salvation. This is clearly reflected in the repeated prohibitions against any form of work or human effort on the Day of Atonement:

- “You shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement” (Lev. 23:28);
- “Any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people” (v. 30);
- “You shall do no manner of work” (v. 31); and
- “It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest” (v. 32).

It’s easy to get the point because He repeats Himself four times in five verses. Why was the Lord so adamant that no work of any kind was to be done on this Day? Very simply, it was because the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice was all-sufficient—there was nothing else the people could do. The blood of the lamb did it all. The only thing left for them to do as a nation was to come to God in humility and repentance, and gratefully acknowledge that the lamb died for them.

This is what makes the message of the Gospel unique: it says salvation is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9). It’s the most costly commodity in the universe; but because it was paid for by Someone else, it’s free to us.

Just before He died, Yeshua said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He didn’t say, “I made the first installment and now you have to keep up the payments.” He said He finished it and it was DONE.

Forgiveness and salvation have become a reality for millions of non-Jewish believers throughout the past 2,000 years because of Yeshua’s shedding of His blood for them; however, *Yom Kippur* won’t be ultimately and finally

fulfilled until Israel comes to her King-Messiah in repentance and faith.

So far, we’ve seen that the Fall Feasts form a future prophetic timeline of coming events in God’s plan. *Rosh HaShanah* signifies the Rapture followed by the seven-year Tribulation. Then we have *Yom Kippur*, which we saw points to Israel’s ultimate, national salvation at the close of the Tribulation. So what comes next?

7. Tabernacles (חג הסוכות, *Hag HaSukkot*)

‘You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God’ (Lev. 23:41-43).

Sukkot is the plural form of *sukkah*, the Hebrew word for “hut” or “booth.” In English, we call this seventh observance the Feast of Tabernacles. It’s observed from the 15th to the 21st of the seventh month, Tishri.

Historically, *Sukkot* was designed to remind the people of Israel of their wanderings in the wilderness during the days of Moses (vv. 42-43). During those 40 or so years, they lived in makeshift shelters because they had to move so frequently. God lived in a *sukkah* of sorts, too, during those 40 years. His *sukkah* was called the Tabernacle (Heb., *Mishkan*).

Many Jewish people today celebrate *Sukkot* by building little shelters in their yards or on their patios. During this time, they won’t eat or drink anything outside the *sukkah*. If they live in a warmer climate, they might even sleep in the *sukkah* during this seven-day festival. Children, especially, love it!

Agriculturally, *Sukkot* was a time of thanking God for His bountiful provision in the harvest (Ex. 34:22).

Prophetically, *Sukkot* points to both past and future messianic events. In the past, it pointed to the Incarnation of God in the Person of Yeshua the Messiah. Just as God dwelt among His people in the wilderness Tabernacle, Yeshua was born in Bethlehem so He could dwell among us. The NT says, “And the Word [Yeshua the Messiah] became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

In the Hebrew NT, the word for “dwelt” is *shakan*, which is related to the word *mishkan* (“tabernacle”). John is saying that Yeshua became a Man and tabernacled among us.

Yet another prophetic fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles is still in the future. It foreshadows the coming millennial reign of the Messiah. Like the ingathering of the crops on *Sukkot* in ancient Israel, God will gather His people together at the end of this age. That’s when Israel’s King-Messiah will rule and reign over the nations from the throne of His ancestor David in Jerusalem (Isa. 27:12-13; Jer. 23:7-8).

During that future messianic age, the Feast of Tabernacles will be an international festival with people of all nationalities traveling to Jerusalem from every corner of the globe to worship the Lord:

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16).

Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.



ENDNOTES

¹One familiar adage of biblical interpretation is, “All of the Bible is written for us; but it’s not all written to us.” That is, we can benefit even from those passages that aren’t addressed directly to us.

²Remember that in ancient Jewish reckoning, a day began in the evening at sundown and continued until sundown the following day: “So the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5).

³In AD 30, Nisan 17 ended at sundown on the Sabbath (Saturday).

