

## Parting of Holidays

### *Development of Biblical, Judaic and Christian Liturgical Calendars*

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In my book *Messianic Jews and their Holiday Practice* I have described the history of Jesus believing Jews and how they developed a new practice of Biblical and Jewish Holidays. I also analysed the ways in which Gentile Christians take an interest in these Holidays.<sup>1</sup> Using a journalistic method of analysis, I asked the questions *when, what, how, and why* Messianic Jews or Gentile Christians celebrate. This article is a complement to my book, in which I will put yet another question: *whence* is this practice derived? What are the sources?

In order to answer this question, we need to go back in history; as far back as the sacred times of ancient Israel, and outline their development from there, first in Scriptural Judaism and then in Christianity and Judaism respectively. Messianic Jews are heir to both of these traditions. They stand at the receiving end of the religious practices of the Church and the Synagogue. While identifying with the cultural and religious tradition of their people they are at the same time an integral part of the Christian Church, in particular of Evangelical Protestantism.

In order to understand and appreciate Messianic Jewish holiday practice, it is imperative to look at the three sources from which this phenomenon draws: biblical, Christian and Judaic. Since it is not our purpose to cover, let alone discover, new ground as to the observance of sacred times in Israel, the early Church and nascent Judaism, we have added this historical review to our study, as an excursus. This excursus takes into account the most recent research on the subject. It is not the aim to provide new material.

However, it is necessary to add it to our study because Messianic Jews frequently appeal to history to justify their doctrinal and practical theological choices, especially in the area of calendar and festival. For example, it is claimed that they 'rectify' the erroneous decisions of church councils with respect to the feasts of Israel and 'return' to the biblical roots of original Judeo-Christianity. At any rate, there is a widespread intention to combine Christian faith with Judaic traditions. So it is incumbent to describe as objectively as possible, and in a well informed way, what actually happened in the past, insofar as this is relevant for our analysis of Messianic holiday practice in the following chapter.

This historical excursus will also clarify the terminology used so far with respect to the sacred times and seasons. Until now they were alternatively referred to as 'biblical' or 'Jewish' holidays. Granted, this usage has been rather confusing, but this is because it simply reflects the confusing usage of these terms in Messianic publications. Messianic authors often mingle biblical data and elements from post-biblical Judaism. In so doing they create the impression, consciously or unconsciously, that 'biblical' and 'Jewish' amount to the same thing in the area of feast and festival. A retrospect will make it clear that this is not quite the case.

## The 'Appointed times' and their evolution in the Second Temple period

From *whence* do the sources of Messianic holiday practice come? To answer this question we have to go back before the Christian and Judaic traditions, as far back as their common basis, i.e. the festal calendar in the Torah.

### ***The mo'adey adonay in the Hebrew Bible***

The Israelites were called to sanctify, i.e. 'set apart for God' a liturgical calendar of times and seasons. These sacred occasions are called *mo'adim*, from the singular *mo'ed*.<sup>2</sup>

Derived from the root *'yd* ('to point out, to define, to appoint'), the word *mo'ed* carries a number of meanings. Its primary sense is 'a set time' or 'a determined place' or both.<sup>3</sup> As such it can denote a festival, as in Leviticus

<sup>1</sup> *Messianic Jews and their Holiday Practice – History, Analysis, Gentile Christian Interest* (Edition Israelogic, Nr. 9). Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Mo'adim* in Numbers 28.3 and *mo'adey-yhwh* in Leviticus 23 (verse 2 *et al*).

<sup>3</sup> See GESENIUS, entry Strong 3259, p. 355; the articles on 'mo'ed' by VAN GEMEREN in *TWOT*, and G. SAUER in *TLOT*, Volume 2, p. 551ff.

23, but also a future time announced by the prophet, as in Habakkuk 2:3, or any event of which the timing is considered to be in some way determined beforehand, such as the birth of a child or the migration of a bird.

Used in a cultic setting, it denotes religious festivals and feasts, 'all set times of communal observance'.<sup>4</sup> In a metonymic sense, *mo'ed* also designates the appointed place in which an assembly is held or a festival celebrated, a 'holy place', for example the Tabernacle (usually called *ohel mo'ed*, 'tent of assembly') or the Temple (as in Lamentations 2:6).<sup>5</sup>

Bible translators have used several words to render the meaning of *mo'ed*, such as 'solemnity', 'festival', 'feast', 'holy day' (or its shortened version 'holiday'), 'sacred time', or 'set time'. The dual meanings of set time and designated place are very well captured by 'appointment' or *rendez-vous*, although this might sound too colloquial. We find 'appointed meeting' or 'appointed time' suitable translations.<sup>6</sup>

Of all the passages in which the Torah refers to the calendar of appointed times,<sup>7</sup> Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29 are the most comprehensive. Together they form the liturgical year of Israel. In this sense, they are often called 'the feasts of Israel', i.e. they were given to the people of Israel with a view to sanctifying them unto the Lord.

Incidentally, Leviticus speaks of the *mo'adey-yhwh*, 'the appointed times of YHWH'. Jewish Bible readers would render this expression as *mo'adey adonay*, so as not to pronounce, perhaps inadvertently, the divine name. Messianic Jews invariably follow this custom. Consequently, *mo'adey adonay* has become a household term among them for the biblical holidays. We will follow this usage and employ this term, besides other designations, of course.

The *mo'adim* divides into several cycles, which gave a time structure to Israel's religious, social and economic life:

- A *daily* cycle – the morning and evening sacrifice in the (central) sanctuary.
- A *weekly* cycle – the Sabbath, the seventh day of *shabbat* ('rest' or 'pause'), and of a 'holy convocation'.
- A *monthly* cycle – the *Rosh Hachodesh* ('head of the month') or New Moon celebrations at the beginning of each month.
- An *annual* cycle of seven holidays, consisting of three pilgrim festivals and four solemn days. They are divided into two sequences.

#### **Spring:**

*Pesach* (Passover); commemoration of the exodus from Egypt, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the first month Aviv ('spring'), later called Nisan; its main element being the evening meal with lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread, during which the story of the exodus is passed on from generation to generation.

*Matzot* (Unleavened Bread); from the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first month onwards, lasting for seven days. Towards the end of the monarchy, Pesach and Matzot were united into one festival.

*Omer Reshit* (First Sheaf), also called First Fruit (singular); a festive offering of the first sheaf (*omer*) of the barley harvest, on 'the day after the Sabbath' during the week of Matzot.<sup>8</sup>

On this day begins *Sfirat Ha'omer* ('counting of the omer'), a period of seven weeks leading up to the festival of:

<sup>4</sup> Hendrik L. BOSMAN, *NIDOT*, Vol. 2, p. 871f. Strangely, the entry in *TDOT* denoted 'yd and its derivatives (Volume 6, p. 142ff.) does not specifically discuss the meaning of *mo'ed*.

<sup>5</sup> See GESENIUS, entry Strong 4150, p. 457. Actually, the word *mo'ed* occurs 224 times in the OT, in 146 cases in the expression '*ohel mo'ed*, 'Tent of Meeting' (G. SAUER, *TLOT*, Vol. 2, p. 352).

<sup>6</sup> This is also the rendering frequently used in the current Messianic Jewish movement. Hence the title of Barney KASDAN's book on biblical holidays: *God's Appointed Times*.

<sup>7</sup> The Sabbath: Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15:1-11. The annual holidays: Exodus 12-13, 23:12-19 and 34:18-25; Leviticus 16 and 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 12:5-19 and 16:1-17. Sabbatical and Jubilee years: Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and 30:9-13.

<sup>8</sup> There is considerable confusion as to the designation of this holiday. Leviticus 23 speaks of the presentation of the *omer reshit* ('first sheaf'), so *Omer Reshit* is the most appropriate term for this day. Messianic Jewish authors and Gentile Christians often wrongly use another terminology. Some call it *Sfirat Ha'omer* (e.g. Barney KASDAN, *God's Appointed Times*, p. 39), but this term denotes the subsequent forty-nine days of Omer Counting (see Rueben BROOKS, *Dictionary of Judaism*, p. 64). Others mistakenly use the term *Yom Habikkurim* (e.g. Willem OUWENEEL, *Hoogtijden voor Hem*, p. 105) or its English equivalent First Fruits (e.g. Dan JUSTER, *Jewish Roots*, p. 202), borrowed from Judaism, but this plural term denotes the feast of Shavu'ot, both in Numbers 28 and in Judaism (see Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 87).

*Shavu'ot* (Weeks); a seven day festival starting with the solemn offering of the first breads baked from the wheat harvest on the fiftieth day after *Omer Reshit*. After the period of the Tanakh it was reduced to one or two days. In Judaism, its opening day is also called *Yom Habikkurim* ('day of first fruits', i.e. of the wheat harvest).<sup>9</sup>

#### **Autumn:**

*Yom Teru'ah* (Day of Sounding, i.e. the sounding of the Shofar); on the first of the seventh month, thus coinciding with the seventh New Moon day.

*Yom Kippur* (Day of Expiation); a solemn day of atonement on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month.

*Sukkot* (Huts or Tabernacles); a harvest festival beginning on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month and lasting for seven days, followed by the very festive *Sh'mini Atzeret* ('concluding eighth day') that terminates not only the feast of Sukkot but also the whole annual cycle.

- A seven-year cycle – the seventh Year of Sabbath and after seven sabbatical years an additional year, the fiftieth year of Jubilee.

Interestingly, provision was made for those who had been debarred from the celebration of Pesach. In Numbers 9:9-11 it is stipulated that such persons should observe a 'Second Passover', exactly one month later.

*Matzot*, *Shavu'ot* and *Sukkot* were pilgrim festivals, known in Jewish tradition as the *shalosh regalim* ('three foot journeys').

In the Bible these three appointed times are also called *chag*. Derived from a root signifying 'to dance', 'to turn around', and in some contexts even 'to reel, to be giddy',<sup>10</sup> the noun *chag* 'alludes to the processions and the dances which, in olden times, were part of the ritual of a pilgrimage'.<sup>11</sup> So a *chag* is a 'feast' in the most common sense of the word; a 'joyful celebration'. The Torah emphasises this by ordering that on three of these occasions, the people should leave their daily life and appear in Jerusalem, to bring the appointed festive offerings and rejoice there together.<sup>12</sup>

Strictly speaking the term 'feast' or 'festival' should be reserved for these three occasions only, but in Jewish parlance 'the festivals' or 'the feasts' invariably refer to all the annual holidays.

Another post-biblical expression is 'high holidays'. This denotes the sequence of appointed times in the seventh month.

Israel's liturgical year was based on a lunar calendar. It consisted of twelve lunar months of 29 or 30 days alternatively, which began with the appearance of the new moon. The annual festivals were fixed for certain days in the lunar months. At the same time they had to coincide with the harvest seasons, which are determined by the position of the sun. Given the difference between the lunar year of approximately 354 days and the solar year of approximately 365 days, an adaptation was needed in order to prevent the pilgrim festivals getting out of sequence with the climatic seasons. To this end, a thirteenth month was added in some years, in order to fill the time gap and synchronise the calendar with the seasons.

Independently from the months which made up the year, the weekly cycle of the Sabbath ran its course based on the solar rhythm of day and night. So the sequence of solar weeks runs its course independently from the sequence of lunar months. More often than not, the opening and closing day of the festivals did not coincide with a regular Sabbath, hence the mention of seven special Sabbath days during the year, which had to be observed as such, irrespective of the day of the week on which they fell.

A striking and important feature of the liturgical calendar is the dominance of the number *seven*. Leviticus 23 lists one plus seven *mo'adey-adonay*, i.e. the seventh day of every week plus seven annual solemnities. The *shalosh regalim* are to last for seven days. The seventh Rosh Hachodesh has a special position on the calendar since it coincides with *Yom Teru'ah*, the 'day of sounding' (the shofar) and the opening of the autumn cycle.

<sup>9</sup> See the preceding footnote for the terminology with respect to this festival.

<sup>10</sup> See GESENIUS, entry Strong 2287, p. 260. He adds that it refers to the leaping and dancing which accompanied the celebration of a festival.

<sup>11</sup> Here we agree with Roland DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel: its Life and Institutions*, p. 470. Notice the Arab equivalent *hadj* that denotes the pilgrimage of Moslems to Mecca.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 23:12-19; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 12:5-19; and 16:1-17. Talmudic rabbis insisted on these three necessary aspects of the three pilgrim festivals: *re'iyah* ('appearance'), *chagigah* ('festal offering') and *simchat* ('joy'). See Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p. 152.

As to the sabbatical years and the Year of Jubilee, the analogy with the weekly seventh day, and the annual festival of Shavu'ot on the fiftieth day after Omer Reshit, is too obvious to be missed.

Apart from the regular weekly Sabbath the calendar mentions exactly seven special Sabbaths which could come on various days in the week but during which no servile work was to be done: the first and seventh day of Matzot and Pentecost, Yom Teru'ah, Yom Kippur, the first day of Sukkot and its octave called Sh'mini Atzeret. The last one is the seventh of the seven special Sabbaths, so it does not come as a surprise that the Torah gives orders to make this a most festive and joyful day.

The symbolic value of the number seven, which pervades the whole liturgical year is evident. 'In Scripture it marks the sacred measurement of time', as Alfred Edersheim has put it.<sup>13</sup>

No doubt, the centrepiece of the whole liturgical calendar was the seventh day. This made it unique among the religious calendars of its day. Not only did it set apart a number of annual celebrations, which was customary in all other cultures of antiquity, but also a weekly day of rest and remembrance. No other culture or religion in antiquity knew anything like this holy seventh day of the week. The Sabbath made the Jewish people unique.<sup>14</sup>

### **Meaning and functions**

Taking the 'mo'adim adonay as a whole, they had two (or three?) meanings: agricultural, salvation historical and spiritual.

The annual high holidays were arranged in accordance with the *agricultural* season, most notably the harvest from the fields in the spring and the harvest from the trees in the autumn. The three pilgrim festivals were explicitly related to these harvests; Matzot, with its Omer Reshit celebration comes at the outset of the barley harvest, and Shavu'ot at the wheat harvest, while Sukkot celebrates the culmination of the fruit harvest. Besides this, Pesach might well have links with the agricultural economy. It falls in the season of the reproduction of livestock – a suitable time to sacrifice lambs and monitor the number of sheep.

As the people celebrate the feasts, they affirm and celebrate the fact that its times and fortunes are taken up in God's providential care for his creation – a providence manifested in nature through the produce from the fields and the trees, and the fertility of the cattle and sheep.

In this respect, Israel's holidays were like those of all the surrounding nations. However, they were different in one respect and this is their outstanding peculiarity: they were linked to *historical* events. Put more precisely, they commemorated the constitutive moments in their history when God intervened to save them, to guide them, and to reveal his word and his presence to them. So the agricultural festivals take on a salvation historical meaning. Pesach recalls in a solemn way the miraculous liberation from slavery and bonded labour in Egypt. The feast of Matzot recalls the initial days after the Exodus, when the people had no leaven to leaven their bread. Sukkot commemorates the desert wanderings of the people, when they lived in tents for forty years. Similarly, Yom Kippur is not only a day of repentance and expiation, but the solemn ritual also has an historical dimension: it is in actual fact the renewal of the Covenant that had been concluded between the people and God.

The historical meaning of Sabbath is even more encompassing; it reminds the people of the creation of the universe, of the exodus from Egypt, and of the conclusion of the Covenant at Mount Sinai. Even so, the agricultural aspect is still there, because this day provides a wholesome interruption of all work that is done for a living. Even harvesting is suspended on this day. So it gives rest to man, animal and nature alike.

By extension, the sabbatical and Jubilee years have the same historical and agricultural meaning. As slaves are set free, the people are reminded of the exodus from bondage. As the land rests, there is a renewed awareness of creation: 'the earth and its fullness are of the Lord.' As debts are remitted and families receive back their lost property, there is a sense of living up to the real standards of the Covenant: 'every Israelite under his own fig-tree'.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> The only possible parallel in OT times, in theory at least, was the Babylonian *sappatu*. However, despite the phonetic resemblance, it was quite different from the Hebrew Sabbath. The *sappatu* was the middle day of the month, i.e. the day of the full moon; a day of godly omen and therefore a 'lucky day'. Other Babylonian texts mention the 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> day of the month as evil days, but they are not called *sappatu*. So the meaning and origin of the Sabbath should not be sought in the Babylonian religious world. See a detailed description and the same conclusion, Roland DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel*, p. 475f.

Thirdly, the *mo'adey adonay* have *spiritual* meaning as they speak of the Covenant relation between God and his people. Every holiday is an enacted lesson illustrating the fact that God loves his people and cares for them. More particularly, Yom Kippur speaks of divine judgment and the willingness to forgive sin.

Taking the three meanings together we can summarize the import of the *mo'adey adonay* as follows: By following the various cycles of the liturgical year, the times and circumstances of the people are taken up in God's all-encompassing time. He is the Creator who, in his providence, takes care of his creation in general; he is the Lord of his Covenant people in particular; and he is the Saviour who protects and leads his people through his redeeming acts in history.

The social dimension of the appointed times – from collections for the poor to the restoring of property – has led some commentators to identify yet two other meanings of the festivals. Vriezen, for example, writes that they were 'instituted to maintain community between God and Israel, and also to re-establish community among Israelites themselves by taking care of the widows and orphans'.<sup>15</sup> He is undoubtedly right in pointing out that the festivals were choice occasions to do well towards the needy. Deuteronomy highlights this aspect in particular. Even as the people celebrate the fact that God takes care of them, they are also called to take care of each other as a people.

Nevertheless, community building and social care are not so much meanings as functions of the festivals. The same applies to the so-called 'cultic meaning', which should rather be qualified as a 'cultic function'.<sup>16</sup> This comes close to the spiritual meaning but is not quite the same. For instance, the Yom Kippur ritual signifies God's willingness to forgive human sin and keep the Covenant relationship with his people intact – this is the meaning of the holiday. At the same time, it provides an occasion when one can actually acknowledge one's sins and bring the necessary sacrifices – this is the function of the holiday.

Nearly all the appointed times have a cultic function, as they are occasions for a 'holy convocation'. People assemble to appear before their God, to praise and thank him, to pray, to confess their transgressions and ask for forgiveness, to bring sacrifices of various kinds, and to hear his word. In other words, through the holy convocations and the sacrificial cult, the Covenant relationship with God is maintained and, if need be, restored. Closely linked to the cultic was the educational function: as people assembled to celebrate, the 'story' of each festival was passed on from generation to generation, in order to nurture the faith.

We shall return to the functions of the feasts of Israel at a later stage in our study, when the holiday practice of Messianic Jewish congregations will be analysed from the point of view of the functionality of religious feasts in general.

### **Development in ancient Israel**

It would be going too far to discuss Israel's liturgical year in detail.<sup>17</sup> So we will leave aside such issues as the relationship between it and the religious feasts of the surrounding cultures, or its development over the course of time. As to the latter, it is often argued that ancient Israel 'borrowed' the agricultural festivals from its social and religious environment, while adding historical meanings at later stages in its history. Furthermore, the centralisation of the cult in Jerusalem would have engendered a 'concentration on the outward performances of festivals, sacrifices and fasting'.<sup>18</sup> Differences in wording between the relevant passages in the Torah are taken as further evidence of a 'process of redaction' that reflects the development of a rudimentary festal calendar into an elaborate liturgical calendar of a more cultic nature. According to this approach, Leviticus 23 represents the final stage of this process.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> T.C. VRIEZEN, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 1958, p. 284 and 320, quoted in *NIDOT*, Vol. 2, p. 872.

<sup>16</sup> Usually, this distinction is blurred when presenting the festal calendar of ancient Israel. For example in *NIDOT*, where Hendrik L. BOSMAN mingles the two categories under one heading of 'theological elements' (Vol. 2, p. 871).

