

## GOD'S DRESS REHEARSALS

**Matthew 25:1-13**

**October 24, 2021**

A little boy came home from his first day of school, and his mother asked him, “*What did you learn today?*” He replied, “*Not enough, I guess. They want me to come back tomorrow.*” Like that little boy, I’m glad you came back this Sunday, because we are going to learn more about Christ’s second coming as we look at the seven Jewish festivals, God’s dress rehearsals for what He wants to accomplish on this earth!

The Bible tells us that God keeps a calendar and every important date for the salvation of this world had been put on that calendar from the beginning of time. God had the exact date right down to the minute **circled on His calendar** when Jesus was to be born, when Jesus was to die, when Jesus was to rise from the dead, as well as the future date when Jesus will return (His second coming). We know that because God is a God of order and rhythm, plus we are told in Genesis that God created the solar system (sun, moon, and stars) to work like a giant clock that keeps time perfectly for Him.

We also need to realize that Jesus wasn’t blond haired, blue eyed and fair skinned – He was Jewish, and the Bible Jesus read was the Old Testament, and He would have kept the seven Jewish Festivals (Feasts) described in **Leviticus 23**, where God gives us exact details how these feasts are to be celebrated each and every year, on the very specific dates on God’s lunar calendar. God’s calendar is not the solar calendar that we use, His calendar is based on the moon not the sun.

**Leviticus 23:44** tells us, “*Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed festivals of the Lord.*” So, these Jewish Festivals were key to maintaining their Jewish identity as God’s chosen people, not only as a reminder of what God had done for them in the past, but also to tell them what He will do for them in the future, on the exact dates that they have celebrated these yearly Jewish festivals for generations. The Jewish festivals were to be seen by the people as God’s dress rehearsals, so that His people would know what to do when the time of their fulfillment comes. The future day when each of the Jewish festivals would be fulfilled by their coming promised Messiah.

All four Gospels tell us clearly that when Jesus died, He fulfilled the Feast of Passover; when He was buried and laid in the tomb he fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and when Jesus rose from the dead, He fulfilled the Feast of

Firstfruits. 2000 years ago, Jesus fulfilled all three of the Jewish spring feasts on the exact days that the Israelites had celebrated them for generations since leaving slavery in Egypt! The four Gospels tell us that Jesus not only fulfilled all three of the spring festivals, but the fourth festival, the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) is currently being fulfilled by us the church with the coming of the Holy Spirit, which lives in each one of His followers. So, that leaves the three fall feasts yet to be fulfilled, and they will be fulfilled when Jesus returns as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS at His second coming!

History tell us that the early Christian church – during the first few centuries kept and celebrated these Jewish festivals, however, the modern church has been at a great disadvantage because we haven't taken any of these Jewish festivals seriously. The church has ignored them, thereby missing their significance for us today. Another problem for us is that the Bible can be difficult to understand to our logical Western Greek way of thinking, thereby we end up missing some of the hidden Hebrew meanings and the significance of the rituals during these festivals. So, to understand what God is telling us, the Bible needs to be seen through Hebrew eyes. So, let's put on our Hebrew glasses and see what we can discover!

When talking about these festivals, the writers of the four Gospels had left certain important facts out, because their audience were predominately Jewish and would already know their customs, so it would have been redundant and needless to take the time to explain them in detail when producing these ancient documents that were expensive and time consuming 2000 years ago. (For example: today, if we told someone it was raining cats and dogs, we wouldn't need to explain in detail what we meant). Since the Gentile church doesn't know the customs of first century Judaism, we are at a disadvantage when we read the Bible and must rely on commentaries to help us understand what was taking place, especially during their celebrations. So, I believe that the Jewish festivals and Jewish traditions are important for the church today because the Bible tells us that we have been grafted into the olive branch, which means we are united with God's chosen people and share in all of the promises made to Abraham. Therefore, we need to understand that the church has definitely not replaced the Jewish nation as God's holy people. God still has a divine purpose for the Jewish nation, especially during these end times, so we need to keep a close watch on what is happening within Israel, and between Israel and their hostile neighbours to not be caught off guard. The nation of Israel will take an important role in God's end-time prophecies!