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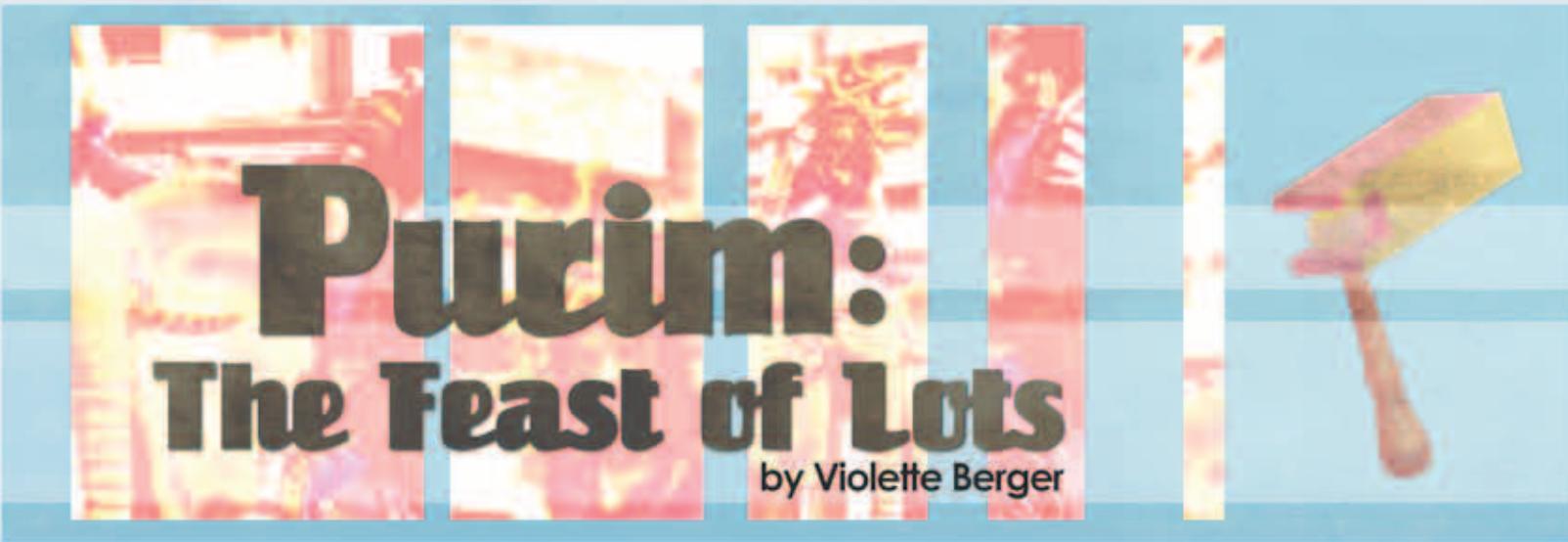
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Gideon Levytam

Gideon Levytam is an Israeli believer in Yeshua (Jesus). He was born in Jerusalem on May 14, 1955, seven years to the day after the founding of the modern state of Israel. According to tradition, Gideon's ancestors were from the tribe of Levi and fled to Yemen when Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Gideon was in the 1973 Yom Kippur War and later came to faith in Yeshua as a result of his study of the *Berit HaChadashah* (Hebrew New Testament). He now lives in Canada and serves as CJFM's director of international ministries.



Purim: The Feast of Lots

by Violette Berger

In Chapter 23 of Leviticus, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.’” He proceeds to explain each of the seven feasts of Israel and their “appointed times.” These feasts have been celebrated by the Jewish people from biblical times until the present, throughout their generations, just as the Lord commanded.

However, there are also other feasts that have been celebrated from that time until the present. The best known of these feasts is the “Feast of Purim,” also known as the “Feast of Lots.” The Feast of Purim has its origin in the time of Esther, when King Ahasuerus was king of Persia between 486-465 BCE. Hence, it is also known as the “Feast of Esther.” The name, “Purim” is the plural form derived from the word, “Pur,” meaning “lot.”

“Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai. . . . They cast Pur (that is, the lot) before Haman to determine the day and the month until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar” (Esther 3:6-7). Adar corresponds to our months of February or March; Purim is celebrated on March 17 this year.

Purim is a joyful holiday. In synagogues, the entire Book of Esther is read from a parchment scroll called the *megillah*, which means “rolled up.” Although God’s name is not mentioned, in no book of the Bible is His presence more manifest on every page—especially in protecting and preserving His covenant people.

The Book of Esther opens with a feast given by King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes. When he ordered his wife, Queen Vashti, to appear, she refused and was deposed. King Ahasuerus chose Esther as his queen because of her great natural beauty. Unbeknownst to the king, Esther was a Jewish maiden whose uncle, Mordecai, “was sitting at the king’s gate.” When Mordecai learned of a plot to slay the king he warned Esther, who revealed the plot to the king and the king’s life was saved.