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of the feasts of Israel, their character, their function and their evolution in the course of time, see James C. VANDERKAM, 'Calendars, Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), Volume 1, p. 814ff., as well as the still classic survey of Roland DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel: its Life and its Institutions*, p. 475ff. He describes them from a historical critical angle so as to bring out the supposed development of originally agricultural festivals into a detailed liturgical calendar after the return from Exile.

For more detailed analyses, see the chapters dealing with the biblical period in Roger T. BECKWITH, *Calendar and Chronology. Jewish and Christian*. Less critical and more descriptive is Willem OUWENEEL in when he summarises, in *Hoogtijden voor Hem*, the Old Testament background of each holy day.

From the Jewish side, Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, describes in detail the festivals in the period of the Tanakh, taking the orthodox view that Israel's liturgical calendar dates from the days of Moses.

<sup>18</sup> Hendrik L. BOSMAN in *NIDOT*, Vol. 2, p. 874.

<sup>19</sup> For an example of such a developmental approach, see Roland DE VAUX, *Ancient Israel*, p. 484-518. To mention one example of the conclusions arrived at when taking this angle: on pp. 509ff. he argues that e.g. Yom Kippur is one of the 'Later Feasts', instituted after the time of Ezra and Nehemia. Of course, this flies in the face of the testimony of the written Torah that explicitly mentions Moses as the one who instituted this holiday. Such

Such interpretations of the Old Testament data are open to discussion, but we can leave this matter aside: not only because Messianic Jewish authors invariably take the conservative view that all the commandments with respect to the sacred times stem from Moses, but also, and more importantly, because first century Judaism perceived the written Torah as a unified text. What counted for the Jews at that time was the integral text, as it has been handed down. It is on this text that their oral traditions of religious practices were based. It is this text that was authoritative for Jesus and his disciples. It is this text that has been recognised as Holy Writ, by both Judaism and Christianity.

So we consider the *mo'adey adonay*, as presented in the Torah, as a unified calendar; as a whole.

This is not to exclude any evolution during biblical times, after the institution of the calendar in Mosaic legislation. On the contrary.. For instance, there is the quite significant example of the principal annual festival: Pesach. Originally it was celebrated in a family context, in the various dwelling places all over the country. With the centralisation of the priestly cult, during the monarchy, the celebration of Pesach changed from a delocalised family celebration into a centralised celebration in and around the Temple. Slaughtering the Passover lambs then took place on the esplanade of the Temple and became part of the preparatory ritual of the feast conducted by the priests. In fact, Pesach became so closely linked with the celebrations of the pilgrim festival Matzot, which also took place in the central sanctuary, that the two feasts became virtually one.<sup>20</sup> Since then, this dual festival could be called either Pesach or Matzot. As time went on, this usage became generalised, and we find it also in the New Testament ('the feast of Unleavened Bread which is called Pesach', Luke 22:1).

#### **Development until the first century C.E.**

Whereas the possible evolution of the *mo'adey adonay* during the period of the Hebrew Bible, is of relatively little importance for our study, the changes that occurred during the Second Temple period have more bearing on the subject. Especially the last part of this period is of interest because it includes the time of Jesus, the apostles and the first Christian communities. It ends with the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Jewish religious practice in this period forms the context of nascent Christianity and constitutes the foundational background of post 70 Judaism. For this reason, 'Second Temple Judaism' is often taken as a starting point for discussing the evolution of Jewish holiday observance<sup>21</sup> and the development of the Christian liturgical year.<sup>22</sup>

Information about religious practice during this time can be gathered from the New Testament (especially the Gospels); the Mishnah, insofar as it contains references to persons and situations before 70; and the Qumran literature and a number of contemporaneous Jewish writings such as Josephus and a number of Apocryphal books. On the basis of these sources various Jewish and Christian scholars have described what they call Second Temple Judaism, or First Century Judaism, in general, and its holiday practice in particular.<sup>23</sup> Using the recent research on the subject as a guide, we summarise how the feasts of Israel developed during this period.

Generally speaking, first century Judaism scrupulously followed the guidelines of the Torah with respect to the appointed times – applying them to the particular circumstances of the day. Virtually all the different streams of Second Temple Judaism attached great significance to calendars and the observance of festivals, and their leaders were preoccupied with the various technical matters related to the computation of days and

hypotheses are often of a tentative nature, so much so, that even adherents of the historical critical developmental approach recognise that 'much more research will have to be done on how different festival traditions (from the northern kingdom and Judah) were combined in the final text of the OT' (B.R. GOLDSTEIN & A. COOPER, in a recent article, 'The Festivals in Ancient Israel', quoted in *NIDOT*, Vol. 2, p. 874).

<sup>20</sup> For the reasons for this concentration of Pesach in the central sanctuary, see e.g. Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 42ff.

<sup>21</sup> So does, for instance, Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoekka*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> So does, for instance, Thomas J. TALLEY, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*.

<sup>23</sup> We mention only a few titles of the vast literature devoted to this area of research. From the Jewish side: Jacob NEUSNER, *De Joodse wieg van het Christendom, and Shmuel SAFRAI, Volk met een land*. From the Christian side: Hugues COUSIN (ed), *Le monde où vivait Jésus*; Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*; and James D.G. DUNN, *The Partings of the Ways* (although the latter two works are not primarily devoted to reconstructing first century Judaism as such, they contain much invaluable information on that subject taking into account recent scholarly discussions).

Holiday practice in Second Temple Judaism is dealt with by Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, published in 1934 but still esteemed as an indispensable source guide on the subject (according to the foreword of Harold KUSHNER to the 1996 edition); David INSTONE-BREWER, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament*, Volume 2, *Feasts and Sabbaths*; Roger T. BECKWITH, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian*; and Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*.

The work of Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple and its Ministries*, is outdated from a scholarly point of view, but Gentile and Messianic Jewish authors writing on the feasts of Israel, still frequently quote this book as an authoritative source on Jewish holiday practice in the time of Jesus. Interest in his writings among Evangelicals is such that *The Temple and its Ministries* and other titles continue to be published in reprint.

months. Several extra-biblical sources witness to this heightened interest, most notably the Elephantine papyri, 1 Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, as well as the Temple Scroll and other scrolls found at Qumran.<sup>24</sup>

An important matter in this respect was the relationship between calendar rulings and religious authority. Given the importance of feasts in all ancient societies, the determination of their dates was a matter for the religious authorities. All matters pertaining to the calendar were the prerogative of the highest authority in religious matters, i.e. the priesthood.

Israel was no exception to this rule. The authority for determining the dates of the festivals resided with the High Priest and the Sanhedrim. In a very real sense they were the guardians of the calendar. It was the task of the high priest and his aides to determine the exact day of each New Moon, the date of Pesach, and the addition of a thirteenth month in a given year. Moreover, they took care to communicate this information throughout the Land, and to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora. In the absence of the refined meteorological instruments of the modern world, they relied on personal observation. When the decisive day of the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan approached, observers scrutinised the sky, on two different mountaintops near Jerusalem. As soon as they noticed the moon entering its first quarter they ran to the high priest and, upon the agreement of two witnesses, the latter ruled that the New Moon had come. Immediately, fires were lit on the two mountaintops, which served as signals to observers on other high places for them to light a fire, and so the news of the New Moon spread as fire all through the Jewish land and even beyond. Later, this practice was no longer considered a sufficient safeguard against possible error, so messengers were sent out to carry the information to distant communities in the Diaspora, allowing them enough time to prepare for Passover, whether in Jerusalem, as a pilgrim, or at home.<sup>25</sup>

However, Sabbath observance did not depend on the decisions of the priestly hierarchy. It was sufficient to wait for the sun to set at the end of the sixth day, a moment everyone could observe, whoever he was and wherever he lived.

Rather than remaining a static tradition, holiday observance in Judaism developed as time went on. By the first century, the practice of the holidays had become more elaborate and subject to more detailed prescriptions than in the former biblical period. There was also further development in the signification of the festivals, as additional historical meanings were given to them.

While a detailed discussion of this development would lead us beyond the scope of our study, we need to single out a few examples in order to illustrate some important differences with the biblical period.

The primary example that comes to mind is the increasing emphasis on the Sabbath as 'the highest and foremost expression of Torah observance', as Jean Massonnet aptly puts it. The concern to respect the scriptural injunctions concerning this holiday led to the development of an abundance of do's and don'ts. Jean Massonnet summarises the general opinion of scholars, that the elaborate Sabbath rulings which have been collected in the Mishnah 'were essentially the same as at the outset of the first century C.E., except from some areas that were affected by the changes that have come about in 70'.<sup>26</sup>

A second important evolution is the practice of the Passover meal. The Torah does not prescribe much of this. It only mentions the key elements of this symbolic commemorative meal: matsah, bitter herbs, lamb, and the transmission of the story of the Exodus. In due time an elaborate sequence of rites developed, with a rather detailed liturgy. For that reason the meal was called the Seder ('order'). In rabbinic Judaism this tendency would continue and give rise to the traditional Haggadah ('what has to be recounted'), the elaborate text of the story that had to be told through the Seder liturgy. When the Mishnah was compiled these traditions were not yet fully developed. There is a consensus that the Passover Seder, as described in rabbinic literature, did not yet exist during the Second Temple period.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to reconstruct its beginnings, but there is at least something to go by. For a start, some information in the Mishnah concerns the customs of the Passover meal during the time that the Temple still existed. Moreover, this information is corroborated by the Gospel accounts of Jesus' last supper.

Combining the Gospel record with data from rabbinic literature, Alfred Edersheim has proposed a rather elaborate reconstruction of the Passover meal of Jesus' day.<sup>28</sup> In current Messianic Jewish circles, it is still regarded as a reliable presentation, but it is probably too anachronistic. Aware of the danger of reading the

<sup>24</sup> A succinct survey of calendars and festivals in post-exilic times and early Judaism is offered by James C. VANDERKAM, 'Calendars, Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), Volume 1, p. 814ff.

<sup>25</sup> See for a detailed description: Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 114ff. and Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple*, p. 155ff.

<sup>26</sup> Jean MASSONNET, 'Chabat et fêtes,' in: Hugues COUSIN (ed), *Le monde où vivait Jésus*, p. 330f.

<sup>27</sup> See: Jean MASSONNET, 'Chabat et Fêtes,' in Hugues COUSIN (ed), *Le monde où vivait Jésus*, p. xxx, and Joshua KULP, 'The origins of the Seder and Haggadah.'

<sup>28</sup> Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple and its Ministries*, p. 193ff.

Gospel account through the spectacles of later Judaic traditions, present scholarship is more reluctant in reconstructing the customary Jewish Passover meal of the first century.<sup>29</sup> According to Oskar Skarsaune the Passover meal in Jesus' day consisted of the biblical elements plus ritual washing(s), various cups of wine, formal blessings over bread and wine, psalm singing and Scripture readings – without trying to reconstruct the order of the various elements.<sup>30</sup> We think that that is indeed as far as one can go from a purely historical angle. From these sources we can conclude that the rudiments of the later Seder and Haggadah were already practised in Jesus' day, beside the biblical elements it contained.

A third example of elaboration is the celebration of Sukkot. Several new customs were added, such as the daily waving of willow branches while reciting the *Hosha'anut* prayers ('please, save us!') based on Psalm 118, and the lighting of the temple area. Although not prescribed in the Torah, the ritual drawing of water became a major element of the celebration. Every day, priests went down to the Well of Siloam to draw water, in order to bring it up to the sanctuary and sprinkle it on the altar. On the seventh day, a sevenfold quantity was drawn and poured out.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the religious calendar had been amplified during the course of the Second Temple period. Besides the original cycle of annual holidays, Jews also celebrated two other festivals of later origin:

- *Purim* ('lots'); a two-day festival, on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, in commemoration of the miraculous escape from a planned genocide in the time of queen Esther.
- *Chanukkah* ('dedication'); an eight-day celebration, starting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, to commemorate the purification and rededication of the temple in the wake of the Maccabean Revolt in 167 B.C.E..

The first has some biblical warrant, in the book of Esther, where the institution of Purim is attributed to queen Esther herself.

As to the second, there is no record of its official institution, but its practice in first century Judaism is widely attested, not only in the Mishnah but also in the New Testament, where Jesus is reported to have gone up to Jerusalem when 'Chanukkah was celebrated' (John 10:22).

Besides these two joyful feasts, four days of fasting were observed in commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the first temple in 587 B.C.E.. Shortly after the return of some of the exiled Jews, Zachariah had already mentioned the custom of fasting four times a year.<sup>32</sup> One of these has become *Tisha be'av* (the 9<sup>th</sup> of the fifth month Av), the most important of all the minor fasts in rabbinic Judaism. In biblical times this day had not yet acquired such predominance. It is even uncertain to what extent these fasts were observed during the period of the Second Temple. Apparently the Pharisees were most keen to keep them, which is in keeping with their general emphasis on fasting as a key element of piety. Although we can be certain that these days were observed in the time of the NT we cannot say in exactly what manner.

In order to distinguish these additional holidays from those that had been instituted originally by the Lord, they have come to be referred to as the Minor Holidays or Minor Feasts and Fasts.

During the Second Temple period, there was also an evolution in the area of interpretation. Generally speaking, there was a tendency to historicise *all* the annual festivals.

The most conspicuous example is Shavu'ot. In biblical times it was a harvest festival and its significance 'only' agricultural. But after the exile, historical meaning was attributed to it as well. 2 Chronicles 15:10-14 mentions a 'festival of the Covenant' in the third month, which was, in all likelihood, a celebration of Shavu'ot. The Targum on this passage confirms this explanation. Writing in the second century B.C.E., the author of the Book of Jubilees described Shavu'ot as 'a festival of the oaths', a commemoration of the Covenant with Noah and the Mosaic Covenant.

By the time of the redaction of the Mishnah, Shavu'ot had developed into the commemoration of the giving of the Law. While it is theoretically possible that this interpretation goes back to an earlier period, it remains a hypothesis, and an unlikely one at that, because the first rabbis who linked Shavu'ot to the giving of the Torah

<sup>29</sup> So for example Jean MASSONNET, 'Chabat et Fêtes,' in Hugues COUSIN (ed), *Le monde où vivait Jésus*, p. 342f., and Joshua KULP, 'The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah.'

<sup>30</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 401ff.

<sup>31</sup> Customs reported in the Mishnah, *Sukkah*, IV.5 and 9, but dating from before 70 C.E.

<sup>32</sup> Zechariah 7:1-5 and 8:19 mention several fasts. Taken together they add up to four; one in the fourth month (in later Judaism identified as the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz), one in the fifth month (undoubtedly the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av), one on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month Tishri; and one on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the tenth month Tevet. No doubt, all these days were related to the destruction of the first Temple and the events leading up to that calamity. See Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 96f.

flourished from 150 C.E. onwards.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, this correlation is not attested to elsewhere, in any sources from the first century and before.

Another telling example of historicising is the way in which the prophet Zechariah placed Sukkot in an eschatological perspective. After the ‘battle for Jerusalem’ in the last days is over and the people of Israel have been redeemed,

...the Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his Name will be the only Name... Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the feast of Sukkot (14:9 and 16).

Strictly speaking, this prophecy does not alter the meaning of the feast in the present but gives it an extra dimension. It adds a new historical perspective. With the words of Zechariah in mind, people will not only rejoice over the harvest and commemorate the desert wanderings of their ancestors but also look forward to a future situation in which the nations will celebrate it, year after year, together with Israel.

## Two Paradigm Shifts

This ongoing process of adaptation and reinterpretation was deeply influenced by two epoch making events during the first century C.E., both of which amounted to a paradigm shift. The first of these events was the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, a devout Jew from Nazareth, acclaimed as the promised Messiah of Israel by a growing number of followers.

### Jesus and the holidays of Israel

Before looking at Jesus’ conduct with respect to Sabbath and festivals, we wish to make a point about the theological relevance of his earthly life.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it became commonplace, in NT studies, to distinguish the ministry and teaching of Jesus on the one hand, and the life and message of the early Christian communities on the other. On one side of the divide there was ‘the Jesus of history’ who brought a ‘Jewish’ message; on the other side, ‘the Christ of faith’ of the Gospel kerygma which was preached by the apostles after Pentecost. In the light of their faith encounter with the ‘risen Lord’ they had reinterpreted Jesus in largely non-Jewish terms as the divine Saviour of mankind. What counts for Christian conduct and doctrine, so the presupposition goes, is not so much the historical Jesus as the Christ who is preached and taught by the early apostolic community.

We find the dichotomy between the Jesus who lived in Palestine and the Christ who is preached by the Church, largely exaggerated. There is a fundamental continuity between the two. To our mind, it is unthinkable that the apostles after Pentecost, and Paul in particular, were willing, or even able, to proclaim the message of a divine Redeemer who had come down to save mankind, if the very Jesus who walked the shores of Galilee had not first proclaimed it to his disciples. In other words, the Gospel *kerygma* of the early churches must have been based on the historical Jesus.<sup>34</sup>

Leaving aside this point of NT theology in general, we draw attention to one particular aspect: where the Jesus of history was distinguished from the Christ of faith, there was often a tendency to concentrate on the titles of Jesus, or those attributed to him – Son of God, Messiah, Son of Man, Lord, and so on – rather than showing the significance of how he himself lived and behaved.

Some decades ago, however, interest in the historical Jesus was renewed. One of the major contributing factors for this ‘third quest’ was the Jesus research conducted by Jewish scholars such as David Flusser, who protested against the tendency, in Christian circles, to dissociate Jesus from the Judaism of his day. They argued the contrary, namely that first century Judaism is precisely the framework in which Jesus should be understood.

The third quest has brought to light the fact that Jesus was part and parcel of the theological universe of Judaism and its religious practice. James G. Dunn, in a recent publication, summarises the challenge of the third quest as follows. ‘There is need to recognize and give weight to the Jewish context and character of Jesus and his

<sup>33</sup> The first mention is by Rabbi Yoshua ben Chalafat, about 150 C.E. Cf. Talmud Bavli, *Pessachim*, 68b, where Rabbi Eleazar (c. 250 C.E.) mentions the same correlation.

<sup>34</sup> See for a discussion of this issue: George Eldon LADD, *A Theology of the New Testament*, chapter 13. We agree with his conclusion: ‘If ‘the historical Jesus’ is the product of philosophical presuppositions about the nature of history, is not the construct ‘the biblical Christ’ the product of faith? The answer is No. The biblical portrait of Christ is a product of the apostolic biblical witness. My faith does not create that construct, but my faith that the nature of God and history has room for such a Jesus as the Gospels picture makes it possible for me to accept the biblical witness’ (p. 180).

ministry', because 'this provides a fresh stimulus and the new angle of entry into the Jesus-tradition'.<sup>35</sup> In other words, this is the key to understanding the person and work of Jesus. Indeed, the third quest is a 'Jewish quest', as Oskar Skarsaune rightly observes. Certainly, since its emergence 'much exciting research is going on in recent scholarship; the Jewishness of Jesus is now being approached from many interesting angles'.<sup>36</sup> Nowadays, Jewish and Christian scholars, who study the NT and its Jewish context, agree that Jesus lived as a devout Jew, in obedience to the Torah and in accordance with many of the religious customs of his day, while critically disavowing those traditions which he deemed incompatible with God's original intentions. As such, he behaved like a Jewish teacher of the Law.<sup>37</sup>

Moving on from the general picture to the particular area of the observance of the 'appointed times', we want to see how Jesus related to the Jewish holiday practice of his day. Three observations can be made.

To begin with, he kept the *mo'adey adonay*, at any rate the Sabbath and the annual festivals. His parents were devout Jews who took him each year to Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach there (Luke 2). On the Sabbath he was to be found in the synagogue, teaching from the lectionary passages of the day (Luke 4:18ff). And the Gospels record several occasions on which he celebrated the feasts. While the Synoptics concentrate on the final Pesach, John's Gospel informs us that Jesus regularly went up to Jerusalem for Pesach/Matzot (2:13 and 12:1), a 'Feast of the Jews' (5:1, probably Shavu'ot), Sukkot (7:2), and Chanukkah (10:22). His 'Last Supper' was in a traditional Passover Seder, as the Synoptic Gospels make clear. One gets the impression that these were not exceptional occasions but that Jesus was in the habit of keeping the feasts of Israel.