Jesus said that He had come to fulfill the entire Old Testament – which means Jesus knew exactly when He was to enter the holy city, according to date circled on God’s calendar. So, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the day the church celebrates as Palm Sunday – it was **Nissan 10** on God’s calendar, four days before the Passover festival. Each year on that specific day, the High Priest would leave the Temple and chose a perfect spotless lamb from the fields surrounding Bethlehem. And that chosen lamb, after being examined by the people for four days, would shed its blood for the sins of the nation for that year at Passover. The High Priest would bring this lamb into the city through the Eastern Gate, while the people celebrated in the streets. So, on that exact same day, **Nissan 10**, God had also made His choice, choosing His Son, Jesus Christ, as the perfect sinless Lamb of God, to not only die for the sins of the nation of Israel for one year, but to shed His blood for all people, from every nation on this earth, not for one year, but for all of eternity!

Jesus also enters into the city of Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate that day – spending the next four days being examined by the people as He taught in the city. Then Jesus on the night He was betrayed celebrates the Passover meal with His disciples, showing them how He has become the bread and wine to fulfill Scriptures, instituting Holy Communion. Jesus is arrested and found guilty by the Sanhedrin of blasphemy (a mere mortal claiming to be God), and then sent to the Roman Governor, Pilate, who claims Jesus innocent, but turns Jesus over to die by crucifixion to please the people. It was Friday, **Nissan 14** on God’s calendar, the day of the Feast of Passover, that Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 am, which was the exact time that the sacrifice of the lambs in the Temple began. As Jesus was suffering on the cross for six hours, between 100,000 to 200,000 lambs were being slaughtered by the priests, and their blood, mixed with water flowed like a river from the Temple mount out into the Kidron Valley below. Then, at exactly at 3:00 pm the shofar is blown from the top of the temple wall signalling the end of the sacrifices. As Jesus hears the sound of the shofar, He hears His heavenly Father’s voice telling Him the penalty for the sins of the world have been paid in full. Then, **“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last”** (Mark 15:37) – right on God’s schedule! Right to the exact minute!

Immediately following the crucifixion – Jesus is removed from the cross and laid in a borrowed tomb so as to avoid leaving the body exposed on the Sabbath which began at sundown on that Friday. Sundown on the day of Passover signifies the

start of the next Jewish feast, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins on **Nissan 15** on God's lunar calendar. This spring feast impressed upon the Jewish people the need to remove all sin (yeast) from their lives – a spring cleaning needed to take place in their lives. As believers, we also need to practice spring cleaning, taking God's light and shining it into our hearts, so that there's not even a hint of sin to be found anywhere. As Jesus was buried in a cold dark tomb, we need to bury our sins in a grave – we need to die to our sins!

The next Jewish Feast that Jesus fulfilled is called Firstfruits which takes place the very next day, on **Nissan 16**. This feast centers on first things and its requirements are outlined in **Leviticus 23:9-16**, ***“The Lord said to Moses: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap it's harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath...From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks.’”*** The day after the Jewish Sabbath is Sunday, so this feast takes place on Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead. As well, the Feast of Firstfruits began the countdown of seven weeks (49 days) leading up to Feast of Pentecost. So, you can see these three spring festivals take place one right after the other, and like many of the Jewish festivals it revolves around the agricultural cycles of the land. Barley was the first grain to ripen of all the grains that were sown during the winter months. For this feast, a sheaf (about a bushel) of barley would be harvested and brought to the Temple as a thanksgiving offering to the Lord for the upcoming harvest. The High Priest would take this offering and wave it before the Lord; God would see it and accept it, and only then were the people free to enjoy the rest of the harvest.

So, how does this feast of Firstfruits apply to Jesus? The resurrection separates Christians from all other religions around the world – we are the only ones that serve a risen living God. The resurrection is the key event for the church. We serve a risen Saviour! The Apostle Paul reminds the church that Jesus represents the firstfruits, the first to rise from the dead in **1 Corinthians 15:20-26**, ***“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must***

*reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*” This festival is important because the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a guarantee of our own resurrection. Since Christ was the first to rise, the firstfruits of the harvest of souls, one day we will follow Him and also rise from the dead. OUR HOPE!

The fourth Jewish festival of Pentecost coming fifty days later, has also been fulfilled perfectly with the coming of the Holy Spirit (which we celebrate today as the birth of the church). Even though these spring feasts were celebrated every year for centuries in advance of Jesus first coming as God’s dress rehearsals, most of the Jewish people missed their Messiah, and are still waiting, now 2000 years later, for their Messiah to come for the first time. This leaves us with the last three Jewish feasts which have not been fulfilled as-of-yet, and there is again very little dispute among Christian theologians that these last three fall feast days of Israel will be fulfilled at Jesus’ second coming. So, if Jesus fulfilled the first three spring feasts perfectly on God’s calendar, on the dates God has circled, then we must believe that Jesus will fulfill these last three feasts of Israel perfectly, right on God’s schedule. So, just as God’s people, the Jews, had been rehearsing for generations Jesus’ first coming, God’s people continue to rehearse for Jesus’ future second coming as well in anticipation!