Haman, the prime minister of Persia, walked through the “gates of the city” and demanded that every knee bow down to him. But Mordecai refused to “bend his knee” to anyone but the One True God—Jehovah! This infuriated Haman, so he began his attempt to annihilate God’s chosen people by planning the extermination of all Jewish people and erecting gallows upon which to hang Mordecai. Esther risked her life to reveal Haman’s plot to King Ahasuerus, but the king extended his golden scepter thus allowing her to speak. When the king learned of the plot, he issued a *new* decree that permitted the Jewish people to defend themselves against their enemies. Thousands of enemies were slaughtered as the Jewish people fought to protect themselves. Thus, Haman’s diabolical scheme was foiled, and Israel was saved. In the end, Haman and his 10 sons were hanged on the gallows that were prepared for Mordecai.

Today, when the *megillah* is read in the synagogues and in homes on Purim, people cheer, whistle, and clap whenever the names of Queen Esther or Mordecai are mentioned. But when Haman’s name is mentioned, people boo, bang on pots and pans, stamp their feet, and twirl their *groggers* (noisemakers). They rejoice in witnessing God’s faithfulness to His chosen people. The Jewish people still exist.

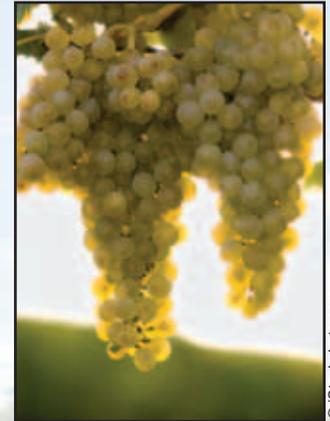
Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever (Jer. 31:35-36).

If the scepter had not been held out to Esther, she could not have approached her king and revealed the plot. She and the Jewish people would have perished. Today, the “scepter” is a Person, extended to both Jew and Gentile alike. “A scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). That “scepter” is the promised Messiah, Jesus, who became incarnate approximately 2,000 years ago. By His sacrificial death and resurrection He provides redemption for all who receive Him—and an *audience* with God, the Father!



by Violette Berger

Fruit from the Harvest



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Orchestrated by God

Barry Berger, CJFM director of missions emeritus (Phoenix), had the privilege of being invited to teach at his home church during two Sunday morning services. It was a specific request for a message on “The Jewish Roots of Communion.” On that same day, another scenario was taking place. An unsaved Jewish woman, “Mrs. J,” had been invited by a couple of church members to attend a service. Mrs. J waited for them to meet her in the lobby, but the couple never showed up. Unsure about what to do, she finally decided to leave and headed for the door.

But another couple approached Mrs. J, and upon hearing her dilemma, they invited her to attend the service and sit with them. Mrs. J heard Barry explain the origin of communion in the Passover, which piqued her interest. The next day, she emailed Barry asking if he could meet with her; she had some questions concerning his message. They met at a restaurant, and Mrs. J listened as Barry presented the Gospel message and answered her questions. They met again the following week. And Mrs. J joyfully prayed the prayer of faith with Barry when he asked her if she would like to receive Yeshua (Jesus) as her Lord and Savior. Mrs. J now regularly attends church and Barry’s monthly fellowship, *Tikvah BaMidbar* (Hope in the Desert). Barry also continues to disciple her weekly, teaching her major Bible doctrines.

A Blessed New Year

CJFM missionary Richard Hill (Las Vegas) is also pastor of *Beth Yeshua*, a messianic congregation where Jewish-Gentile couples can enjoy worshipping together. For the last few months, Jacob—an unsaved Jewish man—and his wife, Paula—a saved Gentile—have been attending their Shabbat (Sabbath) services. Jacob was open to discussing Jesus with Rich, but still expressed numerous, typical Jewish objections. In fact, he stated that he “would not even be talking with Rich if his parents were still alive!”

Jacob and Paula had been looking forward to celebrating their first Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) service at *Beth Yeshua*, but Paula was pregnant and her doctor planned to induce labor the day before the holiday. They were excited that their daughter was a planned Rosh Hashanah baby. The day before the planned induction of labor, Rich visited the couple to pray for them and their baby. The next day at the hospital, while talking with Jacob before the baby’s birth, Jacob admitted to Rich that he had prayed to receive Jesus at the previous Shabbat service during the altar call for salvation.