A word about the Last Supper should be added. In John's chronology, Jesus died on the 'day of preparation' (18:28 and 19:14). At first sight, this seems to imply that his last meal took place a day earlier than the normal time for the Passover Seder. Some interpreters have concluded from this that in John's view, the farewell meal of Jesus and his disciples was not a Passover Meal. But this amounts to saying that the fourth evangelist clearly contradicts the unanimous testimony of the other three, viz. that Jesus ordered his disciples to 'prepare the Passover Meal' (*pascha*, Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12, Luke 22:7). In our view, this cannot have been the intention of John.

Various hypotheses have been advanced to harmonise the different accounts, often based on the different calendars that were in use among the various factions of first century Judaism. So the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, the day of the Seder, could come on different days: according to the reckoning of the Pharisees it would have come a day earlier than according to the calendar used by the Sadducees. While the Synoptics followed the former, so the theory goes, the fourth evangelist followed the latter.<sup>38</sup> Others have come up with the ingenious explanation that 'the day of preparation' in John's Gospel was in fact the first day of the Pesach festival, a 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, and hence a special Sabbath, a day to refrain from work. In that particular year, it fell on a Friday, just before the regular Sabbath of the festival week, also called the Great Sabbath. In such cases, it was allowed on Friday to make preparations for the following Sabbath. This included the preparation of a meal on Friday evening – not the Seder but one of the daily Paschal meals during the festival week.<sup>39</sup>

If either of these explanations is true, the discrepancy between the time-table of the Synoptics and that of the fourth Gospel is only apparent. Granted, these are but hypotheses. The last word has definitely not yet been said about this intricate problem of exegesis. Even so, we are persuaded that the Last Supper was a Seder, in all four gospel accounts.

Secondly, Jesus' lifestyle, including his holiday practice, is clearly situated in first century Judaism. Although the religious and social life of the Jewish people at that time was based on the Torah and the religion of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, it was in many ways a further development. All kinds of oral traditions had developed. Moreover, different groups held to different interpretations of the Scriptures and different modes of conduct. In fact, it would be more precise to speak of Second Temple Judaisms (plural).

<sup>35</sup> James D.G. DUNN, *The Partings of the Ways*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 143, at the end of a chapter summarising this so-called third quest for the historical Jesus. Another recent work, James D.G. DUNN, *The Parting of the Ways*, also reviews the history of this quest (chapter 1), which has brought to the fore the Jewishness of Jesus. We take their conclusions as a guide for presenting the way Jesus, the apostolic and the primitive church related to the feasts of Israel.

<sup>37</sup> The literature on the roots of Jesus' teaching and lifestyle in first century Judaism is vast and impossible to summarize. Suffice it to mention, *pars pro toto*, some works that have been of particular interest to our study: Brad H. YOUNG, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*; Frédéric MANNS, *Les racines juives du christianisme*; and idem, *Une approche juive du Nouveau Testament*.

<sup>38</sup> See for this line of explanation e.g. G. COHEN STUART, *Joodse feesten* (p. 339ff.) and C. DEN BOER, *Pasen, feest van bevrijding*, p. 24ff.

<sup>39</sup> In his monograph on Jewish and Christian Passover, C. DEN BOER summarises this hypothesis, advanced by P.H.R. VAN HOUWELINGEN and others (*Pasen, feest van bevrijding*, p. 25). He apparently accepts it, but a few pages later in the same chapter he complicates his position by stating: 'In his report of the events, John points out that the Jewish leaders, c.q. chief priests/Sadducees, still had to keep their Seder Evening' (p. 28).

Even though Jesus had come to fulfil the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures, he did not represent a wholesale return to the ‘old time religion’. Rather than disavowing all the religious customs and traditions of his time *en bloc*, he practised many of them. While criticising some of the ‘man made traditions’, he kept to others.

In passing, we notice that this practice is particularly relevant for contemporary missiology, as it discusses how the communication of the Gospel should be contextualised in the culture of its addressees. From a missiological point of view, the way in which Jesus acted within the Jewish culture can be defined as an example of inculturation.<sup>40</sup>

Returning to Jesus and his compliance with existing religious practice, a clear example of that is the way in which he observed the holidays. In that respect, he went beyond biblical revelation and command. On the Sabbath he took part in the synagogue service, used the lectionary of Torah portions, and the additional readings (*haftaroth*) lectionary, and explained the Scriptures – as was the custom in his day. Not only did he celebrate the *mo'adey adonay*, but also Chanukkah, a festival that did not figure in the original calendar. During Sukkot, he deliberately related to the water ceremony and possibly also to the light ceremony, two popular customs at that time. Its origins are obscure, but one thing is certain; they are not prescribed in the Torah! The Passover meal with his disciples, in the Upper Room, was nothing less than the customary Seder.

Evidently, Jesus did not disdain the holiday traditions of first century Judaism, the very traditions that would be further developed in rabbinic Judaism. We note also, in passing, that this observation is particularly relevant for the discussions within the current Messianic movement, about the pros and cons of those Judaic rites which lack explicit biblical warrant. We shall certainly return to this further on in our study.

A third observation should immediately be added. Instead of just following the tradition and adding his viewpoint to that of other teachers of the Torah, Jesus claimed to have greater authority than Moses (‘Moses said... but I say to you...’ Matthew 5:21 ff.). His saying: ‘greater than the Temple is here’ (Matthew 12:6) pointed in the same direction. Through his identification with the glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7, he clearly implied that He was the promised Messianic Redeemer of Israel and mankind.

According to the widespread expectation of first century Judaism, one of the prerogatives of the coming Messiah would be to renew the Torah, in other words to issue a new Torah.<sup>41</sup> This is precisely what Jesus did. When he corrected certain practices, and reinterpreted certain rites by relating them to his mission on earth, he did not appeal to a chain of tradition or any teaching school. He acted on his own Messianic authority.

Again, the area of the *mo'adey adonay* is a prime example. For a start, Jesus’ behaviour on the Sabbath was very controversial, to say the least. He took issue with those who interpreted the Mosaic prohibition of ‘work’ in a rigid way. In fact he allowed the sick to be healed, the hungry to be fed and the possessed to be delivered, precisely on this day.

Some scholars have asserted that he put an end to the Sabbath as an institution. Messianics, on the other hand, argue that Jesus, far from setting aside the Sabbath commandment as such, criticised the (oral) traditions that had been developed around it, mainly in terms of prohibitions. While the oral traditions in Jesus’ day elaborated on the categories of forbidden activities, Jesus insisted on what one should *do* on the seventh day: this is the day *par excellence* to do well to others. When Jesus healed the sick, and allowed his disciples to eat corns of wheat on this sacred day, David Friedman comments, the motive was to bring to light God’s original intentions for the Sabbath.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> In 5.3.1 we presented the theses of David STERN, in his *Jewish Manifesto*, that the term contextualisation does not apply to the original Jewish Gospel, only to the way in which the communication of that original Gospel has been adapted, later on, to the various non-Jewish cultures. In 5.3.3 and 5.3.4 we considerably modified this thesis. Suffice it to add here, that the universal truth of the Gospel will always be expressed in some cultural form or another, be it Jewish or non-Jewish. In other words, the unchanging message will always be contextualised in relation to a specific context. Jesus and the apostles are no exceptions to this.

<sup>41</sup> In the Mishanic and Talmudic era, the rabbis reflected on passages like Isaiah 2:4 (‘the law will go out from Zion’) and Jeremiah 31:31 (‘he will write the law in their hearts’), and related it to the coming of the Messiah. They discussed what kind of Torah would be issued from the idea that the Messiah will have to adapt the Torah to the new situation of the Messianic Era. In other words, when the Messiah comes, he will teach his Torah. Will this be a new Torah, or an adapted Torah? ‘The Messiah will bring a new Torah (*torah hadashah*)’ (Leviticus R., 13, §3). Whatever its relation to the existing Torah, it will be ‘the Torah of the Messiah (*torah shel mashiah*)’ (Ecclesiasticus R., 11:8). It is possible that such reflections already took place in the Second Temple Era.

According to Mogens Müller and Henrik Tronier, who analyse the rabbinic discussion on this subject, the idea was not that the Torah that came forth from Sinai would be replaced but rather, that it would ‘receive its final and complete interpretation and application’. They argue that the rabbis gradually attributed a didactic function to the Davidic Messiah, not unlike their own didactic function, and they refer to The Psalms of Solomon and the Targum of Isaiah as evidence. More than teaching wisdom, Messiah would institute a new Torah (*The New Testament and Reception*, p. 88f.

<sup>42</sup> See a summary of the discussion in David FRIEDMAN, *They Loved the Torah*, p. 9f.

This emphasis was not altogether unique, by the way, in first century Judaism. Philo offered similar statements.<sup>43</sup>

During the Passover meal he introduced a novel rite (foot-washing). Moreover, he changed the order of the liturgy by eating bread 'after the meal and 'after they had given thanks', as the Gospel writers tell us. This procedure is totally absent from the descriptions of the Seder in the Mishnah, so it is unlikely, to say the least, that it was already customary in Jesus' days. Alfred Edersheim may well be right in concluding that Jesus in fact anticipated the *afikomen* or after-dish that became part of the Seder after 70 C.E., when a lamb could no longer be sacrificed.<sup>44</sup> Be that as it may, from the Gospel accounts it becomes clear that Jesus did not slavishly follow tradition but took the liberty to change, to add, or to leave aside certain practices, as he deemed fit.

Even more strikingly, Jesus did not just adopt existing interpretations of the holidays but offered new meanings, as he related them to his own person and ministry. This aspect of his teaching is most notably brought to the fore in John's Gospel, where we find 17 of the 25 NT occurrences of the word *heorté* ('feast'). As one commentator aptly summarises:

Weaving into his Gospel the fabric of the recurring festivals of Israel, John presents Jesus' discourses on the true meaning of these festivals with himself as the centre.<sup>45</sup>

This correlation between Jesus and the feasts of Israel is often presented as John's theological interpretation, a form of Gemeindeftheologie. Boendermaker and Monshouwer maintain that John linked the story of Jesus to the festivals so as to fit it into the format of the liturgical calendar and the lectionary of Bible readings.<sup>46</sup> Without denying the creative role of the evangelists in composing the Gospels, we are convinced that John could only relate Jesus to the festivals because Jesus himself had done so. He faithfully transmits 'what his eyes had seen, what he had heard and contemplated, what his hands had touched' (1 John 1:1-3).

He put the Sabbath in a new perspective, by teaching that there is a correlation with the coming of the Son of Man (a recognised Messianic title in the Judaism of his day): 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). By making this statement, he clearly assumed a status above this most holy of all the appointed times. On the closing day of Sukkot, when water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam and brought to the Temple, he used this custom to draw the spectators' attention to himself: 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink... and streams of living water will flow from within him'. John explains that this referred to 'the water of the Spirit' (John 7:37ff.).

While the crowd celebrated Chanukkah, he declared himself to be the deliverer sent by the Father. 'The miracles that I do in my Father's Name, speak for me (...) I and the Father are one' (John 10:25-30).

During his last Passover meal, he followed the usual liturgy of his day. But he reinterpreted one element and added two others. After the ritual washing of hands he continued by washing the feet of his disciples, in order to give them an example to follow. After the main Paschal meal he introduced a new rite; he took *matsah*, broke it and distributed it, and explained the meaning as follows: 'this is my body, which is for you'. Similarly, he reinterpreted the cup of wine that was drunk after the main course as follows: 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood'.<sup>47</sup> Not only did he institute these two elements as 'a remembrance of me', he also gave them an eschatological overtone: 'I will not drink again... until it finds fulfilment in the Kingdom of God' (Luke 22:17). Jesus very deliberately chose the moment when he would lay down his life. He was betrayed and executed on Passover day. And on the 'first day of the week' he appeared as the Risen One, that is on Omer Reshit, the day on which the first fruit of the harvest had to be presented in the Temple. Just before ascending to heaven, he ordered his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit, who he would send to them. He did so on the morning of Shavu'ot.

<sup>43</sup> Philo speaks of the Sabbath as the God given occasion to do well to people in need. See Peter WICK, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste*, p. 390.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple: its Ministry and its Services*, p. 191.

<sup>45</sup> NIDNT, 'heorté' (entry # 2038), p. 440f.

<sup>46</sup> J.P. BOENDERMAKER and G. MONSHOUWER, *Johannes, de evangelist van de feesten*. They build their case on similar conjectures proposed by A. GULDING in 1960, C.T. RUDDICK Jr. in 1969 and Michael GOULDER in 1982. In a similar vein, Denis GRENIER, in *L'évangile dans le calendrier*, develops the thesis that the structure of the Gospel of Mark is grafted on the Jewish festal calendar and the lectionary of Torah readings. He argues that this Gospel was destined for a Judeo-Christian audience, in order to serve as a sort of teaching manual for new believers. Underlying his approach is the assumption that not only Jesus but also the first generation of believers celebrated the feasts of Israel.

<sup>47</sup> I take the wording of the tradition that Paul cites in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 (NIV). The exact original wording of the institution of the Lord's Supper is a matter of considerable debate. See e.g. Joachim JEREMIAS, *Die Abendmahls Worte Jesu*. In the traditional Seder, 'this cup' would have been the third, but it is not sure whether all four cups of the Seder in later Judaism were already part of the liturgy during the time of Jesus.

### Paradigm shift #1 – faith in Jesus the Messiah

After Jesus' resurrection, and even more so after the descent of the Holy Spirit, his followers gained deeper understanding of what their beloved Saviour had taught during his ministry on earth. They at last began to fully grasp his uniqueness. Their encounter with the risen Lord and the experience of the indwelling of his Spirit were so decisive that everything they knew from the Scriptures was seen in the light of this Jesus.

The recognition that he was indeed the Messiah of Israel, who fulfils the prophetic promises, amounted to a paradigm shift for his disciples, who had all grown up in first century Judaism.

Certainly, this did not mean that these Jewish believers opted out of Judaism altogether. Jesus had presented himself as the one who had come, not to abolish Judaism but to restore Israel.<sup>48</sup> Following the example and teaching of their Master, the disciples remained well rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and still hoped for the full salvation of Israel. As far as we can gather from the New Testament writings, they also continued to attend the prayer services in the Temple, to observe the Sabbath and to celebrate the festivals – at least in the earliest period.

But their Judaism changed. Or to be more precise, it went through a paradigm shift. The result was a new kind of Judaism, unknown before; that is to say, a Christ-centred way of loving God and obeying his commandments. It opened borders, as Gentiles were welcomed and accepted on the same basis as Jews, namely faith in Jesus Messiah. Its centre of gravity had drifted away from the covenant with Moses, the physical temple and the Torah, to the person of Jesus Christ and the community of the New Covenant instituted by him.<sup>49</sup>

From the apostolic writings we learn that this paradigm shift was not easy to handle. Paradigm shifts never are. They call for readjustment and reinterpretation, and that takes time and effort.

As far as the holidays of Israel are concerned, the paradigm shift had four important consequences for the first generations of Christians.

First, it affected their understanding of the sacred times of Israel's calendar. The way in which Jesus had related certain elements of the sacred holidays to himself opened a new window of understanding. From then on they viewed their religious heritage, and their observances, from the perspective of Jesus' death and resurrection during Passover. As Frédéric Manns rightly states:

The communities of believers, in all their diversity, made every effort to express their faith in Jesus and to reread the messianic prophecies in the First Testament in the light of Passover. The emphasis was put on the radical newness of the paschal angle through which the community looked back on Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

From this perspective, the apostles interpreted the sacrifices of remission and atonement under the mosaic legislation as foreshadows of the unique sacrifice of Jesus' life. All of them had been accomplished in the death of Christ on the day of Pesach. The logical implication was, of course, that there was no longer any need to bring the prescribed sin offerings during the festivals.

Moreover, the feasts of Israel were now redefined as 'types' and 'shadows' which pointed to a reality beyond, i.e. the things that have come to pass through Christ (Colossians 2:17).

Yet this new understanding is only applied to Yom Kippur (Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1, where the same word 'shadow' appears) and to Pesach in the NT. As for Shavu'ot, we do not have the impression that Luke, when he describes the outpouring of the Spirit on this festival, intends to redefine it. He rather seems to bring out the divine timing of this event.<sup>51</sup>

As for Passover, Jesus had already paved the way for a reinterpretation, when he gave new meanings to elements of the Seder liturgy and ordered his disciples to 'do this in my remembrance'. Furthermore, all four Gospels report that Jesus' last week took place during the preparations of the festival of Pesach/Matzot, which implies that his death was indeed a Passover sacrifice, and the final one at that.

We already referred to the chronology of Jesus' passion in John's Gospel. Some scholars take it that John deliberately lets the death of Jesus coincide with the slaughtering of the paschal lambs in the Temple court, in

<sup>48</sup> Recent NT scholarship emphasises that the 'restoration of Israel' is the framework within which all of Jesus' words and actions make the most sense (J.P. SANDERS), that Jesus' aim was a 'restoration project' to redeem his people from a sort of spiritual, inner exile (N.T. WRIGHT). See Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> James D.G. DUNN, in *The Partings of the Ways*, argues that the covenant with Israel, the Torah, and the Temple were the pillars or focal points of virtually all of first century Judaism. He explains how the understanding of these pillars was modified by Jesus and in the primitive Church.

<sup>50</sup> Frédéric MANNs, *Les racines juives du christianisme*, p. 185.

<sup>51</sup> Here we disagree with Oskar SKARSAUNE who maintains: 'only Passover and Shavuot were taken over and reinterpreted among Christians' (*In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 380). NT authors do not expand on the old and the new meaning of the rites connected with this biblical festival, in the same way as they mention and redefine the rites of Yom Kippour and Pesach.

order to underline that he is the perfect Lamb of God.<sup>52</sup> But we have already indicated (in par. 6.2.1) that the 'day of preparation' on which Jesus was crucified could well have been the day after the immolation of the paschal lambs and the celebration of the Passover Seder.

Even so, the fourth evangelist clearly portrays Jesus as the perfect Paschal lamb. He quotes John the Baptist as saying, at the outset of Jesus' ministry: 'behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world'. Similarly, Peter likens the redeeming death of Jesus to 'the blood of a lamb without spot or blemish' (1 Peter 1:19). This wording corresponds exactly to the prescriptions concerning the selection of sacrificial lambs (Leviticus 22:17-25).

Paul explains that 'Christ is our Passover', i.e. the Paschal lamb. In the same passage he gives a spiritual explanation on removing all that is leavened and consuming only unleavened food. He calls his readers to 'celebrate the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). We find it most likely that 'the feast' refers to Pesach, i.e. the Passover meal. The mention of the Paschal Lamb in the same passage points in this direction. The injunction to 'do away with the old leaven' reflects the day of preparation, just before Pesach, when the houses had to be cleansed of old leaven. Another, less plausible explanation is that 'the feast' denotes Pesach and Matzot together. Certainly, in post-exilic times either of the two names could be used to mean the combination Pesach/Matzot, which constituted eight days of unleavened bread.

Nonetheless, we have the impression that Paul has Pesach in mind. For the community of believers, this 'feast' was closely linked with the Lord's Supper, since it was instituted during the Passover meal. In fact, Paul explicitly deals with the Lord's Supper further on in his epistle. He reinforces the eschatological dimension that Jesus had already given it. He explicitly relates it to the return of the Lord: 'whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Concerning the second festival which is reinterpreted in the apostolic writings, Yom Kippur, the Epistle to the Hebrews points out that the ritual of the double sin-offering and the entry into the Holy of holies with the blood of the victims, were 'types' or 'shadows' of the vicarious death of Christ, our superior High Priest, and his ascension to the heavenly throne of God (10.1 and following).

