

Optimistic Despite Opposition

Long Beach Alliance Church • March 30th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**‘THE LATTER GLORY OF THIS HOUSE
WILL BE GREATER THAN THE FORMER,’
SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS, ‘AND
IN THIS PLACE I WILL GIVE PEACE,’
DECLARES THE LORD OF HOSTS.**

~HAGGAI 2:9 (NASB)

1) Dark Clouds On The Horizon

- A) The move of the Israelites from Babylon (where they had been exiled) and back to Israel (by order of the Persian King Cyrus, Ezra 1:1ff) was “easier said than done...”
- B) Israel had been occupied by foreigners (Assyrian occupiers and other peoples, cf. 4:2ff) who had made attempts at assimilating into the local culture, while still retaining their cultic practices (cf., 2nd Kings 17:33).
- C) When the significant festivals of the month of Tishri (September/October) came on the Jewish calendar, the issue of sacrifices came bubbling to the surface (Ezra 3:1ff).

JEWISH CALENDAR									
ORDER IN CALENDAR	PREEXILIC NAME		EQUIVALENT	SEASON	FARMING	FESTIVALS	BIBLICAL REFERENCE		
	SACRED	CIVIL						POSTEXILIC NAME	
1	7	ABIB	NISAN	Mar.-Apr.	Spring Equinox, Latter Rains	Barley harvest begins Flax harvest	Religious New Year's Day Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits	Ex. 12:2, Neh. 2:1	
2	8	ZIV	IYYAR	Apr.-May	Summer Dry Season Begins	Barley harvest	Later Passover (Num. 9:10-11)	1 Kings 6:1, 37	
3	9		SIVAN	May-June		Wheat harvest begins Early figs ripen	Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21)	Est. 8:9	
4	10		TAMMUZ	Jun-July		Wheat harvest Grape harvest		Ezek. 8:14	
5	11		AB	July-Aug.		Principal fruit month: grape, fig, olive			
6	12		ELUL	Aug.-Sept.		Dates and summer figs		Neh. 6:15	
7	1	ETHANIM	TISHRI	Sept.-Oct.	Early Rains Seedtime	Plowing and sowing	Civil New Year's Day Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Booths	1 Kings 8:2	
8	2	BUL	HESHVAN	Oct.-Nov.		Wheat and barley sowing	Solemn Assembly (Lev. 23:36)	1 Kings 6:38	
9	3		CHISLEV	Nov.-Dec.	Winter Begins (John 10:22)		Feast of Dedication (Lights) (John 10:22)	Neh. 1:1	
10	4		TEBETH	Dec.-Jan.	Rainy Winter Months	Cultivation of Jordan Valley begins		Est. 2:16	
11	5		SHEBAT	Jan.-Feb.		Almond blossoms Oranges ripen		Zech. 1:7	
12	6		ADAR	Feb.-Mar.		Barley ripens Citrus fruit harvest		Ezra 6:15	
13			ADAR SHENI	Intercalary month: Added each year that the barley was not ripe on the 16th of Nisan. Two such years were not allowed in succession.					

THE JEWISH YEAR		
FEAST	DATE	PURPOSE
The Passover	Nisan 14 (March/April)	To remember the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.
The Feast of Unleavened Bread	Nisan 15-21	Part of the Passover celebration. Ate unleavened bread and celebrated the beginning of the wheat harvest.
Pentecost (Feast of Weeks)	Sivan 6 (May/June)	Marked the end of the wheat harvest.
The Feast of Trumpets	Tishri 1 (Sept/Oct)	Known as Rosh Hashshanah, it was the celebration of the new year (civil year).
The Day of Atonement	Tishri 10	A day of fast set apart for national repentance and atonement for sin.
The Feast of Booths	Tishri 15-22	Also known as "Tabernacles," it commemorated Israel's wilderness experience.
The Feast of Lights	Kislev 25 (Nov/Dec)	Not found in the Mosaic Law. It was a celebration of the Maccabean cleansing and rededicating of the Temple.
The Feast of Purim	Adar 14-15 (Feb/March)	Not found in the Mosaic law. Purim ("lots") remembered God's deliverance of Israel in the days of Esther.

- D) The altar on which the occupiers were making sacrifices was clearly not built according to Moses' specifications, which Zerubbabel rectifies by erecting a new altar (3:2).

2) Implied Opposition From The Outside

- A) As the Israelites begin using the altar for sacrifices and worship, they experience terror at the disenfranchised and (probably) unhappy people who are in the land (3:3).
- B) While there is no mention of overt conflict yet (that will come later), the foreshadowing of impending conflict with outside forces is clearly forced by the significance of the exiles celebrating the Feast of Booths* in Jerusalem (3:4-6).
- C) The text is very careful to make a point that all the actions which the Israelites take are under the protection and directives of Cyrus, King of Persia (3:7).

3) Unity In Purpose & Unity In Worship

- A) The task of restoration was a passionate one for the Israelites (cf., 1:1:68-69), and brought great generosity.

* The Feast of Booths (The Jewish Festal Calendar is provided as a reference for you on the back page) was the "feast of feasts" for the Jews. They considered this feast to be "especially sacred and important" (Josephus, *Antiquities 8.100*). Each festival was a commemoration of God's provision for the Jews. The Feast of Booths commemorated God's provision for the Jews while they wandered in the desert during the Exodus. The feast, also known as "Tabernacles," was held when the harvest was finally gathered in, not only the grain crops but also the grape and olive crops (Exodus 23:16 refers to it as the "Feast of Ingathering"). The feast lasted for seven days, and sometimes longer. The Jews would celebrate the festival by moving out of their normal homes and moving into "booths" or small tent-like structures which had leafy roofs (commemorating the structures/tents they lived in during the 40-year Exodus). To this day, during the Feast of Booths, Jews will "camp out" in these structures on the roofs and balconies of their homes. One commentator noted that it is the only time of the year when the poor and the rich all live in similar fashion, making it a unique week of fellowship and camaraderie amongst the people. (Various sources, especially *The Gospel of John, NICNT*, Leon Morris, Page 349).

- B) Once the Jews were established, they were able to begin working on the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem (3:8).
- C) The tasks of organizing resources, preparing for the work, and finding people to assist in the restoration comes together with great unity and ease for the Jews (3:8-9).
- D) Clearly, this was a time of great celebration and unity for the Jews. The spirit of coming out of exile and returning to Israel reaches an exciting peak as the people worship God together. The focus is clearly on God's provision (3:10-11).

4) The Shock Of Opposition -- From Within

- A) Abruptly, the tone of the celebration is tainted by the mention of those who remembered the grandeur of Solomon's temple and were loudly weeping at the smallish size of the new foundations (3:12).
- B) This group were the "older ones" and the "heads of households," people of great influence and financial standing within the post-exile community.
- C) This internal conflict within the community is another foreshadowing of trouble which is to come. It also comes after tremendous unity and progress, a shocking shift in the focus of the community away from God's provision.
- D) The question which faces the community is profound, "do the new changes to the sanctuary damage its glory?" Interestingly, Ezra does not answer. However, Haggai does answer (Haggai 2:1-9), returning the focus onto God!