Rich writes, “Not only has God brought new life into their lives through a beautiful baby, He has brought new spiritual life to Jacob through Jesus! Everything happened at the time of Rosh Hashanah, the celebration of a new year. Jacob and Paula now have cause to celebrate even more—what a way to start the New Year!”

Glory to God

“Nick,” a friend of **Michael Campo, CJFM area director (Chicago)**, would periodically call Mike with theological questions. Mike witnessed to Nick over the phone for about three to four months. Finally, Nick consented to attend one of Mike’s Bible studies. The particular study Mike taught that day was, “How Did the Wise Men Know?” Mike also presented the Gospel, as he usually does in his Bible studies, since not everyone who attends is saved.

Nick was very quiet during the study; before Nick left, he did tell Mike that he enjoyed it. The next phone call Mike received from Nick was a request to accompany him to a Christian bookstore, as he wanted to buy a Bible and needed Mike’s advice. After meeting and purchasing a Bible, Nick asked Mike if he would set another time aside to get together; Nick wanted to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Mike delightfully responded, “Why do we have to set time aside? We can do it right now!”

Mike suggested they sit in his car to talk, where he proceeded to explain from the biblical account of Nicodemus what it meant to be “born again.” After asking Nick a couple of diagnostic questions, Mike was confident that Nick understood the decision he was making and led him in the prayer of faith. Mike continues to meet and disciple Nick one-on-one, but now Nick also attends Mike’s Bible study. Mike comments, “God promised that His word would not return void—and it didn’t! All glory to Him!”

Living Water

Gideon Levytam, CJFM director of international ministries, officiated at a baptismal service for 15 Jewish, Russian-speaking new believers in Minsk, Belarus. These new believers risked persecution from the unbelieving community by entering the waters of baptism—thereby identifying themselves with Yeshua and the messianic community. Please pray for their protection and that Yeshua would be glorified. “*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38).

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

(You may even see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.)

QUESTION: *I worry that I may be demon possessed. Friends and family have shunned me, and I'm not sure what to think or do. What does the Bible say about demon possession?*

ANSWER: Many question whether demon possession is a legitimate spiritual problem, or if it is merely a throwback to medieval and earlier biblical times when superstitious people thought evil spirits lurked under rocks and around every dark corner. More specifically, the issue distills down to the following questions (and possibly others, as well). Let's look at them one at a time.

1. Are demons real? In ancient and medieval times, it was commonly believed that unseen spirits and forces (including "daemons") influenced human beings by varying degrees. To the ancients, these spiritual entities were not usually evil. Sometimes they were seen as helpful. The physical world was animated for good or for evil by these invisible forces. Even Plato and Socrates wrote about this phenomenon.

In our enlightened age, however, secularists prefer to believe that all human behaviors and afflictions can be explained physically or chemically. There's no such thing as pure evil, we are told. Everything must have a logical and scientific explanation. But is this really true?

The Bible is our plumb line for truth—not worldly philosophies or popular mythologies. The OT (Tanakh) tells us that there's an unseen, spiritual world that is very much connected to what happens in our visible world (for example, see 2 Kings 6:14-17).

The NT confirms this. In Ephesians 6:12, the Apostle Paul outlines a hierarchy of satanic powers who fight and scheme against us: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities (Gk., *archas*), against powers (*exousia*), against the rulers of the darkness of

this age (*kosmokratoras tou skotous tou aionos*), against spiritual hosts of wickedness (*pneumatika teis ponerias*) in the heavenly places."

There are more than 30 references to demon possession in the Gospels. If we apply the "law of first mention," that takes us to Matthew 4:24: "*Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.*"

The broader category in this passage is "all sick people." Then it breaks down into finer distinctions between "diseases" and "torments"—and between people who were demon-possessed and others who were epileptics and paralytics (notice the contrast in those last two categories between people whose bodies move uncontrollably and those who can't move at all).

So yes, demons are real. Forces at work in the unseen, spiritual realm can influence what happens in the visible world.