Besides these explicit reinterpretations, the apostolic writings contain several allusions to the other feasts of Israel. For example, by means of a midrash the author of Hebrews relates Genesis 2:7 to Psalm 95:11 and plays on the dual meaning of the word *shabbat* that appears in both texts. 'Sabbath' not only means the sacred seventh day but also 'rest' in the general sense of the word. Combining these two texts from the Scriptures with the fact that Christ has inaugurated the new era, the author is able to convey the message that 'there remains a Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God'. He calls on his readers to 'make every effort to enter that rest' (4.9 and 11). Undoubtedly his first readers will have thought of the Sabbath day. But the author does not explicitly relate the eschatological 'rest' to Sabbath observance. Strictly speaking, Hebrews 4 is not about the Sabbath but about the future consummation of the Messianic Kingdom. Rather than reinterpreting the weekly holy day it rekindles eschatological hope.

Paul and John describe Jesus as 'the firstborn from the dead' (1 Corinthians 15:20ff, Revelation 1:5). This is probably an allusion to Omer Reshit, the feast of the First Sheaf, which fell on the first day of the week of Matzot. It was precisely on this day that Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>53</sup>

James writes to Jewish believers in the Land that they are 'a kind of first fruits of the whole creation' (1:18). He probably alludes to Shavu'ot. Even as the first fruit presented to the Lord on that festival was the beginning of a greater harvest to follow, so the harvest of the Gospel began to be brought in on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

Finally, the book of Revelation contains several allusions to the feast of Tabernacles, in relation to the coming of the new Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> This is not a completely novel idea, given the fact that Zechariah had already related it to the eschatological salvation of Israel and the nations (Zechariah 14). Jean Daniélou rightly remarks that Revelation 'amalgamates the motifs of Tabernacles with the eschatological Pascal liturgy of the Lamb',<sup>55</sup> which brings us back to the centrality of Passover in all that the NT has to say concerning the feasts of Israel. It should be noted that allusions are not yet reinterpretations. Such veiled references to the *mo'adey adonay* make appeals to their symbolism, their use as illustrations of certain aspects of the person and ministry of Messiah. Allusions do not change the existing meaning of the festivals; they only show correlations.

<sup>52</sup> So e.g. Joachim JEREMIAS in 'pascha,' TDNT V, p. 900.

<sup>53</sup> All the Gospels agree that Jesus presented himself for the first time as the Risen Lord on 'the first day of the week', and that this was the week of Pesach/Matzot. So there can be no doubt that this was the day of Omer Reshit, on which the priests waved the first sheaves of the harvest so as to 'present' them to the Lord.

<sup>54</sup> See for a detailed discussion on this correlation: Jacob KEEGSTR, *Gods profetische feesten*.

<sup>55</sup> Jean DANIELOU, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 346.

Secondly, the new perspective on Passover and Yom Kippur did not prevent believers from celebrating the holidays of Israel. From Acts 17:2, 20:6, 21:16-20 and 27:9 we gather that the apostles kept the Sabbath and annual holidays, at least to a certain extent. Paul's affirmation, during the process at Jerusalem, that he had done nothing against the Torah and lived in accordance with the customs of his people (Acts 25:8), and the fact that the Pharisees found nothing wrong in him (Acts 23:9), clearly implies that he continued to respect the sacred times instituted in the Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 he explicitly calls on his readers to celebrate the feast of Pesach/Matzot, in the context of their Christian faith: 'Christ is our Paschal Lamb.'

But doesn't this stand in contradiction with Paul's statements against keeping the calendar? Let us look at them more closely.

From the polemic in Galatians 4 – 'You are observing special days and seasons and months and years' (v. 10) – we can assume that some believers in the Galatian churches were enticed by a combination of the sacred times of Israel on the one hand, and ascetic practices and the veneration of cosmic powers on the other. Paul categorically condemned this kind of calendar observance, introduced by false teachers, because it was part of a subservience to the 'powers', the cosmic powers and elementary principles that dominate the pagan religions to which the Galatian believers once had belonged. The false teachers seem to have advocated a syncretistic form of calendar spirituality.<sup>56</sup>

The same can be said of the reference to 'festival, New Moon or Sabbath' in Paul's polemic against the false teachers in the Colossian churches (Colossians 2:16). It seems that they advocated a similar combination of Jewish calendar and ascetic practices of pagan origin.<sup>57</sup>

Paul's polemical statements in these two epistles do not imply that Israel's festal calendar, as such, is to be categorically excluded from Christian religious practice.

Apart from these few references, the NT does not provide more explicit references concerning the primitive church and holiday practice. Early Christian traditions about the apostles do not provide much information either. Post-apostolic and early patristic writings deal with the Sabbath and festival observance, but we should be careful not to read that back into NT times.

So, our conclusions have to be on the basis of probability, taking into account the fact that the primitive church largely operated within the context of Judaism. It seems most likely that Jewish believers continued to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest, and to attend, as far as possible, the synagogue services, which at that time were essentially devoted to Scripture reading. Some Gentile believers will have observed the seventh day in a similar vein, but they were free to refrain from it. Paul leaves the matter to individual conscience (Romans 10:4-5). As for the annual festivals, the picture presented by Oskar Skarsaune is most probable:

Very likely Jewish believers continued to take part in the ordinary celebration of all the Jewish festivals, but they do not seem to have changed them or wanted them observed by Gentile believers, except, that is, Passover and Pentecost. At these festivals, and these only, something new and fundamental happened to Jesus: he died and rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and fulfilled his promise of giving the Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

We only take issue with his suggestion that believers reinterpreted Pentecost in the same way as they reinterpreted Passover. But apart from that, his general conclusion seems to be the one most in keeping with the available information.

A third consequence of the paradigm shift was the introduction of new celebrations, hitherto unknown in Judaism: 'Christian Passover' and Sunday worship.

<sup>56</sup> That the 'Galatian heresy' was a combination of Jewish calendar and pagan religiosity is generally admitted. It was related to the *stoicheia*, which is usually translated as 'cosmic powers' and/or 'elementary spirits'. For instance, P.A. VAN STEMPVOORT comments: 'There is much to be said for the opinion of Duncan, that Paul selects those elements of Jewish ritual, which are apparently related to the pagan cult. Days of fasting, New Moon festivals... New Year's Day, Sabbath or Sabbath Year: the old is honoured again in Galatia. And behind the Jewish ritual lurks the old astrology in order to take precedence again!' (*De brief van Paulus aan de Galaten*, p. 114f.).

<sup>57</sup> Commentators generally consider that 'Colossian heresy' seems to have been a combination of Hellenistic and Judaic elements. With respect to 2:16, J.E. UITMAN, comments: 'It seems that the false teachers imposed... food prohibitions and obligatory holidays. A sort of asceticism and a legalistic way of life, rooted in Platonism, in the Greek contradiction: spirit-matter. But for this, they appealed to the Old Testament. Apparently, it was a form of Jewish Hellenism (*De brief van Paulus aan de Colossenzen*, p. 67f.).

<sup>58</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 381. NT authors do not expand on the old and the new meaning of the rites connected with this biblical festival, in the same way as they mention and redefine the rites of Yom Kippour and Pesach.

Not only did the first Christians attach new meanings to Pesach/Matzot, they also celebrated the festival from this new perspective. This is corroborated by the testimony of 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. Here, Paul calls on his Jewish *and* Gentile readers to ‘celebrate the feast’, i.e. of Pesach. They should celebrate it from the perspective of their faith in Christ, the perfect Passover lamb. In so doing, the festival will be, for them, an occasion to cleanse themselves from ‘the old yeast of hypocrisy’ and to renew their lives as a ‘new batch without yeast’. 1 Peter 1:13-19 possibly also alludes to such a Passover celebration.<sup>59</sup> We do not know whether the celebration that Paul had in mind included the Lord’s Supper, but it is highly probably that it was indeed part of it, whether or not it was combined with a complete Seder. For believers to assemble on Pesach and remember that ‘Christ our Passover is slain’ and not to celebrate the meal instituted by the Lord would be unthinkable.

The other novelty was Sunday worship. In several passages, the NT authors refer to a regular assembly on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2); either on Saturday evening (Acts 20:7ff.) or very early on Sunday morning, as we can gather from the information provided by the emperor’s envoy Pliny, who wrote in 112 in his report on the Christians: ‘Their custom had been to gather before dawn on a fixed day...’ Or perhaps they met on Sunday evening, as was the custom of some churches at the beginning of the second century (see *Didache* 14:1-2).

Whatever the precise time, the reason for assembling was to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for it was the unanimous tradition of the primitive church that He was indeed raised on the first day (1 Corinthians 15:3ff.), and that his appearances also took place on a first day (John 20-21). It came to be known as ‘the Lord’s Day’, a term already used in Revelation 1:10.

How they celebrated, and what kind of liturgy they used, is not very clear from the NT. All our information about Sunday worship in the Early Church dates from later writings.

Moreover, Sunday worship does not seem to have replaced the observance of the Sabbath. Apparently, Jewish believers at least kept both, side by side. It should be noted that nowhere in the NT is the first day of the week instituted as a holy day; nowhere is it promulgated as a divinely appointed time.

An interesting question is whether the meals during the weekly services were linked with the last Passover meal of the Lord. NT scholars have debated this question. Some say that the meals during the weekly assembly on Sunday were initially a reminder, or even a sort of resumption of the table fellowship with the risen Lord, just before his ascension. It was Paul who linked the weekly meal with the Passover meal and the remembrance of Jesus’ death. In so doing, he introduced the novel phenomenon of a weekly Passover, alongside a yearly Passover celebration, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.<sup>60</sup> Others hold that the church of Jerusalem celebrated the Lord’s Supper on a weekly or even daily basis right from the start. They argue that ‘breaking of bread’ in Acts 2:42 is a reference to the commemorative rite of bread and wine, instituted by the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Whatever view we take, we can be certain that, at a very early stage, the Lord’s Supper became part and parcel of the Sunday worship. Generally called Eucharist (‘thanksgiving’), it has its roots in the last Passover meal of Jesus. So the Eucharist is indeed a Christian and weekly form of Passover. This can even be said of Sunday worship as such, to the extent to which it is centred on the Eucharist.

Fourthly and finally, we notice that in the apostolic teaching the observance of the biblical holidays is not presented as an essential element of Christian life, to say the least. Apart from Paul’s injunction to celebrate Pesach (i.e. Christian Passover), and the insistence in Hebrews 10:26 that believers should not neglect their gatherings (i.e. their regular, weekly meetings) we do not find exhortations to keep holidays, let alone instructions on how to keep them. When discussions arose, Paul counselled everyone to decide on the basis of individual conscience (Romans 14:5). One should not condemn others for keeping the holidays – or for not keeping them. His injunction in Colossians 2:16, while taking issue with those who impose syncretistic holiday observance on others, does not add that Christians should not keep holidays altogether. Instead of countering one ceremonial law (‘you shall observe’) by another one (‘you shall not observe’), he exhorts his readers to set their minds on Christ, and on an ethical lifestyle worthy of the Lord.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Some take it that Acts 20:6, where we read that Paul and his missionary team stopped in Troas to celebrate Matsot, also refers to a similar Christian celebration of Pesach. (So e.g. *NIDNT*, ‘pascha’, p. 984.). We find this explanation too hypothetical.

<sup>60</sup> This is the interesting theory advanced by Hans LIETZMANN, *Mass and Lord’s Supper*, quoted and discussed in Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 380f.

<sup>61</sup> So e.g. Jean DANÉLOU, *Jewish Christianity*, and Peter WICK, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste*.

<sup>62</sup> Some commentators go as far as concluding that Paul equally condemns those who impose the observance of Israel’s holidays *and* those who categorically forbid Christians from keeping them. To be honest, the latter is not what Paul explicitly says. It is rather a conclusion that could be drawn from the Pauline argumentation in Colossians 2: the Feasts of Israel are shadows of the reality in Christ, and as such they have great value –

This lenient position is due to the shift of emphasis from the ritual to the ethical, a shift that can be noticed throughout the New Testament. For example, viewed from the angle of the atonement wrought by the death of Jesus Christ, the Temple and its sacrificial cult had lost its pertinence. From then on, the community of believers was the 'place' where 'spiritual sacrifices' of praise, thanksgiving, liberality, sharing and well-doing were brought (Philippians 4:8, Hebrews 13:15-16, 1 Peter 2:5). Paul urges his readers to offer their bodies as 'living sacrifices', saying that this is their 'spiritual' or 'reasonable worship' (Romans 12:1).

On the other hand, in the Mosaic dispensation sacrifices are a key element for keeping the appointed times of the Lord. In fact, all sacrifices were bound up with some appointed time or other. When sacrifices are no longer deemed necessary, or when they are spiritualised, the holidays lose much of their importance. Observing the rites of the holidays was no longer essential for the remission of sins; no longer foundational for the relationship with God.

### Paradigm shift #2 – Judaism without a Temple

As long as the temple in Jerusalem existed, and the priesthood functioned, their importance for the Jewish world cannot be overestimated. The religious significance of the Temple was threefold: it was the place where God dwelled on earth, among his people; it was the supreme seat of authoritative Torah teaching; and here the atoning sacrifices were brought.<sup>63</sup> In this respect, it is useful to recall the words of the high priest Simon the Just, who flourished about 200 B.C.E.:

On three things does the world stand: on the Torah, on the Temple, and on deeds of loving-kindness.<sup>64</sup>

From the fact that these words were handed down and included, four centuries later, in the Mishnah, we can conclude that they express a fundamental conviction in Judaism. This also explains why the outcome of the Jewish revolt against Roman occupation was such a tremendous disaster, not only in political but also in religious terms. In 66 C.E., Jewish resentment against the presence of the Romans in the land of Israel led to an uprising that was crushed by the imperial legions, four years later. Eventually, Jerusalem was captured, its population killed or taken captive, the Temple treasury robbed and the sanctuary destroyed.

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple led to the loss of the foundational institutions of the Sanhedrin, the priesthood including the high priest, and the Temple cult. Especially the last was an outright catastrophe. It deeply affected all 'parties' of Judaism, whatever their attitudes on the existing Temple cult of their time; attitudes that ranged from unconditional support to outright critique.

In his history of the Jewish people during the Second Temple Period, Shmuel Safrai rightly summarises:

The loss [of these institutions] created a terrifying vacuum in the system of the commandments that were related to the function of the Temple. It would be an overstatement to say that Judaism was in danger of disappearing completely, but with the destruction of the Temple much fell in pieces. The sages had to go at great length in order to reconstruct Jewish life.<sup>65</sup>

The sages to whom Shmuel Safrai refers are the rabbis who adapted Judaism's religious practice to the new situation without a Temple, so as to ensure its continuity. This work began in the religious centre in Javne, which was created shortly after 70, under the leadership of Yochanan ben Zakkai. He and his collaborators are known as the rabbis or the sages.

From the end of the first century onwards, the rabbis undertook to fill the vacuum created by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Realising that Jewish religious life had to be reformatted so as to function in new and unprecedented circumstances, they continued the work of the scribes, collecting the oral traditions, and commenting on and interpreting them. In so doing, they laid the basis of what was to become Rabbinic or Talmudic Judaism.

We cannot relate the whole of this paradigm shift in detail. We can only point out a few aspects which pertain to the subject of our study. The rabbis of Javneh played a key role in the spiritual reconstitution of Judaism. They created prayer liturgies to be used in the synagogue. They officially confirmed the size of the canon of the Hebrew Bible. They retained the 39 writings that were generally recognised as divinely inspired, while

provided they are interpreted and kept with a view to the reality in Christ. See for this line of argument: Willem OUWENEEL, *Hoogtijden voor Hem*, p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> See: Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 93f.

<sup>64</sup> Mishnah, *Avot* 1:2.

<sup>65</sup> Shmuel SAFRAI, *Volk met een land*, p. 129.

excluding a certain number of writings considered spurious. They finalised the lectionary of *par'shot*, the 'portions' of the Torah, and *haftarot*, the 'additional' passages from the Prophets to be read at Sabbath, as well as the special Scripture readings for the annual holidays.

The major witness to their work is the Mishnah, compiled around 200 C.E., in which older and more recent oral traditions around the Torah are transmitted, commented on, reinterpreted and applied to life's circumstances. By collecting these oral traditions in written form, the idea was to help the Jews to live in accordance with the sum-total of the 613 commandments that Moses was supposed to have received.<sup>66</sup>

Succeeding generations of sages continued to comment on the Mishnah and further developed its teachings. This body of tradition is known as the Gemara. Its redaction was finalised in the fourth and fifth century. At that stage it was collected, in combination with the original Mishnah, into the Talmud, which can be seen as the foundational literature of Judaism. Two versions of the Talmud have come down to us, one written in Palestine (*Talmud yerushalmi*), the other in Babylon (*Talmud bavli*), the latter being the most authoritative of the two.<sup>67</sup>

We should keep in mind that the Mishnah, in the tractate *Avot*, traces the oral tradition back, through a chain of transmission, to Moses. According to the rabbis, Moses not only received the *Torah she bichtav* ('written Torah') but at the same time also the *Torah she be'al pe* ('oral Torah'). Of course, this is a theological idea, expressing the conviction that the oral tradition was a necessary compendium to the Scriptures, and that it constituted the authoritative guide to understanding the written Torah of their own days. It also reflects the rabbis' claim to be the rightful heirs of Moses, the prophets, the Temple cult and the scriptural religion of Israel.

Mishnah and Gemara are mainly Halachic in content – Halacha refers to the rules of conduct in accordance with the divine Torah, applied to every area of life. The overarching purpose of the Talmud was to provide the Jewish people with a body of teaching which was meant to be more than a creed; it was also a guide to life in every phase,' summarises C. Cohen, who captures well its significance: 'The greatest accomplishment which the teaching of the Talmud achieved for the Jewish people was to make them feel that the end of the Temple did not imply an end to their religion.'<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the challenge facing the rabbis, in the centuries following the fall of Jerusalem, can be summarised in one brief sentence: how to conceive of a Jewish religion without a Temple?

Given the centrality of the Temple in Judaism, its loss amounted to a paradigm shift. Of all the streams of first century Judaism, only the rabbis of Javne and their successors proved able to take up the challenge. All other 'parties' disappeared, precisely because they were unable to reorganise themselves under the new circumstances, or unable to even think of a 'Judaism without a Temple'.

All the sources tell us that the 'most irksome question'<sup>69</sup> facing the rabbis, was how the people could obtain forgiveness of sin without the sacrificial service that was brutally put to an end in 70. The sacrificial commandments that were an integral part of the covenant obligation of the Jewish people could no longer be observed. It was out of the question for the sacrificial rites to continue elsewhere, in one or more alternative sanctuaries, since the holy writ explicitly demanded the centralisation of the cult in the one place chosen by God himself. So from now on, Judaism had to cope without any form of temple service – as long as the holy place lay in ruins. This posed a most disturbing question: how could the people now obtain remission for their sins?

The rabbinic solution to this problem is well illustrated by the story of rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai who left Jerusalem, with his disciple, rabbi Yehoshua.

Gazing upon the destroyed Temple, rabbi Yehoshua cried out: 'Woe to us! The place where Israel obtained atonement for sins is in ruins!'

Rabbi Yochanan said to him: 'My son, don't be distressed. We still have another form of atonement that is equally efficacious. And what is it? The deeds of benevolence, as it has been said: "for I take pleasure in love, not in sacrifices".'<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Although frequently taken as a general truth, the number of 613 *mitsvot* is in fact a rabbinic calculation. See the Mishnah tractate *Makkoth*, 24a – '613 commandments were addressed to Moses, 365 prohibitions corresponding to the number of days in the solar year, and 248 positive commands corresponding to the number of limbs in the human body...'