Now let’s look at these three Jewish fall festivals. The first fall festival is the Feast of Trumpets, also known as the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), which was celebrated on both September 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> this year. You need to notice this feast is celebrated on two dates, all because the day and hour is unknown, all because this holiday can’t be officially declared until the sliver of new moon is spotted by two witnesses. The next fall festival is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the holiest day of the year, the only day when the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, offering the blood of the chosen sacrificial lamb on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people for that year. This festival is celebrated 10 days after the Feast of Trumpets. Then the last festival takes place 5 days later and is called the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) which celebrates God living among His people, pointing to when God’s everlasting kingdom will be established on this earth.

What we need to see is that God does major things on His festival days – and the blowing of the trumpet (shofar) on the first fall feast day is the dress rehearsal for the future Rapture of the church. Jewish tradition teaches that the blast of the shofar confuses Satan, allowing the believers to pass through the heavens

unhindered, because Satan and his demons control the heavens that surround the earth. The second coming of Christ and the Rapture of the church is best indicated by the Apostle Paul in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** which we looked at last Sunday. The people of God have been celebrating a holiday known as the Feast of Trumpets every single year for thousands of years, and it is the foreshadowing of one of the most dramatic moments in human history for believers, a prophetic picture of the Rapture of the church, when Jesus returns for His bride, His faithful church, which has endured seven years of tribulation. The first Jewish feast day falls on the very first day of the seventh month, called **Tishri 1** on God's lunar calendar, and is the only feast for which no one can know the day or the hour when it will begin. That's because it depends on the very first sighting of the new moon by two witnesses, and that is why there are always two days marked on the Jewish calendar for this festival, just to be safe, because it could be cloudy on one of those days and the moon would not be visible to the naked eye. Jesus referred to this in His comments about His second coming in **Matthew 24:36**, "*No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" Jesus made it clear that only God knows when Jesus will return for His church!

This has been our hope as believers for 2000 years now – that one day a great trumpet will blow and those of us still alive will be taken home to join the other believers that have gone on ahead of us. This day, when all Christians are removed from the earth, will usher in the final wrath of God, when His seven bowls of judgment, spoken about in Revelation 16, will be poured out upon the earth for ten days. Then at the end of those ten days, on **Tishri 10**, the Raptured church will return with Jesus as His heavenly army on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) for the Battle of Armageddon to defeat the anti-Christ and his army, in the great battle to end all battles, which will usher in the millennium reign of Christ. Five days after the Day of Atonement, on **Tishri 15**, the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) begins, a time of great rejoicing because now God dwells with His people. King Jesus takes His place on the throne in Jerusalem to rule the world for 1000 years of peace before the final judgment of Satan when he is cast in the lake of fire!

When Jesus was asked in **Matthew 24:3** about the sign of His coming – He gives His disciples two parables to describe the two types of believers that will be present in the last days. The first parable found in **Matthew 24:45-51** describes how two servants related to absence of their master – the wise servant who was faithful and dependable when his master was away on his long journey, was

rewarded when the Master returned, but the unwise wicked servant was removed from his position and banished to a place of sorrow and anguish. Then the second parable found in **Matthew 25:1-13** describes a Jewish wedding, and similar to the first parable, the parable of the Ten Virgins is also a warning to the church about Christ's return and where believers will spend eternity. Will believers be foolish or wise! Will believers be prepared or not! For only those that are wise and ready will go with Christ the Bridegroom to the wedding banquet, and the door will be shut to those who are foolish and unprepared! Here's Jesus' conclusion to this parable: ***"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour"*** (Matthew 25:13).

I believe that Jesus gives His church these two parables as a wake-up call, so that we would live for eternity with passion and be committed to reach out to the lost, because whatever amount of time we have left before the return of Jesus, is all the time we have remaining to bring in the rest of the harvest. Many believe that we are too heavenly minded we are of no earthly good; however, **C. S. Lewis** said this about living for eternity, *"If you read history, you will find out that the Christian who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."* When the church loses their focus on eternity, hoping to get out of here before trouble comes, they won't have a burden and heart for the lost!