However, we need to maintain our balance here. Many years ago, when I was a pastor in Illinois, a young mother in our church thought demons were everywhere. She was a sweet lady (and had her hands full with three small children), but she was a bit unbalanced when it came to the kingdom of darkness. One summer, during a church picnic, we were playing volleyball. She thought the referee made a bad call, so she threw up her hands and started verbally (and rather loudly) rebuking the devil. She was convinced that the ref's bad call was the work of the Evil One. The rest of us thought it was just . . . well, a questionable call.

Again, balance is the key. C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in

their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight" (*The Screwtape Letters*).

2. Are psychoses and other forms of mental illness sometimes mistaken for demon possession? Yes, and very likely, vice versa.

I apologize for beating the same drum over and over—but again, balance is important here. It's wrong (and maybe even dangerous) to assume that drugs and/or medical therapies can treat every behavioral problem. If there's a spiritual component (like demonic influence or guilt resulting from unconfessed sin, for example), that needs to be dealt with. Otherwise, you're treating symptoms rather than root causes.

On the other hand, I have friends who are convinced that Christians should never resort to psychological counseling or drug therapy. Their position is that psychological disorders—whether it's depression, ADHD, or whatever—have spiritual (rather than physical) causes. They are generally unwilling to entertain the possibility that the brain can malfunction in much the same way that other organs (e.g., the heart, liver, or pancreas) occasionally do.

With all due respect, I disagree. Is there something unspiritual or ungodly about having bypass surgery to correct a heart problem? Having a kidney transplant if you need one? Taking insulin if you're a diabetic? Of course not! Neither should we hesitate to get medical treatment for psychological or mental problems, when indicated. Depression, for example, often requires an integrated approach including counseling and medication. There have been far too many cases of

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Christians—including teenagers—who didn't receive proper treatment for depression and ended up committing suicide. It's a shame—and in most cases, unnecessary.

Is our culture overmedicated? I'm not a medical professional, but I think I can safely say the answer is yes, absolutely. They have a pill for everything. In some cases, it's been shown in double-blind studies that placebos are nearly as effective as the drugs. This is all true. But it doesn't mean you shouldn't get professional help when you really need it.

3. Can a Christian be demon possessed? This is a very old debate in Christendom. These days, many evangelicals make a distinction between possession and oppression, saying that true believers can be oppressed, but they can't be possessed. In real life, however, the distinction between the two can be largely academic. Over the years, believers I've known have told me that they never experienced spiritual warfare before they came to faith in Yeshua. In many cases, they never even thought about it before. But once they were saved, the conflict began.

If you define possession as "taking ownership" of someone, then the answer is no, a true believer cannot be possessed by evil spirits. We have been bought with a price (the precious blood of the Lamb) and we therefore belong to Him (1 Peter 1:18-19). The devil can never, ever, under any circumstances take ownership of a blood-bought believer in Yeshua the Messiah (Rev. 12:11). That's one thing we can say with 100-percent certainty.

However, that's not to say evil spirits cannot influence a believer, or that a believer won't find himself in conflict with these forces at times (as we saw above in Ephesians 6:12). One of the Reformers once felt the presence of the devil so strongly that he reportedly threw a bottle of ink at him! We may sense that presence, too, sometimes. But it shouldn't intimidate us because the devil's power is very limited since he was conquered at Calvary. The only power he has over us is what we give him. He cannot force us to do anything we don't want to do. We can't use the excuse that "the devil made me do it."

4. If we encounter a legitimate case of demon possession, how do we deal with it? Christianity isn't for sissies. When you become a believer, you're

enlisting in an army that's at war (2 Tim. 2:3). The NT tells us that we face a three-pronged attack by: (1) a world-system that's opposed to God (1 John 2:15-17), (2) the flesh (that is, our own internal, fallen nature; James 1:13-15), and (3) the devil and his minions (1 Peter 5:8). Notice that two-thirds of the battle is not directly attributable to the devil.

However, in that other third of the cases, when it's a direct spiritual attack, these matters are best dealt with at a local church level. Pastors and elders are our God-ordained authorities in the Body of Messiah, and it's their responsibility to watch over the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-4). When church leaders discern that evil spirits are involved, it should be dealt with privately so it doesn't become a public spectacle or sideshow. In the numerous NT instances where the Lord himself cast out demons, there is no indication that He announced it ahead of time or used it to attract a crowd—or that He ever did it in connection with a church/synagogue service. And I'm pretty sure He didn't take an offering afterward.

Above all, never forget: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).