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed description and analysis of the background of the Mishnah and the Talmud, see e.g. the works that we have consulted: C.A. COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud*; Isidore EPSTEIN, *Judaism*; R. EVERS, *De echte Tora*; R.C. MUSAPH-ANDRIESSE, *Wat na de Tora kwam*; and J.L. PALACHE, *Inleiding in de Talmud*.

<sup>68</sup> A. COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 149 and 157.

<sup>69</sup> As Oskar SKARSAUNE puts it in: *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 93f.

<sup>70</sup> *Avot of Rabbi Nathan*, 34.

From then on, the foundation of Judaism would be the study of the Torah, the practice of the commandments, and the doing of acts of mercy. In this way, the rabbis provided an interim religious practice, between the destruction of the Temple and future deliverance.<sup>71</sup>

One of the good works that should be done, in the absence of sacrifices, is prayer. This shift of emphasis from a sacrificial cult to a non-sacrificial practice of the Torah is particularly relevant for the observance of the *mo'adey adonay*, as it enabled these holidays to be kept despite the cessation of the Temple cult. The rabbis of Javne and their successors determined the forms in which they could, or should, be practised under the new circumstances. We shall return to this in a following section.

In passing, we should emphasise that Talmudic Judaism is not just a continuation of first century Judaism in general and Pharisaism in particular, but that it represents a new stage in the religious history of the Jewish people.

This is not to say that the Mishnah does not contain valid historical information about earlier times, but such information is embedded in later discussions aimed at outlining religious conduct after the fall of the Temple. Certainly, there is a direct relation between the Pharisees, on the one hand, and the rabbis of Javne and their successors on the other. Jochanan ben Zakkai was a disciple of Hillel, one of the most predominant Pharisees in the first half of the first century. He and his associates were very close to the views that had been expressed by the Pharisees before 70. While Pharisaism disappeared as an organisation 'its spirit lived on' in the school of Javne and other rabbinic academies; 'the body died, but the spirit was renewed,' as Marcel Pelletier concludes in a study devoted to the history and influence of this party. He goes on to say:

Many rabbinic practices concerning prayer at home, marriage, the admission of adolescents in the practising community, the respect for the Sabbath and the feasts... are directly inspired by Pharisaic precepts, despite the fact that certain rules concerning Sabbath rest and ritual ablutions have been spiritualised.<sup>72</sup>

Notwithstanding this continuity, there was also discontinuity. Claude Pelletier hints at that when he says that the spirit of the Pharisees was 'renewed' and their regulation 'spiritualised'. The school of Javne regrouped more than just Pharisaic survivors of the Revolt, they picked up more than just Pharisaic ideas, and they lived under new circumstances. Moreover, they were faced with a challenge then unknown to the Pharisees. By the same token, rabbinic Judaism, as expressed in the Mishnah compiled around 200 C.E., cannot simply be projected back as if it was essentially the same as the anterior Judaism of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> As widespread as it may be, the practice of interpreting the words of Jesus and Paul in the light of parallels in rabbinic literature, is not without the risk of anachronism: that of reading back ulterior rabbinic statements into the text of the New Testament.

Jacob Neusner, in particular, has taken issue with Christian scholars who present pictures of 'the Jewish Jesus' and 'the Jewish Paul' that are largely based on parallels between the New Testament and ulterior rabbinic writings. While agreeing that rabbinic literature illuminates the world in which earliest Christianity took shape, he warns against uncritically accepting all that the rabbis say about first century religious practice at face value.<sup>74</sup> For one, it is difficult to establish the time of origin of sayings attributed to named rabbis, and secondly, the redaction of the Mishnah and Talmud took place from 200 to 600 years after the time of Jesus, under quite different circumstances.<sup>75</sup> The polemical tone of Jacob Neusner's writings makes us wonder whether he is perhaps not overstating his point – for instance, when he writes:

If people want to know precisely who was the Jesus of history and exactly what he said, as distinct from what the Gospels (all four) tell about Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, then I do not think the rabbinic literature will prove ubiquitously relevant to their work (though here and there, on an episodic and anecdotal basis, they may find some interesting bits of information).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Thus is the summary of the paradigm shift offered by Jacob NEUSNER, *De Joodse wieg...*, p. 110.

<sup>72</sup> Marcel PELLETIER, *Les Phariseens: histoire d'un parti méconnu*, p. 365.

<sup>73</sup> So e.g. Roger LE DÉAUT, *The Spirituality of Judaism*, p. 14. Nowadays, scholars are more and more agreed that there are major differences between the sectarian Pharisees on the one hand, and rabbinic Judaism as a far more consensual movement on the other. This new perspective is to a considerable extent due to the publications of Jacob NEUSNER, of which we only mention *De Joodse wieg van het Christendom*. On p. 101ff. he summarizes the main reasons that underlie this perspective.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob NEUSNER, *Rabbinic literature & the New Testament*, p. ix.

<sup>75</sup> See for these two arguments: Jacob NEUSNER, *Rabbinic literature & the New Testament*, p. 190.

<sup>76</sup> Jacob NEUSNER, *Rabbinic literature & the New Testament*, p. 182.

But even when he might stress his point a bit too far, the caution he calls for should be heeded. However, it should be added that he primarily argues against reconstructions of the historical Jesus. This does not imply that the Mishnaic information concerning the Jewish religious practice before the destruction of the Temple is largely unreliable, from a historical point of view. But this information should always be critically assessed.

This point will be taken up again, when we come to the debate in the current Messianic movement about the possible use of rabbinic traditions when celebrating the holidays, as believers in Jesus, in the context of the New Covenant.

### Parting of holidays

In the foregoing, we have only mentioned some initial consequences of the two paradigm shifts for the practice of holidays. More will be said about this in the following sections. Before we move on to that, however, a few general remarks are in place.

To begin with, the Sages of Judaism had made provision for the observance of biblical holidays in a situation without a Temple (and therefore without sacrifices), and without a homeland (which made it impossible to make pilgrimages during the harvest festivals). Christians were subject to the same change of situation, but their church leaders did not make provision for such circumstances.

Moreover, the Sages of Judaism were persuaded that the Jewish people could only fully observe the sacred times in the biblical land where there was a sanctuary and a priesthood. So they also made provision for when the Jews would return to their land and celebrate the festivals there. The Christian Church, on the contrary, did not foresee a time when the biblical holidays would be celebrated again.

Secondly, the two paradigm shifts noted above did not affect the Jewish people in the same manner. Whereas the coming of Jesus only amounted to a paradigm shift for those Jews who acknowledged him as the promised Messiah, the Fall of Jerusalem was a paradigm shift for the whole Jewish people, including those who believed in Jesus. Until 70, Jewish believers in Jesus were part of the larger Jewish commonwealth, of which the Temple was one of the pillars. So they had to reckon with it, in one way or another, if only because they were Jews. While some, like Stephen, viewed the Temple cult in a critical manner, others took part in its services, like Peter and John, or performed the duties of a religious vow in its precincts, like Paul.<sup>77</sup> Some taught that the Christian community was the new Temple, not made with hands.<sup>78</sup> Others depicted the Temple cult as a shadow of the heavenly liturgy.<sup>79</sup> But all the while there was, at the heart of Judaism, a physical temple where animal sacrifices and other offerings of a material nature were brought.

All that changed in 70. That is why the fall of Jerusalem also affected the early church. Jacob Neusner well summarises its impact, when he writes:

The whole history of both Christianity and Judaism runs through the abyss of this catastrophe. Both religious traditions had to discover what it means to serve God in a way that was unprecedented in the history of Israel, a history of which both religious traditions pretended to be the natural outcome and fulfilment... This terrible event marked the end of a cult that was one thousand years old, and the beginning of what we now know to be two thousand years of continuation of the life of ancient Israel, in old and new ways, in Judaism and Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

Neusner only mentions the two groups within the multivariate Judaism of the Second Temple period which managed to surmount the cataclysmic events of 70: the Christian community and nascent rabbinic Judaism.

This leads to a third observation, namely that these two streams could continue their course despite the loss of the Temple and the priesthood, precisely because they were already to some extent distanced from the predominance of the Temple and its institutions, before 70. At that time, 'for both groups, the Temple was not an essential, irreplaceable institution'.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Acts 7; Acts 3:1 (see also 2:42); Acts 21.

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1 Peter 2:1-5.

<sup>79</sup> Hebrews 8.

<sup>80</sup> Jacob NEUSNER, *De Joodse wieg van het Christendom*, p. 101.

<sup>81</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 155.

Both had been prepared for the new situation: Christians, because they had come to understand that the death of Jesus had made all atoning sacrifices in the Temple obsolete, and because they considered the old priesthood to be replaced by the priesthood of all believers; the group around the school of Javne, because their Pharisaic predecessors had already introduced a religious practice, concentrated on the Torah and decentralised in synagogues and local fellowship groups.

But their response was different. The believers in Jesus developed a different Judaism to the rabbis of Javne. The first focussed on Jesus Christ and the presence of his Spirit in the life of the believers, the second on the study of the Torah and Torah observance. The first had a universal outlook, despite its Jewish roots, the second a national orientation, despite the number of Gentiles who made its numbers swell. The first became the Christian Church, the second evolved into rabbinic or Talmudic Judaism. One could say in summary, that the first followed the Word made flesh, whereas the second evolved around the practice of the written Word.

Fourthly, the destruction of the Temple did not yet mean the definite parting of the ways between the Messianic Judaism of the believers in Jesus, and rabbinic Judaism. Introduced by James Parkes,<sup>82</sup> the expression 'parting of the ways' has become a technical term in the study of early Christian Jewish relations. It used to be thought that it took place in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, but recent research shows that it actually took effect during and after the second Jewish Revolt in 135.<sup>83</sup>

Certainly, on a theological level, there were already several 'partings of the ways', as James Dunn rightly observes.<sup>84</sup> Jesus believers developed alternative views on election, the unity of God, the Covenant, the Torah and the Temple. From their side, the rabbis contested the claims of the Christians, took measures to exclude Jewish believers from the synagogue (through the notorious passage concerning the *minim* in the daily prayer). But on a practical level, they remained in close contact with the wider Jewish world. Despite the influx of a large number of Gentiles, Christianity was still perceived as a 'Jewish sect'. As far as we can tell from the sources, the parting of the ways really took effect after the second Jewish Revolt in 132-135. Because Jewish Christians were unable to accept the Messianic claim of its leader, Simon Bar Kochba, a claim supported by the influential rabbi Akiva, they did not take part in the uprising. The wider Jewish community interpreted their abstention as a betrayal of their people. From then on, there was no place for Judeo-Christians in the world of the synagogue which was becoming more and more aligned to the Judaism of the rabbis. Even so, contacts between the churches and the Jewish communities continued, on a local level, well into the fourth century.

A final remark is needed to bring the focus back to the subject of our study. Our interest is not so much in the parting of the ways in general, but in a specific aspect of it, namely the 'parting of the holidays'. In fact, two different traditions of practising sacred times emerged after the paradigm shifts that took place in the first century C.E.. We need to outline the emergence of these two traditions and note their main characteristics, because they constitute the sources of holiday practice in the current Messianic movement. In order to understand it, historical feedback is therefore needed.

As to the parting of the ways in general, several researchers have brought it to light and described it.<sup>85</sup> In their work, some attention is paid to what we could call the parting of the holidays, but this aspect has not yet been dealt with in a parallel, comparative way.

Certainly, historians of liturgy have written on the development of the Christian Church year. Lately, Jewish scholars have begun to investigate the development of Judaism's calendar and holiday practice.<sup>86</sup> But rarely

<sup>82</sup> James PARKES, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, published in 1934.

<sup>83</sup> Recently, the paradigm of a parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, as well as the expression itself, have been called into question by such scholars as Daniel BOYARIN (*Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*), A.H. BECKER and A.Y. REED (who edited *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*). These and other authors point out that during the formative period of both Christianity and Judaism there have always been groups and individuals who embodied the non-parting of the ways between the two faith communities. Only after the Constantinian change did relations become very problematic even to the point of dying out. Even so, attempts to cut the links between the Church and the Synagogue were not entirely successful, at least in the fourth century, as we can deduce for example from John Chrysostom's homilies against Christians taking part in Judaic practices. See for a brief discussion: Oskar SKARSAUNE and Reidar HVALVIK, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, p. xii and p. 776f. They rightly contend that 'hardly anyone doubts – not even the most convinced spokespersons of the new paradigm of 'The Ways that Never Parted' – that religious leadership on both sides had an easier task in building and patrolling the fences between the two faith communities in the Constantinian epoch.'

<sup>84</sup> James D.G. DUNN, *The Partings of the Ways*. The whole book is devoted to these theological partings (plural!) of the ways. At the end he deals with the social and cultural parting of the ways between two faith communities, arguing convincingly that it took place at a later stage in history, in the wake of the failed Jewish Revolt in 135 CE.

<sup>85</sup> We only mention: David FLUSSER, *Van oorsprong tot schisma*, part IV; Stanley E. PORTER and Brook W. PEARSON (ed.), *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*; Michael L. BROWN, *Our hands are stained with blood*; James D.G. DUNN, *The Partings of the Ways*.

<sup>86</sup> Some have published studies of this kind, notably Rudolf BOON. His monograph *De Joodse wortels van de christelijke eredienst* about the Jewish character of early Christian liturgy still stands as a groundbreaking study. It inspired Dutch scholars to further bring to light the relation between early Christian liturgy and the religious practice of the synagogue, e.g. David MONSHOUWER, *Vieren vol verwachting*. However, their work is not free from

are the two developments placed in conjunction in a comprehensive way, so as to detect common threads and mutual influences and to mark differences.<sup>87</sup> We would suggest that this is an area in need of further academic research.

In this chapter we present the Christian and Judaic reception (perception??) of biblical holidays one after the other, precisely to allow for a comparison. Rather than a full-scale and in-depth presentation of this double reception, our chapter is a summary of the larger picture, presenting its main characteristics. Our study demands it: not only because holiday practice in the current Messianic movement draws from these two different traditions; but also because popular publications on biblical holidays often appeal to history in order to substantiate their plea for returning to the Sabbath, adopting the Jewish calendar and keeping Judaic manners of observance. Usually this is called a 'return to Jewish roots'. In the following chapters this issue will arise on several occasions. Some historical feedback is necessary to appreciate and weigh the arguments that are advanced

## Reception of Biblical Holidays in Christianity

How was the heritage of the feasts of Israel received in the Christian churches? Historians of liturgy have devoted considerable attention to this question; although they often concentrated on the liturgical development in mainstream 'orthodox' or 'catholic' Christianity.<sup>88</sup> An exception is the work of Jean Daniélou that still stands out as a major reference work concerning the theology and liturgy of early Jewish Christianity.<sup>89</sup> This strand of the Church has only recently become a subject of intensive academic research.<sup>90</sup> Little by little, more information is being gathered about the Judeo-Christian reception of the feasts of Israel.

An important publication is *In the Shadow of the Temple* by Oskar Skarsaune, which describes the Jewish influences on early Christianity. Bringing together the recent research on the various aspects of Judeo- as well as 'catholic' Christianity, his work is a comprehensive description of the development of the early Church, also in the area of worship and festival, although the latter is not his primary focus. It provides valuable information and is an advance on the previous work by Jean Daniélou.<sup>91</sup> We will use it as a major source when outlining the Christian reception of biblical holidays.

### Judeo-Christian continuity

After the apostolic period, two lines can be detected: one gradually receding to the point of disappearing, the other gradually taking precedence to the point of becoming general practice.

The first line is the continued practice of Jewish holidays by Judeo-Christianity – a collective term for orthodox and heterodox groups and individuals up to the fourth century.<sup>92</sup>

After the sack of Jerusalem, the believers who had fled east of the Jordan returned. It seems that for a time the churches in Jerusalem and Judea did very well. They were often referred to as the Nazarenes.<sup>93</sup>

The number of Jewish believers grew far less quickly than the number of Gentiles who came to faith. From the second century onwards, they became a dwindling minority, albeit an influential minority, especially in the area of teaching and theology.

anachronism, i.e. reading back rabbinic literature in the first century and in the primitive Judeo-Christian communities. See our remarks above on the continuity and discontinuity between first century Judaism and later rabbinic Judaism.

<sup>87</sup> Examples of such a parallel and comparative study are Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*, a rather philosophical comparison of the Christian and Judaic notion of sacred time and their respective festal calendars; and Paul F. BRADSHAW and Lawrence A. HOFFMAN, *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship*, which concentrates on liturgical forms and expressions.

<sup>88</sup> Two recent publications on this subject still adopt this approach: Thomas J. TALLEY, 'Worship and Devotional Life,' in *Christian Worship*, 2005 (His important study *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, already appeared in 1991), and Peter WICK, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste: Entstehung und Entwicklung im Rahmen der frühjüdischen Tempel-, Synagogen- und Hausfrömmigkeit*, 2003.

<sup>89</sup> His book is still widely referred to. Jean DANIELOU, *Jewish Christianity*. Its disadvantage is the general approach; the author does not clearly distinguish between orthodox groups called 'Nazarenes' and other sectarian groups defending some form of heterodoxy.

<sup>90</sup> Of the many academic publications of recent times we only mention, by way of example: Ray A. PRITZ, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity from the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*.

<sup>91</sup> In *Bible et liturgie*, Jean DANIELOU deals more in detail with the Jewish background of emerging Christian liturgy. But like his book *Jewish Christianity*, it has the disadvantage of not sufficiently distinguishing the development in Judeo-Christianity.

<sup>92</sup> See for the history of early Judeo-Christianity: Oskar SKARSAUNE and Reidar HVALVIK, *History of Jewish Believers in Jesus*, in which most recent scholarship on this subject has been brought together. While this vast work concentrates on the general history and especially on the literary sources concerning Jewish believers, it does not single out their practice of biblical sacred times and/or Christian holidays. As for this aspect of Judeo-Christianity, Jean DANIELOU remains one of the few authors to have paid particular attention to it (see his *Theology of Jewish Christianity*), even though it should be added that he does not sufficiently distinguish between orthodox and heterodox individuals and groups.

<sup>93</sup> A name that already comes up in Acts 24:5, where it could either refer to all the churches, or only to the Jewish churches in Jerusalem and Judea. After the time of the NT, it soon disappeared, but it appears again in the literature of the fourth century

The picture of the Jewish believers in primitive Christianity is not easy to reconstruct. Focussing our attention on holiday practice, the following contours can be drawn.

Jewish believers after 70 C.E. were as dispersed as the rest of their compatriots, even more so after 135. It seems that the vast majority of them joined Gentile churches. Gradually they adopted not only the teaching but also the worship practices of their new environment, of which the celebration of Israel's feasts was not an integral part. This was especially the case in the Diaspora, where the churches absorbed large numbers of Jews, who were not brought into the fold of the emerging rabbinic Judaism. Eventually this led to complete assimilation and loss of ethnic identity.

Others formed separate, predominantly Jewish, communities. This was the case in regions with a sizeable Jewish population such as Judea, Galilee, Trans-Jordan and Syria. They combined their faith in Jesus with a Judaic lifestyle based on the Torah. Generally speaking, these communities can be divided in three strands: the heterodox Ebionites, the sectarian groups around Jewish Gnostic heretics, and the orthodox Nazarenes.<sup>94</sup>

The Ebionites practised circumcision, observed Sabbath and the Festivals, kept the food laws and went as far as forbidding all consumption of meat. They even scrapped certain passages in the Hebrew bible which prescribe animal sacrifices. From Gentiles who came to faith in Jesus they demanded the same Judaic lifestyle. For this reason they considered Paul 'an apostate of the Law', because of his ideas concerning the freedom of the Gentiles to follow the precepts of Moses. We call them heterodox because of their Christology, or rather Messialogy. According to them, Jesus was fully human but not divine, born in a natural way. He has become Messiah on the merit of his perfect obedience to the will of God.<sup>95</sup>

Gnostic sects like the Cerinthians and the Elkesaites mingled Jewish ideas, such as the coming of the Millennium, with Gnostic theories such as docetism (the divine 'Christ' descended on Jesus after his baptism and left him just before the crucifixion), and the distinction between the Supreme God and the creator of the material world.<sup>96</sup> More often than not, these groups laid great emphasis on strict dietary precepts, days of fasting and the liturgical calendar, as necessary means of reaching a more advanced level of spirituality.