I like Eugene Peterson's paraphrase translation of **Hebrews 6:1 (The Message)**, ***"So come on, let's leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ."*** Eugene Peterson says, *"It's time to grow up, church,"* and start to realize the fact that we are all destined for eternity, whether we're prepared or not, and we need to be prepared to meet Christ the Bridegroom when He returns for His bride. When the people in Jesus' day heard this parable of the Ten Virgins, they knew exactly what Jesus was taking about, because they understood what was going to happen in the last days. His Jewish audience understood the principles and traditions of Jewish engagement and marriage. It's also interesting that the Apostle Paul links these ancient marriage rituals to Christ's return for His church in **Ephesians 5:31-32**, ***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church."*** So, as the modern day church, we need to understand

these ancient traditions to be prepared for Christ's return and not be caught off guard!

In ancient Israel when it came time for a Jewish man to marry – he would have to go to the young woman's home and sign an engagement contract with her father, and the most important part of this contract was how much the young man was willing to pay for the woman he wanted to marry (dowry). This bride price amount determined the level of his love for her. Now in respect to the bride price for His church, Jesus stated that He would pay with His life, which showed His great sacrificial love for us that He would willingly die and shed His blood for His church. Then once the Jewish father accepted the bridal price the marriage contract was legally binding and only divorce could break it. In the same way, once we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are saved, sealed, and destined for eternity. Then the next step is the engagement period would last for 12 to 18 months. During this engagement phase, the couple would separate and begin to prepare for their wedding day, usually not seeing each other during this period. As they separated, the bridegroom would leave his bride with a gift to keep her focused on him in his absence. Jesus as well, gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit when He returned to Heaven to remind us of Him until He returns!

So, during the engagement period – the groom would return to his father's house to prepare a place for the bride, usually building an addition to his father's house, where he and his bride would live. In the same way, Jesus had to leave and return to His heavenly Father to begin preparing for our wedding day. Jesus spoke about this in **John 14:1-3**, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*** After the son went to his father's house and built the room where he and his bride would live, he would then have to wait for his father to release him to go and claim his bride. The groom didn't know the day of his wedding; only his father knew the right time. Again, Jesus said this when He was asked when He would return: ***“About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”*** (Mark 13:32). Only God the Father knows the day of Christ the Bridegroom's return to claim His bride, the church.

While the groom was away preparing the wedding chamber – the waiting bride had responsibilities as well. Her job was to keep herself pure and spotless, and ready at

moments notice for the bridegrooms return. Traditionally the groom would come at night, so she had to have her bags packed and her lamps filled with oil ready by her bedside at all times. In the very same way, the church, as the bride of Christ, is called to be holy, spotless, and set apart for Him, always prepared and ready for Christ's return at a moments notice. As the church, we often lose sight of this fact and get caught up, distracted, and preoccupied with the cares of this world that we forget that we are to be prepared and ready for Christ's imminent return at a moments notice!

Then, that exciting day would finally arrive – the day when the father would release his son to go and get his bride. The groomsmen would go on ahead to where the bride lived and would sound the alarm, by blowing the shofar, to let the bride know that the groom was on his way. **At the blast of the trumpet sound**, the bride would immediately leave her home, along with her bridesmaids, and meet the groom halfway. In the same way, we will meet Christ halfway, meeting Him in the air, and that's what Paul tells us in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**, ***“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*** So, you can see by these ancient Jewish wedding customs – we as the Bride of Christ, will be caught up before God releases His final wrath and judgment upon this earth, and then ten days later, we will return with Christ after the honeymoon period to defeat the Antichrist, and reign with Christ for all eternity!

The seven Biblical festivals are prophetic, dress rehearsals of things to come. And God always does the *“big things”* on His festival days. Jesus was crucified on Passover – He was in the grave on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – He was raised from the dead on First Fruits – and the Holy Spirit was poured out during the Feast of Pentecost, birthing the church. And then, here's what God has planned for the future: one of the most dramatic events in human history will be the blowing of the trumpet (shofar) on the Feast of Trumpets, also called the *“Hidden Feast”* because its day is unknown. That day the Rapture of the church will take place, which will usher in the *“Ten Days of Awe,”* during which the final wrath of God will be poured out on the earth in the bowl judgments, according to **Revelation 16**. Then, ten days later comes Yom Kipper, The Day of Atonement, when the Bridegroom and bride will leave their chamber and return to defeat the beast, Satan, according to **Revelation 19**. Five days later, the last festival, The

Feast of Tabernacles begins, a time of great rejoicing, and the theme of this festival is, “*God dwells with mankind.*” A time when the glory of God fills the earth for 1000 year!

In closing, here’s the take-away – God is working off a calendar that He established at the very beginning of time – and He will accomplish all of it – right on schedule.

**TO GOD BE THE GLORY HONOUR AND PRAISE! COME LORD JESUS!**