Orthodox Christian leaders were often very suspicious of so-called Jewish practices, precisely because they were an important part of the lifestyle of heterodox and heretical Jewish believers. But not all Jewish believers came in this category. Some were undoubtedly orthodox. Known in their time as the 'Nazarenes', they did not make Judaic practices obligatory for Gentile believers.<sup>97</sup>

Unfortunately, no written records of their own making are extant. We only have some citations of their works in the writings of others.<sup>98</sup> Ray Pritz has reconstructed their history and theology in an interesting monograph.<sup>99</sup> He draws the following picture: The Nazarenes had an orthodox Christology, accepted the writings of Paul, and approved of his mission to the Gentiles. Although their way of life was decidedly Judaic, this did not cause them to refrain from fellowship with Gentile churches. As far as possible, they remained in contact with the synagogues and the rabbis, in order to communicate the Gospel to them. But they were increasingly marginalised in their Jewish milieu, as Pritz explains:

Just as they rejected the church's setting aside of the Law of Moses, so also they refused the rabbi's expansive interpretations of it. (...) It is not far wrong to say that the demise of the Nazarenes resulted from their own restrictive approach to the Law. Such a spurning of rabbinic authority could not be tolerated by that authority. There is another factor in this separation from Judaism, one of perhaps greater importance than the rejection of *Halakhah*. It is (...) their acceptance and proclamation of the deity of Jesus. They went beyond the allowable limits of an ever-stricter monotheism.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> In this and the following paragraphs we summarize the picture drawn by Ray PRITZ in *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, while adding references to Patristic writings that mention a particular group of Jewish Christians.

<sup>95</sup> IRENEUS, *Against heresies*, 1.26.2, 3.2.7, 3.15.1, 3.21.1, 4.33.4 and 5.1.3; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum*, 5.61 and 65; EUSEBIUS, *History of the Church*, 3.27 and 6.17.

<sup>96</sup> IRENEUS, *Against heresies*, 1.26.2; EUSEBIUS, *History of the Church*, 3.28.2; HIPPOLYTUS, *Refutation of all heresies*, 19.8-12 and 19.10-25; EPIPHANIUS, *Heresies*, 30.17.7, 19.1.8-9, 19.3.5-7 and 19.4.3.

<sup>97</sup> Early church fathers acknowledge that these believers did not try and 'persuade Gentiles to follow the precepts of Moses' (JUSTIN, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 47:1-4). Jerome is also aware of the existence of orthodox Jewish Christians. Other post-Nicene Church Fathers such as Eusebius and Epiphaneus, however, ranged all Jewish believers outside the mainline Gentile churches in the category of Judaisers, heretics and sectarians. According to Ray Pritz, these Fathers referred to them collectively as 'Ebionites' or 'Nazarenes', without distinguishing between their various points of view (*Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, p. 108ff.).

<sup>98</sup> The most important author to quote their works is JEROME: *The lives of illustrious men*, 3; *Commentary on Matthew*, 13:53-54; *Commentary on Galatians*, 3:13-14 and 5:3; *Commentary on Isaiah*, 8:4, 19:9, 29:20-21, 31:6-9 and 66:20.

<sup>99</sup> Ray PRITZ, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*.

<sup>100</sup> Ray PRITZ, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, p. 110.

Yet the Nazarenes continued to observe certain aspects of the Mosaic Law: most notably circumcision and the Sabbath, and probably also some or all of the annual holidays. It was precisely for their Judaic lifestyle that they were gradually excluded from Catholic Christianity, despite their orthodox theology. By the fifth century they had disappeared from recorded history.

Assuming that Jewish believers continued to keep all or some of the feasts of Israel, how did they celebrate them? Sadly, the available sources do not tell us much about their manner of observance.

Did they create holiday services with prayers and benedictions and psalms taken over from the original Temple services, as in the synagogue? Did they reinterpret certain customs and add others, as in rabbinic Judaism? While all of this is theoretically possible, we cannot say yes or no, due to the lack of extant sources of information. We can guess, but we do not know for sure.

### Gentile Christian transformation

The second line after the apostolic period is the development of the Church Year. From the second century onwards, this became general practice, overshadowing the dying line of Judeo-Christian continuity. This was the line of the Gentile Christian communities and a large number of Jewish believers. Together they constituted the mainstream, known as 'orthodox' or 'catholic' Christianity.

It began with a concentration on the two novel elements introduced in NT times, weekly Sunday worship and Christian Passover at the time of Pesach. The Jewish festivals were neither included nor replaced. At first they were not forbidden either. From the middle of the second century onwards, church leaders became increasingly opposed to a continued observance of the Jewish calendar. Patristic writings are replete with such polemics. It was part of the process of increasing demarcation between the two faith communities.

At the same time, the Fathers strongly spoke out against participating in pagan religious festivals, because of the idol worship and the licentious behaviour which usually accompanied them. Two quotes suffice to express the feelings of church leaders.

It is clear that those who wish to offer an enlightened worship to the Divine Being will act according to sound reason and not take part in the public feasts... We may not join in their feasts, which are celebrated in honour of demons.<sup>101</sup>

However, no alternative religious calendar was developed for the time being. The Christian Church Year, as we have come to know it, only developed from the fourth century onwards, from the time in which Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Critics of the Christian Church Year often maintain that the Sunday, as a day of worship and rest, is a pagan intrusion. In their view, it is an unbiblical replacement of the Sabbath. Some argue that the imperial church of Constantine imposed it, and that this move was born out of anti-Semitic sentiments. This flies in the face of overwhelming patristic evidence that Sunday worship was already universal practice long before Constantine. Aware of this evidence, other critics concur with Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi who argues that Sunday worship was introduced by the Church of Rome. In the wake of the anti-Jewish legislation of emperor Hadrian, the Roman bishops attempted to wean believers away from the veneration of the Sabbath, so as to dissociate the Christians from the Jews.<sup>102</sup> But such theories do not stand up to scrutiny. Recent scholarship is agreed that the idea of regularly meeting on 'the first day of the week' stems from the primitive Church in the time of the NT.<sup>103</sup> We find their arguments convincing, because the testimony of the post-apostolic and early fathers, attesting to the very early origin of Sunday worship, is indeed unequivocal.<sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, the content of the Sunday service (or rather services, since churches met on Sunday morning and evening) was very much akin to the synagogue service. Scripture readings and explanations, collective prayers and the recitation of the Decalogue, and confessional texts like the *Shema* were highly reminiscent of Jewish worship. However, the Eucharist was a new element; though the singing of psalms and other songs

<sup>101</sup> ORIGEN and *The Apostolic Constitutions*, quoted in *DECB*, p. 342-343, where several other Fathers are quoted in relation to this subject.

<sup>102</sup> Samuele BACCHIOCCHI, *From Sabbath to Sunday*. His thesis is widely adopted by authors representing Messianic Judaism. It is explicitly quoted by e.g. Ariel BERKOVITZ, *Celebrating the Sabbath*, p. 39; and Dan JUSTER, *Jewish Roots*, p. 197-199.

<sup>103</sup> See for a refutation of the theses of the sabbatarian critics of Sunday worship, the contributions of Richard J. BAUCKHAM in Donald A. CARSON (ed.), *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, chapter 8 and 9.

<sup>104</sup> See the quotes from the *Didache*, IGNATIUS, JUSTIN MARTYR, CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, TERTULLIAN, ORIGEN and later church fathers in *DECB*, p. 405-407.

perhaps also constituted a departure from Jewish custom.<sup>105</sup> Despite the polemic against Jewish practices in the early church, the service bore a largely Jewish character. Peter Wick, who has noted this apparent contradiction, offers an explanation that we find quite logical: 'The more one copies the other, the more important it becomes to mark one's identity over and against the other.'<sup>106</sup>

From the middle of the second century onwards we hear church leaders forbidding believers to keep the Sabbath. Nevertheless, the Sabbath did not immediately disappear out of sight. Oskar Skarsaune says:

Christians (and it seems Christians universally) celebrated the first day of the week as the day of the resurrection... With regard to the Sabbath, we have to distinguish between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. The early Christians (both Jewish and Gentile) regarded the Sabbath as special for Israel. It was part of the national heritage of the Jewish people. Observance of Sabbath was rarely taken over by Gentile believers. Remember also that they did not, in the beginning, transfer the Sabbath commandment to Sunday. That happened after Constantine, definitely.<sup>107</sup>

David Monshouwer is presumably right in saying that the shift from Sabbath to Sunday worship was 'a rather spontaneous process, of which the edict of Constantine that declared the Sunday to be the official day of rest in the Roman Empire (321) only was just the formal closure'.<sup>108</sup>

But this shift did not take place overnight. There are several indications that Jewish and also Gentile Christians continued, for a long time to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, probably in conjunction with worshipping on Sunday. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, generally dated towards the end of the 4th century, stated that the Sabbath should be observed, because it is 'rest in order to meditate on the Law' (7.413), and elsewhere: 'Keep the Sabbath and the Lord's Day festival, the first is a memorial of the creation, the latter, of the resurrection' (7.469).<sup>109</sup>

Around 365 CE, the [Council of Laodicea](#) attempted to put an end to the observance of Sabbath, apparently because it still continued at that time. It ruled: 'The Gospels are to be read on tsb [i.e. the Saturday], with the other Scriptures' (canon 16), and: 'Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ' (canon 29).<sup>110</sup>

Well into the fifth century several church councils deemed it necessary to take measures against Christians who celebrated Sabbath. Apparently such practice still existed by then, as we can gather, for example, from the *Ecclesiastical History* written by Socrates Scholasticus in the fifth century:

For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this. The Egyptians in the neighborhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general: for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening making their offerings they partake of the mysteries. At Alexandria again, on the Wednesday.<sup>111</sup>

As to the annual cycle of holidays, Pesach changed into 'Christian Passover', the commemoration of the death of Christ as well as his resurrection. In most languages its name is a rather literal rendering of the Hebrew *Pesach* or its Greek alliteration *pascha*: e.g. *Pasen*, *Pâques*, *Pascua*. Some Germanic languages have substituted names which recall the heathen goddess of spring: e.g. *Ostern*, *Easter*. Some Messianic authors, and Gentile critics of the Christian liturgical calendar, take this as evidence that Easter is of pagan origin, introduced to replace the biblical Passover,<sup>112</sup> but this is an exaggerated claim. There certainly was a difference between Christian and Jewish Passover, and the two were often placed in opposition to each other, so much so that, from the third century onwards, Christian theologians indeed present Easter as the fulfilment and replacement of Jewish Passover. It is also true that, at a later stage, customs of pagan origin were introduced

<sup>105</sup> This correspondence had already been brought to light by Jean DANÉLOU, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 331ff., and is described and analysed in more detail by Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 381ff.

<sup>106</sup> Peter WICK, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienst*, p. 379.

<sup>107</sup> David NEFF, 'The Church's Hidden Jewishness,' interview with Oskar Skarsaune in *Christianity Today*, Vol. 47, Nr. 10, October 2003, p. 106.

<sup>108</sup> Dirk MONSHOUWER, 'Sabbat en Zondag,' in: Paul OSKAMP & Niek SCHUMAN, *De weg van de liturgie*, p. 103.

<sup>109</sup> Translation from *DECB*, under the entry 'Sabbath', p. 572.

<sup>110</sup> Translation from *NPNF*, Series II, Volume XIV 'The Seven Ecumenical Councils'.

<sup>111</sup> Book 5, chapter 22. Translation from *NPNF*, Series II, Volume II, 'Socrates'.

<sup>112</sup> See e.g. Steven L. WARE, 'When is Easter this Year?' in *Christian History*, 20 April 2000, p. 5.

in connection with the Easter celebrations (bonfires, Easter eggs, processions and so on). But that does not eradicate the fact that Easter is rooted in Pesach, both historically and theologically.<sup>113</sup> All the Gospels report that Jesus was crucified on the Jewish Passover. Early generations of Church leaders were well aware of this link. In the oldest Christian Passover sermon still surviving, Melito, the Bishop of Sardes, affirms:

First of all, the Scripture about the Hebrew Exodus has been read and the words of the mystery have been explained as to how the sheep was sacrificed and the people were saved. Therefore, understand this, O beloved: The mystery of the Passover is new and old, eternal and temporal, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal in this fashion.

Melito goes on to explain the significance of Christian Passover in the light of the Exodus story. Consequently, he emphasises the commemoration of the suffering of Jesus:

Now that you have heard the explanation of the type and of that which corresponds to it, hear also what goes into making up the mystery. What is the Passover? Indeed its name is derived from that event – ‘to celebrate the Passover’ (*to paschein*) is derived from ‘to suffer’ (*tou pathein*). Therefore, learn who the sufferer is, and who he is who suffers along with the sufferer. Why indeed was the Lord present upon the earth? In order that having clothed himself with the one who suffers, he might lift him up to the heights of heaven.<sup>114</sup>

However, as time went on, there was a shift of meaning. Passover became the day of the resurrection, while the passion and crucifixion were related to the Holy Week preceding Easter.

Closely linked to this change of content was the change of date. This did not happen overnight. Quite a few churches, notably those in Asia, were in favour of commemorating Jesus’ death on the Jewish date of 14 Nisan, which came on different days each year. They were called Quartodecimans (‘fourteeners’). Others argued that Passover is the feast of the resurrection and should therefore always be celebrated on a Sunday, i.e. the Sunday following 14 Nisan. After a long controversy, the Church finally adopted the Sunday version of Passover. Moreover, in 325 the council of Nicea adopted a new system of calculating its date, independent of the Jewish computation of 14 Nisan.

Finally the duration also changed. Initially the death and resurrection of Christ were commemorated in a Jewish Pesach fashion, in the time span of one evening and one morning. In the fourth century this was extended to the Paschal Triduum of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

Passover, or Easter in English, is the oldest annual feast of the Church. It has always remained the centre of the Church Year, in all denominations. The whole Christian festal calendar is arranged around this centre.<sup>115</sup> Evangelical author Robert Webber certainly captures well its prime importance when he says:

It is Christ who determines the Christian Year... By *Christ* I mean the mystery of Christ born, living, dying, and being raised again for the salvation and healing of both creature and creation. Therefore, what gives rise to the Christian Year is the *paschal mystery* (the oldest term used for Easter).<sup>116</sup>

In the second century, Shavu’ot was adopted and reinterpreted as the Christian Pentecost. Initially ‘Pentecost’ stood for the fifty days following Passover, a ‘time of exultation’ to celebrate the resurrection, the appearances of the risen Lord, the ascension and the giving of the Spirit.<sup>117</sup>

For a long time, Passover and Pentecost were the only annual festivals. One could even say, the only festival, because Pentecost was the prolongation and conclusion of Passover. Oskar Skarsaune suggests that the reason for this ‘reduction’ was that Jesus had done something decisive on those occasions, while no major events in the life of Jesus took place on the other festivals.<sup>118</sup> We do not find this argument convincing, because the Gospel of John certainly relates the ministry of Jesus to more than one festival.

<sup>113</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE argues rather convincingly that the Eucharist was originally a weekly Passover celebration, and that the Eucharistic service and prayers that have been preserved in the *Didache* and the writings of Justin and Tertullian can be traced to the Jewish roots of Passover (*In the Shadow of the Temple*, chapter 20).

<sup>114</sup> MELITO of Sardes, *Peri Pascha*, § 1-2 and § 46-47. Translation of Kerux, *the Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary*, published by Kerux Inc. in collaboration with Northwest Theological Seminary, Lynnwood, Washington, through the website [www.kerux.com/documents](http://www.kerux.com/documents). See for the importance of the Exodus narrative for Melito’s interpretation of Po: Thomas J. TALLEY, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, p. 12-18.

<sup>115</sup> This is the general opinion of authors on the history of Christian liturgy. See e.g. R.F. BUXTON, ‘Calendar’, in J.G. DAVIES (ed), *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, p. 133ff.; Thomas J. TALLEY, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, p. 1ff.; and Dirk MONSHOUWER, ‘Pasen en de andere feesten,’ in: Paul OSKAMP & Niek SCHUMAN, *De weg van de liturgie*, p. 108ff.

<sup>116</sup> Robert E. WEBBER, *Ancient-Future time*, p. 24.

<sup>117</sup> See TERTULLIAN, *On Baptism*, 19, and the quotes collected in *DECB*, p. 82f.

<sup>118</sup> Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, p. 381.

As far as we are able to verify, David Monshouwer offers a better explanation, namely that the other holidays, viewed from a Christological perspective, were swallowed up in Passover: Yom Kippur, because it signifies the atoning death of the Messiah, and Sukkot, because it marks his entry in Jerusalem and therefore the prelude to his passion and crucifixion.<sup>119</sup> Other authors have equally supposed that the entry in Jerusalem really took place during Sukkot, and that in the fourth century it was integrated in the Easter cycle, in the form of Palm Sunday. Jean Daniélou concludes that Tabernacles has not so much disappeared from the Christian calendar as become transformed and subsumed in the feast of Easter.<sup>120</sup>

The fact remains that the three autumn festivals, as such, were not taken over by the Church. Chanukkah and Purim were left out as well. So for a long time one could not speak of a Church year at all, as there really was only one annual period of celebration: from Passover to Pentecost.

The development of a Church Year began in the fourth century. At first, Passover day became the Paschal Triduum (see above), which was later extended to a Holy Week, which began with Palm Sunday, and a preceding period of Lent consisting of forty days of (light or partial) fasting.

Besides this, new holidays were introduced to commemorate various events in the life and ministry of Jesus which had no direct link to a biblical festival. Their dates were fixed independently of the Jewish calendar.

The most important new festivals were Ascension, Epiphany (the feast of Jesus' baptism) and Christmas (the feast of the birth of Jesus). The latter two came in the winter season, thus filling the vacuum of the long period without holidays. They developed into the Christmas cycle, beginning with the four Sundays of Advent and ending with Epiphany.

Historians of liturgy have noted that aspects of Jewish autumn festivals do reappear in the Church Year. Christmas and Chanukkah both come on the 25<sup>th</sup> of a month; both last for eight days (Christmas ending with its octave, with the commemoration of Jesus' circumcision on the eighth day, according to Jewish custom); both are marked by the theme of light in the darkness. However, Christmas is certainly not a Christianised form of Chanukkah

Some authors see a link between Christmas/Epiphany on the one hand and Sukkot on the other, i.e. the theme of God who comes to dwell among his people.<sup>121</sup>

Interesting as these, and other correspondences, may be it is difficult to ascertain whether they are in fact vestiges of Jewish Festivals which have survived in a Christian context. It is possible but not absolutely certain. Together, the annual Christological feasts are called the *temporale*. They make up the Church Year in the strict sense of the word. Besides these festivals the medieval Church introduced an increasing number of feasts in honour of individual saints, the so-called *sanctorale*.

There were also regional differences in the calendar, as Eastern and Western churches developed various traditions.

The Church Year created a calendar of sacred times similar to, but different from that of the *mo'adey adonay* in the Old Testament. Not only were the feasts of Israel transformed, the festal year was reorganised and set to another calendar, based on the Roman time reckoning. A calendar as such is not sacred, so the Church had no problem abandoning the lunar Jewish calendar, adopting the Julian calendar of the Roman Empire and changing the latter into the Gregorian calendar. This illustrates, as Bruce Chilton rightly observes, the adaptability of Christianity.<sup>122</sup> It is focussed on one, timeless event, the death and resurrection of Jesus; an event that surpasses human history, and can therefore be commemorated at any time, at any place. So the Church freely organised a liturgical year around that eternal event, irrespective of the biblical calendar.

Another sign of this adaptability is the inclusion of both Jewish and pagan elements in its holiday observance.

Much as Christianity could relate typologically to Judaism in its Easter and its Pentecost, understanding Christ as the hidden reality between the ancient types of Exodus and covenant, so Christians could absorb the symbols, images, and festivals of other cultures as types. That absorption has fed the variety of Christian theology, and contributed signally to what is today a very complex calendar.<sup>123</sup>

In conclusion the question should be asked: what was the motivation, the leading idea behind the development of the Church Year? It is important to keep in mind the change of circumstances after Constantine's turn to Christianity. From that time onwards, the Church was no longer a persecuted minority but had a guarantee of

<sup>119</sup> David MONSHOUWER, *Vieren vol verwachting*, p. 33ff.

<sup>120</sup> Jean DANIELOU, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 343ff.

<sup>121</sup> See for the details of the 'vestiges' of Jewish festivals in Christian liturgical traditions: David MONSHOUWER, *Vieren vol verwachting*, p. 26ff. and 33ff; and Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*, p. 56ff

<sup>122</sup> Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*, p. 101ff.

<sup>123</sup> Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*, p. 105.

social stability, and even of political cohesion. This had an impact on the general mood. Instead of being focussed on the eschatological future of Christ's return and the Messianic Kingdom, the Church realised that she was here to stay, on earth, for a long time. Part of this accommodation to a prolonged earthly existence was the development of a liturgical year in which the life of Christ was, as it were, spread throughout the seasons. The Church Year traced a path through ordinary time, as a way of following Christ from holiday to holiday, contemplating at each 'stop' a particular aspect of his person or his saving work.

### Reformed counterpoint

Because they advocated *sola scriptura*, the Reformers introduced a counterpoint to the authority of Church and Tradition. This led them to categorically reject the sanctorale and greatly reduce the number of temporale (Christological holidays). Some taught that anything is permitted in worship, provided it is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. This view was defended by the Lutherans and the Anglicans and has become the prevalent view of mainline Protestantism. As a result it has adopted the Sunday and the core of the Church Year, i.e. the Paschal Triduum, Ascension and Pentecost, Advent and Christmas. Anglicans retained much more of the medieval Church Year. This was in fact one of the main reasons for the Puritan reaction.

Puritanism was Calvinist theology in a British context, and was therefore akin to Presbyterianism and Calvinism in other countries. In the area of holidays, this wing of Protestantism adopted the 'regulative principle' of Scripture and worship, i.e. God has set down in Scripture how and when he is to be worshipped. Man is not to add to, or detract from, what Scripture teaches. This is a more restrictive approach, formulated by the Westminster Confession of Faith as follows:

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men... or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.<sup>124</sup>

Puritans and Presbyterians represent the most outspoken form of the Reformed counterpoint. They strongly condemned Christmas, which they considered a pagan festival in Christianised dress. Moreover, they rejected most of the other annual festivals which had come into use in the Church, because they lacked explicit scriptural warrant. Neither did Calvinists and Puritans accept the Jewish festivals because, in their view, those festivals belonged to the ceremonial law, and the ceremonial law was no longer authoritative for believers. (This was, by the way, the general view of both Roman Catholics and Protestants.)

In fact, the only real Christian holiday, in Calvinistic thinking, is the weekly gathering on Sunday, the 'Lord's day'.

Some even advocated a return to the Sabbath, because of its mention in the Decalogue, i.e. in the moral law considered binding for Christians. In the wake of the Reformation, the Socinian churches of Eastern Europe and the Netherlands, and a small number of Anabaptists, adopted Saturday as the day of worship. The latter group finally abandoned Christianity for Orthodox Judaism. Sabbatism did not become prevalent to any degree among Protestants, but it aroused interest among English and Scottish nonconformists. This led to the formation of several groups of Seventh Day Baptists. They were persecuted as heretics by the Trinitarian and Sunday-observing establishment in Britain. Seventh Day Baptism survived as a small minority and spread to other countries. Towards the middle of the 19th century its teaching gained quite a lot of interest in the United States. One outcome of the spread of their insistence on the Sabbath as the biblical day of worship was the founding of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the Seventh-day Church of God.

However, the prevailing view among Puritans and Calvinists was that the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue should be applied to the Lord's Day, i.e. Sunday, because in their view it is the New Covenant replacement of the Old Covenant Sabbath. As the Westminster Confession puts it:

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also

<sup>124</sup> *Westminster Confession*, chapter 21 ('Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day'), section 1.

are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.<sup>125</sup>

This led to an emphasis on Sunday observance which closely resembled Jewish Sabbath observance and was marked by the abstention from any sort of daily work.

As time went on, the churches marked by Calvinist theology could not, or would not close the door to the Church Year, so eventually they adopted the main elements of it.

### Evangelical (dis)interest

When Evangelicalism emerged, it largely took over the Puritan critique of ritualism and calendar observance. Evangelical movements and churches have generally not paid much attention to the Church Year. In some circles, however, there was an emphasis on Sunday observance, inherited from Puritanism or Calvinism in other countries.

Evangelical spirituality highly valued spontaneity, freedom of liturgy and the fervour of religious experience, so the repetitive character of a liturgical calendar was not something which attracted its attention. Evangelicals highly valued Sunday worship, however. It is not an overstatement to say that this is, in fact, the one sacred time of Evangelicalism, and that its Church Year really consists of 52 weekly holidays. Some celebrate annual Christian feasts as well, others refrain from doing so; but this variance does not greatly disturb the conscience, nor does it inhibit interdenominational collaboration. Liturgy and calendar have never been major preoccupations in these circles.<sup>126</sup>

This is not to say that Evangelicalism is weary of festivity. On the contrary, it has a long tradition of informal, local festivals and conferences, usually during the summer or a civil holiday – which again is witness to its pragmatic outlook. Some of these gatherings are recurrent, others occasional, but never are they made part of a liturgical year.

Since the Puritans, and their Evangelical successors, critically opposed the Church Year of so-called traditional churches, and displayed a disinterest for calendar observance, liturgical symbolism and paraphernalia, it is all the more remarkable that in these circles Bible students showed a particular interest in the symbolism of the Jewish festivals. They were keen to interpret them in a typological and prophetic manner, i.e. as symbolic and ritual foreshadows of Christ, and the eschatological coming of the Kingdom respectively.

This interest is all the more striking since they had no intention of observing them, since they invariably held to the view that they had been abolished by the coming of Christ. So this interest was of another kind, it was part of the reviving interest in eschatology, in the future stages of the divine economy of salvation. The biblical calendar of seven festivals was considered as carrying a deeper meaning; it was taken to be a sort of liturgical reflection of the timetable of God's redemption plan. So they developed typological and eschatological interpretations.

This way of looking at the festivals became an interpretative tradition which constitutes the background to the Hebrew Christian interest in the meaning of the biblical festivals, as we have noted in previous chapters.

## Reception of Biblical Holidays in Rabbinic Judaism

Simultaneously with the development of the Christian holiday traditions, the rabbis of Javne and their successors set out to rethink and reformat the biblical *mo'adey adonay* under the new circumstances of a Judaism without a Temple and without a homeland. As it turned out, holiday observance became one of the pillars of Talmudic Judaism. How did this come about, and why?

### Rabbinic adaptation

After the cessation of the priestly Temple cult, the Jewish people were no longer able to celebrate the holidays in strict and complete accordance with the prescriptions of the Torah – because they no longer could offer the

<sup>125</sup> *Westminster Confession*, chapter 21 ('Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day'), section 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> In his discussion on the history and significance of the Christian and Jewish festal calendar, Bruce CHILTON writes, with respect to the puritanical critique that can be heard even today, that 'it is perennially and all too lightly dismissed as absurd, but that it reflects a necessary element in the Christian conception of time: the acknowledgment that no calendar can contain the reality of God (*Redeeming Time*, p. 100).

statutory sacrifices which were an integral part of holiday observance. Faced with this most delicate issue, the sages simply could not conceive of a religious practice without Sabbath, Feasts and Fasts. Postponing the sacred times until the temple was restored was not a viable option for them. In their view, the question was rather: how can we celebrate them without offering sacrifices in the holy sanctuary?

Their solution was to replace the sacrifices by prayers, provided they were recited at the times when the sacrifices used to be offered.<sup>127</sup> In typical rabbinic fashion, this idea is presented as part of the orally transmitted commandments already given in biblical times:

‘After the destruction of the Temple,’ God said to Abraham, ‘your children shall study the *mitsvot* concerning the sacrifices, and will consider it as though they had actually offered them and I will forgive their sins’.<sup>128</sup>

Given the correspondence between prayer and sacrifice, the rabbis included a recitation of the regulations concerning the morning and evening sacrifice in the daily prayers – the so-called *Korbanoth*. Besides this, an additional *Musaf* service was included in the services on the Sabbath and the festivals, in which portions were read about the offerings which were due on each particular holiday.

For this reason, the *seder mo'ed*, the Mishnaic section consecrated to the holidays, contains minute descriptions of the sacrifices and festival services during the Second Temple period.<sup>129</sup> While they are based on what really took place, they are not so much historical reconstructions as detailed outlines of how such and such a sacrifice should be offered – because, and this is the main point, the people should remember these ideal procedures each time they observe a holiday. They may no longer be able to go to the Temple and bring the prescribed offerings, but they can tell the story, and this they should continue to do – the story of the commandment and its meaning, with its associated rites, blessings and prayers.

Simultaneously with the Temple services which could no longer be conducted, there were parallel services in the local synagogue: three daily prayers, regular services on the Sabbath and special services on the monthly and annual holidays. At those moments, the gathered community recalled the sacrifices by reciting the relative commandments, and saying the associated prayers and blessings. It would be too far fetched to conclude that the rabbis ‘substituted’ the Temple with the synagogue and the sacrifices by means of readings and set prayers. One could better speak of a ‘temporal’ or ‘interim arrangement’, valid as long as the Temple was not yet rebuilt. This clearly comes out in the petition that was added to the prayers, asking God to speedily restore the Temple so that the sacrifices might be offered again.<sup>130</sup> This eschatological outlook has always been retained in orthodox Judaism, only Reform and liberal Judaism renounced the idea that animal sacrifices will one day be reintroduced in the future Temple.<sup>131</sup>

Having recognised this, it is certainly true that readings and prayers filled the vacuum created by the absence of the sacrificial system, thus enabling the people to continue celebrating the Sabbath and the Festivals.

In the course of time succeeding generations of religious leaders were engaged in formulating the prayers which had to be recited in the synagogue. While Judaism has always allowed for spontaneous, personal prayers in the life of the individual, its prayer liturgies have become increasingly standardised. This has not come about without debate. In Talmudic times, several rabbis protested against the tendency of ritualising communal prayers, and they preferred extempore prayers to preconceived formulations. All the while, however, the text of the main prayers was more or less fixed.

First and the foremost of these prayers is the *Tefillah*, also called *Shemone Esreh* (‘Eighteen Blessings’) or *Amida* (‘standing’) because Jews were supposed to recite it while standing. This was to be recited twice a day, recalling the daily offerings, as well as on Sabbath and Festivals – with the omission of the petitions – so as not to infringe on the joyful character of the holidays.

Second came the *Shema*, which contains Deuteronomy 6.4ff, enlarged with other quotes from the Torah, plus preceding and closing blessings. It was included in all synagogue services. Other liturgical prayers and benedictions include the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6, and the *Kedusha*, the sanctification of the Holy One. For a long time, these prayers were not written down but transmitted orally. In his study of the development of Jewish liturgy, A.Z. Idelsohn reminds us that:

<sup>127</sup> This idea became prevalent from Mishnaic times onwards. See e.g. *Talmud bavli*, Berachot 26b; and *Bamidbar Rabba*, ch. 18.

<sup>128</sup> This tradition is recorded several times in *Talmud bavli* (Megilloth 31b, Ta’anith 27b; and Menahoth 110a), as well as in *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, par. 6. See for a detailed discussion: A.Z. IDELSOHN, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 26ff.

<sup>129</sup> *Seder mo'ed* is one of the six *sedarim* or ‘sections’ of the Mishnah, and entirely devoted to the observance of the various holidays.

<sup>130</sup> In his treatise on the development of Jewish liturgy, A.Z. IDELSOHN comments: ‘It is evident that sacrifices were substituted by prayer temporarily only, until the Temple and its cult will be restored; they were never altogether abolished’ (*Jewish Liturgy*, p. 27).

<sup>131</sup> In fact, contemporary Judaism is divided on this question. Orthodox Jews expect that all sacrifices will be restored, others think that only offerings of thanksgiving will be reintroduced, others again do not believe at all in a restoration of the Temple. See Isidore EPSTEIN, *Judaism*, p. 287ff.

The liturgy grew rather through the continuous improvisations of religious spirits in moments of inspiration. These men used to create prayers for their private devotion; and only after their compositions found favour in the eyes of the people, were they gradually incorporated into the public worship.<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, one would have to wait till the ninth century to see the first *Siddur* or prayer book published. Nevertheless, it is equally true that the Sabbath and festival services in the synagogue were, from the outset, very much regulated concerning their liturgical format: besides the recitation of standard prayers and biblical psalms it consisted of prescribed readings following a lectionary, plus special readings during festivals. Undoubtedly, this concern for order was to a large extent influenced by the idea that prayers and Scripture readings reflected, or should reflect, the pattern of the sacrifices in the old days.

It was only in 843 C.E. that Gaon Cohen composed the first written prayer book. A generation later the *Siddur* of Amram Gaon appeared, which has become the foundation for all later collections of benedictions and prayer books. They were written with a view to unifying the worship practices throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The medieval date for their appearance should not blind us to the fact that many of the prayers, blessings, hymns and other liturgical texts, contained in the written *Siddur*, date back to the period of the Tannaim and the Amoraim – the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud who laid the foundation of synagogue worship. Some prayers stem from the Second Temple period.<sup>133</sup>

The *Siddur* has been embellished over many centuries, by many hands. It has greatly contributed to the ordering and conservation of Jewish worship. Consequently, worship in Judaism can be described as highly liturgical. Together with the *Machzor* (the prayer book for festivals) and the *Haggadah* (the prayer book for Pesach), the *Siddur* functions as the guide for synagogue worship, and as the basis for its unity and continuity.

Granted, different expressions have developed, for instance in Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities, and in Turkish and Yemenite communities, but these differences only concern minor points. Similarly, the changes introduced by Reform and Conservative Judaism during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries increased the variety of expressions but did not alter the basic structure of the synagogue liturgy.<sup>134</sup> Everywhere the essence of the *Siddur* is retained. Therefore, all synagogue worship corresponds to the same structure. All forms of worship in Judaism have a common outlook and liturgical pattern, of which the *Siddur* is a standing witness.

Closely related to the cessation of the sacrifices was a second issue facing the sages: the impossibility of receiving atonement in the biblically prescribed way. This problem was especially acute with respect to Yom Kippur, because on that day the supreme atonement ritual had to be performed, which procured expiation for all the sins of the people so that the covenant relationship with God could continue. Is there still a way to ‘be cleaned from all iniquities before the face of the Lord’ (Leviticus 16:30), now that the solemn ritual on Yom Kippur can no longer be held? And if so, how?

In an attempt to solve this most delicate problem, the sages dwelt on the significance of Yom Kippur as such. The verse quoted above stood at the centre of the rabbinic discussions, in particular the phrase ‘On this day, he makes atonement for you...’. What does ‘he’ denote? At face value, two interpretations are possible – the high priest, or God. But while the sages retain these two, they also suggest a third one: reading ‘on this day’ in the sense of ‘this day’ (*hayom hazèh*), they suppose that ‘he’ refers to the day itself. This would imply that the day itself procures atonement; that is to say, the observance of Yom Kippur through fasting, confession and repentance.<sup>135</sup> As Jacob Petuchowsky rightly observes, this interpretation would commend itself after the cessation of the Temple cult.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, it gained wide acceptance and, as a result, the character of Yom Kippur changed considerably. Certainly, the Mishnah contains an elaborate description of the cultic ritual outlined in Leviticus 16, and its practice in the Second Temple period, so as to keep its memory alive. But in rabbinic Judaism, the centre of gravity of its observance shifted from the Temple to the synagogue; from the priestly service to the assembly of the local community; from the expiatory sacrifices to prayer and fasting.

The key element, however, was *teshuvah*, ‘repentance’, in the sense of a ‘return’ to God and his commandments. Only if the people truly repent will their prayer and fasting have effect. A. Cohen summarises:

<sup>132</sup> A.Z. IDELSOHN, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 29.

<sup>133</sup> See the article ‘Liturgy’ in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

<sup>134</sup> See for a discussion of the liturgical continuity and the several changes introduced in the course of time, the articles ‘Sabbath’ and ‘Liturgy’ in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*; and Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 13-30.

<sup>135</sup> See e.g. *Mishnah Yoma*, 8:8.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob PETUCHOWSKY, *Van Pesach tot Chanoeke*, p. 82. He also discusses the changed practice of Yom Kippur after 70 CE, which we outline in this paragraph.

With the cessation of the atonement sacrifices, the importance of repentance as a means of expiation became inevitably enhanced. This is also true of the efficacy of the Day of Atonement.<sup>137</sup>

As so often when adapting holiday observance to the new circumstances of the post Temple period, the rabbis based their emphasis on *teshuvah* on their reading of the Scriptures. Even in the time of the sacrificial cult, they contend, repentance was the essential precondition for any offering to be acceptable to God, for 'neither sin-offering nor trespass-offering nor death nor Yom Kippur can bring expiation without *teshuvah*'.<sup>138</sup> Another quote, this time from the Midrashic literature, very well illustrates the rabbinic perspective:

Whence is it derived that if one repents, it is imputed to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem, built the Temple, erected an altar and offered upon it all the sacrifices enumerated in the Torah? From the text 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit' [Psalm 51:17].<sup>139</sup>

Here we have the basis of Yom Kippur in Judaism. It became one of the most important holidays, second only to Pesach. Solemn synagogue services, marked by prayers of contrition, fasting and introspection, became the main ingredients of its observance. From then on, it was through repentance on this most solemn day of the year that Jewish people sought to straighten out their record with God.

One can easily see how this understanding could foster the ritualistic idea that the observance of Yom Kippur automatically procured atonement. Indeed, this has often been the case, as people thought to obtain forgiveness through the synagogue ritual as such; but it should be noted that the sages clearly took up a position against the ritualising of Yom Kippur. Their emphasis on *teshuvah* is inescapable. In their view, repentance is not only a call to return to God in prayer and the liturgy of the synagogue service, but also, and primarily, a call to make amends for the moral offences against God and the fellow-man. Only when one takes *teshuvah* seriously, the sages insist, in the widest sense of the word, can it replace the sacrifices of expiation.

A third problem facing the Jewish people after the destruction of Jerusalem was, it was no longer possible to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the three *shalosh regalim* Pesach/Matzot, Shavu'ot and Sukkot. This again was an integral part of the biblical prescriptions for the holidays. Even though it was very rare for devout Jews to go up three times per annum, as the Torah literally commands, they did make an effort to do so once a year when living in the Land, and at least once in a lifetime, when living far away in the Diaspora. Despite the practical problems involved in making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it was still considered to be an integral part of Jewish religious duty.

This radically changed after the two Jewish wars against the Romans. For the rabbis, the impossibility of attending the pilgrim festivals in the holy city was no reason to postpone these holidays altogether, until the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple. Instead, they reformatted them in terms of religious festivals to be celebrated in the local Jewish community.

### Rabbinic elaboration

Besides adapting the sacred times of the Torah to new circumstances, the founding fathers of Judaism also elaborated the festal calendar, and the practice of several holidays. For a detailed presentation of this development we refer to the writings of Jewish authors such as Hayyim Schauss, Isidore Epstein, Jacob Petuchowski, Abraham Idelsohn and Stefan Reif; the latter two concentrate on the area of liturgical history.<sup>140</sup> For the purposes of our study, the following summary is in place. The rabbis elaborated holiday practice in three areas: calendar, meaning and format.

For a start, the sages determined festival dates about which there was controversy, and also introduced new elements on the festal calendar.

During the Second Temple period, there was great controversy about the precise date of Shavu'ot. The debate centred on the interpretation of the word *shabbat* in the Torah ordinance that the counting of omer should start on 'the day after *shabbat*'. According to the Pharisees, this refers not to a regular but to a special Sabbath, i.e. the opening day of Matzot. Its date on the calendar was fixed but it could come on any day of the week. So the

<sup>137</sup> A. COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 105.

<sup>138</sup> Talmud, *Tosefta Yoma* 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Leviticus Rabba*, 7:2. Cf. 'I do not want of you sacrifices and offerings but words of contrition, as it is said: 'Take with you words and turn to the Lord' [Hosea 14:2]. *Exodus Rabba*, 37:4.

<sup>140</sup> Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*; Isidore EPSTEIN, *Judaism*; Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoekka*; Abraham IDELSOHN, *Jewish Liturgy*; and Stefan REIF, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*. Christian author Geert COHEN STUART, in *Joodse feesten en vasten*, also touches on the development of Sabbath and festival observance in Judaism, although he concentrates on current practice among religious Jews in Israel. Another Christian author, Bruce CHILTON, in *Redeeming Time*, equally touches on the same subject, but in a rather succinct way.

counting of omer should begin on the day after this special Sabbath. Since Shavu'ot ought to come on the fiftieth day, its date was fixed (6 Shivan), but the day of the week could vary. The Sadducees, on the other hand, argued that the 'sabbat' in the text denoted the regular Sabbath in the week of Matzot; its date on the calendar varied therefore, depending on which day of the week Matzot started in a particular year. Instead of determining a fixed calendar date for Shavu'ot they determined a fixed day of the week, i.e. the first day. The rabbis ruled in favour of the Pharisaic interpretation, and this became general usage in Judaism.<sup>141</sup>

Moreover, an extra eighth day was added to Pesach/Matzot and Sukkot, for Jews in the Diaspora. This ruling seems to have been given because of the various time zones in which the dispersed Jews lived. In order to prevent some of them getting completely out of pace with the time of celebration in the Land, they were to keep an extra day. In so doing, their celebration would always coincide with the seven days in the Land, which remained the standard.

Furthermore, the question arose whether the year should begin in spring, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan, or in autumn, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishri, which is the seventh month when Nisan is taken to be the beginning of the year. Although the evidence in the Hebrew Bible is largely in favour of the first option, there is at least some reason to take a more nuanced view. Clearly, Aviv or Nisan is the first month of the liturgical year,<sup>142</sup> but in a certain sense, the seventh month of Tishri also functions as 'the turning of the year'.<sup>143</sup>

Following these indications, the rabbis of Javneh maintained that the month of Nisan should open the religious year, but they designated the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishri as the civil New Year. Consequently, the original Yom Teru'ah became *Rosh Hashanah* ('head of the year'), a festival of two days. The civil New Year should be distinguished from the beginning of the religious or liturgical year which comes in the month Aviv, or Nisan, as it was called after the exile. The rabbis of the Mishnah did not alter that. Furthermore, the rabbis of the Mishnah even knew of two other New Years, one 'of the Kings' in the summer and one 'of the Trees' in the winter (*Tu Bishvat*).<sup>144</sup> In theory, it is possible that the passages in the Mishnah, concerning New Year, reflect an earlier tradition, and that the idea of a civil New Year in autumn was already gaining acceptance in the Second Temple period. Some scholars indeed assume that it had already been adopted in post-exilic times,<sup>145</sup> but this remains highly hypothetical for lack of concrete evidence. It seems more probable that the shift to a New Year in autumn dates from the time of the Mishnah.<sup>146</sup>

Moreover, the liturgical year was extended, with a number of holidays that were not instituted in the Torah. Well aware of the different status, when compared with the mo'adey adonay, the rabbis called them 'minor feasts and fasts'. Two of them were already known before the destruction of the Temple, although we cannot be certain on what scale they were celebrated in the multicoloured world of first century Judaism. They include:

- *Chanukkah*, ('dedication') – the commemoration of the recapture of Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple in 157 B.C.E. and mentioned in the 1 Maccabees<sup>147</sup>
- *Purim* ('lots') – instituted by Queen Esther after the deliverance from an attempted genocide of the Jews in the Persian Empire. An extra day was added in the Diaspora, possibly for the same reasons as the extension of Matzot and Sukkot from seven to eight days (see above).

In post-exilic scriptural writings there is already mention of days of fasting observed by devout Jews, in commemoration of the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the first temple (Zachariah 7). In the time of the Mishnah, this practice was taken over and further developed. So besides the fast of Yom Kippur, several minor fasts were added to the calendar.

- *Tisha Be'av* ('9<sup>th</sup> of the month Av') is the most important one, since it commemorates the destruction of the first and the second temple.

<sup>141</sup> The Karaites have taken the Sadducee view, so they always celebrate Shavu'ot on a Sunday. We will return to their 'counterpoint' further on in this chapter.

<sup>142</sup> In Exodus 12.2 Moses insists that 'this month', i.e. Aviv (Hebrew for 'spring', later called by its Babylonian name Nisan, 'shall be the first month for the Israelites'. See also Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28.

<sup>143</sup> According to Exodus 34.22, Sukkot marks 'the turning of the year', which either implies that this is the end of the festal season, or that the year begins with the month Tishri. The rabbis of Javneh opted for the second implication. But this has remained a matter of dispute. Because of their strict adherence to the biblical text and their rejection of later traditions, the Karaites did not recognise the rabbinic New Year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishri. See Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoeka*, p. 68.

<sup>144</sup> Mishnah, *Rosh Hashanah*, I.1.

<sup>145</sup> E.g. Jean MASSONNET, 'Chabat et Fêtes,' in Hugues COUSIN (ed), *Le monde où vivait Jésus*, p. 361.

<sup>146</sup> See for a detailed discussion: Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoeka*, p. 71ff.

<sup>147</sup> It is also mentioned in John 10:10, but this was of course not an argument for the rabbis to retain it.

- Other fasts include the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishri (the 'Fast of Gedalyah'), the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet and *Ta'anit Esther* (the 'Fast of Esther' that precedes the Purim festival).

Given the emphasis on repentance in Judaism, it should not come as a surprise that the day of repentance (Yom Kippur) was extended, with preparatory periods of repentance, self-examination and making amends.

- Most important and most widely practised are the *Yamim Noraim*, the ten 'Days of Awe' between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This custom dates from Talmudic times.
- Later, orthodox Jews added a forty-day period of introspection and prayer, preceding Rosh Hashanah.

Further additions to the calendar include

- *Tu Bishvat* ('15<sup>th</sup> of Shivat'). This so-called New Year of the Trees is already mentioned in the Talmud<sup>148</sup> and has recently become quite popular in the state of Israel.
- *Simchat Torah* ('Joy of the Torah'). The biblical calendar already mentioned the very joyful Eighth Day to conclude Sukkot (*Shmini Atzeret*). According to some, this constituted a distinct, eighth annual holiday which summed up all other seven holidays. In rabbinic Judaism it has become associated with the pre-eminence of the Torah and developed into *Simchat Torah* ('joy of Torah'). On that day, the annual lectionary of Torah readings comes to an end and starts all over again. In Israel, Simchat Torah comes on the eighth day after Sukkot; in the Diaspora one day later.

In recent times, two other holidays have been instituted: *Yom Hashoah*, on 25 Nisan, which commemorates the Great Calamity (*shoah*) during the Second World War, and *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, the Independence Day of the state of Israel on 5 Iyar. Although they are not religious holidays in the strict sense of the word, both secular and religious Jews observe them.

The second area of elaboration is that of *meaning*. Here, rabbinic Judaism goes beyond the confines of biblical definition. This was due to the nature of Jewish tradition, as a dynamic process of applying the ancient *mitzvot* to the loss of the Temple cult and the evolution of life in the Diaspora. As the people continued their wanderings on the sinuous and hazardous roads of history, the ancient words of the Torah took on new meanings, or rather disclosed meanings that had been hitherto ignored, bypassed.

Generally speaking, the original agricultural aspects of the festivals receded into the background, since Jews were, from then on, living in non-agricultural communities in the Diaspora. Only in present-day Israel does the link between festival and harvest take on new significance. In fact, from a rabbinic point of view, a full and comprehensive observance of the holidays is only really possible when the people are living in the Land.

This is not to say that the agricultural aspect completely vanished. It was rather generalised in terms of celebrating the goodness of creation and divine providence. Jacob Petuchowsky refers to the holidays which have kept a link with nature as the 'cosmic cycle'. We find this term to be not very apt, because it can easily lead to a confusion of the biblical concept of creation with non-biblical ideas about cosmic luminaries, forces and spiritual powers. But he is certainly right in calling attention to the fact that the festal calendar of Judaism still has a link with nature.<sup>149</sup> We would call this, however, the *creational* meaning of (certain) Jewish holidays. For instance, Rosh Hashanah has become the 'birthday of creation'. Every New Moon recalls the original creation and, according to the sages, it also anticipates the possibility of a new creation. Sukkot celebrations include four parts which represent the importance of the produce of nature for the subsistence of man.

Far more important than the cluster of creational meanings is the cluster of *historical* meanings attached to the sacred times. Rabbinic Judaism has taken over the historicising tendency of the Second Temple period, noted above, and developed it even further.

The Sabbath remained a commemoration of the creation, the liberation from Egypt and the sign of the Covenant with Israel. In the religious tradition of the Jewish people it has acquired an exceptional status. According to the rabbis, this day is of unequalled importance. She should be welcomed as a bride who fills the house with her fragrance; received as a divine gift which transcends all other gifts; sanctified as a token of future Messianic bliss.

<sup>148</sup> Mishnah, *Rosh Hashanah*, I.1.

<sup>149</sup> Jacob PETUCHOWSKY, *Van Pesach tot Chanoeka*, p. 119.

From a commemoration of the bondage in Egypt and the exodus, Pesach/Matzot developed into the festival *par excellence* to commemorate all the tribulations that befell the Jewish people in the course of their journey through space and time, and all God's interventions on behalf of his people. Moreover, it took on a very pronounced Messianic character. The Pesach meal came to anticipate the eschatological Messianic meal, and the coming of the Messiah was expected to take place during the night of Pesach. Roger Le Déaut summarises its importance as follows:

The part played by the Passover liberation in the Jewish faith is analogous to that which the Resurrection of Christ plays in Christianity.<sup>150</sup>

While Pesach gained supreme importance, Omer Reshit receded to the background. In biblical times, 'the real importance of the holiday of Matzot centred on the ceremony of the *omer*, the first sheaf of newly cut barley which was offered to the priest as a gift to God'.<sup>151</sup> After the expulsion of the Jews from the Land, it lost its significance. Since the rabbis did not historicise it, it almost disappeared as a separate holiday. In their description of the way in which Judaism celebrates the Jewish festivals, Hayimm Schauss, Jacob Petuchowski and Gert Cohen Stuart do not even mention it!<sup>152</sup>

Having said this, we should add that the subsequent period of omer counting (Sfirat Ha'omer) was retained and took on considerable importance. In fact, the day of Omer has become the first of a series of 49 special days to which the rabbis gave an historical interpretation. They made it a period of semi-mourning for the numerous pupils of rabi Akiva who died as a result of a plague or a massacre during the unsuccessful second Jewish uprising against the Romans (132-135 C.E.). More generally, the days of Omer recall the sufferings of the Jewish people.

One of these days is called *Lag be'omer* ('33<sup>rd</sup> of Omer'). It is a joyful interruption, because tradition has it that, during the Second Jewish Revolt, no one was killed on this particular day. This explains why marriages and festal celebrations are exceptionally permitted on Lag be'omer, while they are excluded during all the other days of Sfirat Ha'omer.

Shavu'ot was further historicised. Beside the festival of the Covenant it became the commemoration of the giving of the Torah. Given the fact that the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai 'in the third month', i.e. about two months after the Exodus, the rabbis concluded that Moses must have received the Torah and transmitted it to the people at the time of Shavu'ot. So they reinterpreted it as the festival of the revelation of the Torah.

In Messianic publications it is often assumed that the link between Shavu'ot and the Torah was already known in first century Judaism, and that it forms the background to the outpouring of the Spirit described in Acts 2 – the Spirit has come to write Torah in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus.<sup>153</sup> Other authors tentatively suppose the same, when they investigate the Jewish origins of the Christian faith.<sup>154</sup> But there is no convincing proof of this. It is risky to read the interpretations of the *mo'adey adonay*, presented in Mishnah and Talmud, as something that goes back to the beginning of the first century. As far as we can tell from the evidence, the relation between Shavu'ot and the revelation of the Torah is a rabbinic development.

Rosh Hashanah was interpreted as the commemoration of creation and final judgment. According to the rabbis, the world was actually created on the first of Tishri, so Rosh Hashanah was a kind of 'birthday of creation'. The following Ten Days of Awe, as well as Yom Kippur, were placed in the perspective of divine judgment; as such they anticipate the future final judgment of the world.

As for Sukkot, its eschatological dimension was amplified. Moreover, its historical application was widened. In Talmudic Judaism, Sukkot not only recalls the desert wanderings of the Israelites of old, but also the age-long journey of the Jewish people, as well as the personal pilgrimage of every individual Jew on earth. The booths came to represent the provisional and temporary character of man's existence – a meaning enhanced by the reading of Qohelet during this festival.

Judaism also developed a third cluster of *spiritual* meanings.<sup>155</sup> We recall our remarks at the beginning of this chapter about the difference between a spiritual meaning and a cultic function. The first is what a holiday

<sup>150</sup> Roger LE DÉAUT, *The Spirituality of Judaism*, p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Hayyim SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*, p. 41.

<sup>152</sup> Hayimm SCHAUSS, *The Jewish Festivals*; Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoekka*; and Gert COHEN STUART, *De joodse feesten*.

<sup>153</sup> See e.g. Dan JUSTER, *Jewish Roots*. We will return to this in the following chapter, while discussing the Messianic redefinition of biblical holidays.

<sup>154</sup> See e.g. Oskar SKARSAUNE, *In the Shadows of the Temple*, p. 388ff.

<sup>155</sup> Jacob PETUCHOWSKY argues that the Judaic calendar consists of a cosmic, a historical and a spiritual 'cycle' (*Van Pesach tot Chanoekka*, p. 120f.). Above, we already explained why we prefer to speak of 'creational' instead of 'cosmic'. Moreover, the term 'cycle' is somewhat confusing, since it suggests three cycles of festivals, each with a different meaning. Certainly, the calendar consists of various cycles. However, they are not distinct in meaning but only in a temporal sense – there is a weekly, a monthly and an annual cycle. The same cycle and the same holiday can have a creational

*signifies* with respect to God and the Covenant relationship enjoyed by his people. The second applies to what people *did* on a particular holiday to maintain and renew their relationship with God. Given the cessation of the priestly Temple cult, it is evident that the cultic function changed considerably. Prayers and *teshuvah* replaced the sacrifices; synagogue services took the place of Temple services.

However, this did not fundamentally alter the spiritual signification of the holidays. The concept of God remained the same, although the theme of divine judgment became far more important than before. We see this especially in the development of the so-called High Holidays: Rosh Hashanah, followed by the Ten Days of Awe and culminating in Yom Kippur – in Judaism, this is a unified whole which speaks of the final judgment at the end of days, as well as the provisional judgment each year. They teach the people of the gravity of sin, especially the moral transgressions, the need for forgiveness and the importance of *teshuvah*.

All holidays are linked with aspects of God's character and of the Covenant relationship with him. These are the times set apart to offer prayer and praise; to hear the words that proceed from the mouth of God and learn to live by them; to obtain forgiveness and atonement.

Talmudic Judaism has placed the study and the practice of the Torah at the centre of religious life, so it does not come as a surprise that the Torah looms large in the spiritual 'message' of several festivals: one thinks especially of the Torah part of the Sabbath service, the commemoration of the giving of the Torah at Shavu'ot, and the joyful opening of a new (year??)

The third area of rabbinic elaboration was the format of holiday observance, first and foremost with respect to the Sabbath. Rabbinic writings abound with discussions and rulings about forbidden kinds of 'work' and prescribed ways of celebrating this most holy day. Judaic Sabbath keeping might seem burdensome to outside observers, but the sages are at pains to insist on the joyful character of the Sabbath. People should delight in it. Several rites have developed which create a celebrative atmosphere and speak of the beauty of the Sabbath: the festive Sabbath meal and its opening rite, with a blessing over the candles, the wine and the bread (the *Kiddush*). In the evening synagogue service, called *kabalat sjabbat* ('receiving of the Sabbath'), the Sabbath is welcomed as a queen and a bride. To this end, the sixteenth century Kabbalists introduced the song *Lech Dodi* ('come, my beloved') – a song that has gained widespread acceptance and popularity in Judaism.

Perhaps the most important element of Sabbath keeping is the synagogue service. The main service, on Sabbath morning, consists of liturgical blessings and prayers, psalm singing, Torah readings, and additional Tanakh readings. These are followed by study and discussion of the Torah and other texts. To mark the transition from the seventh day to the new week (another service??) came into use, called the *havdalah* ('separation') service. A second holiday for which the format for observance has developed considerably since the days of the Mishnah, is Pesach evening. The symbolic meal came to be known as the Seder ('order'), because it was celebrated according an elaborate order, consisting of Bible readings and explanations, blessings and songs, questions and answers, plus symbolic enactments. Central to the ritual are the four cups of wine, the matzot and the meal. The sages placed the Pesach meal back in its original home setting of family and guests. In due time, the liturgy of the Seder was written down in a so-called Haggadah ('that which has to be told'). Various regional differences existed – and still exist – with respect to certain details, but eventually a rather uniform format emerged. The earliest extant Hagadoth dates from the twelfth century.

It has often been supposed that the traditional Jewish Seder was already practiced – at least to a large extent – in Second Temple Judaism, and therefore also by Jesus and his disciples 'in the night in which he was betrayed'. For that reason, Hebrew Christian authors were keen to offer Messianic interpretations of the various elements of the Seder ritual as it is practised in Judaism.<sup>156</sup> Nowadays, scholars interested in the origins of the Seder are very reluctant indeed to read back such customs into the first century. Even the discussions on this subject, in the Mishnah, do not necessarily reflect the practice of earlier times. As Joshua Kulp notes, there is 'a near consensus among scholars that the Passover Seder as described in rabbinic literature did not yet exist during the Second Temple period'.<sup>157</sup>

We have already noted the profound change in the practice of Yom Kippur. The format of other holidays also went through an ongoing development. Going into detail would take us beyond the scope of our study. The examples of Sabbath, Seder and Yom Kippur suffice to illustrate the general trend. Let us, in closing this paragraph, just mention an important rabbinic concept which favoured the elaboration of rites and customs,

and a historical meaning at the same time – something Jacob Petuchowsky cannot fail to notice of course. He speaks of coinciding cycles. We prefer to speak of coinciding clusters of meanings.

<sup>156</sup> See e.g. Alfred EDERSHEIM, *The Temple and its Ministries*, the chapter on 'Jesus and the Passover'.

<sup>157</sup> Joshua KULP, 'The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah.' In this study he contends that three main forces stimulated the rabbis to develop innovative seder ritual and to generate new, relevant exegeses to the biblical Passover texts: (1) the twin calamities of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the Bar-Kokhba revolt; (2) competition with emerging Christian groups; (3) assimilation of Greco-Roman customs and manners.

namely *hiddur mitzvah* ('embellishment of the commandment').<sup>158</sup> It means, 'carrying out with additional touches beyond what is required by the strict letter of the law, in order to fulfil the commandment in the best manner one's means allows', as A. Cohen defines it.<sup>159</sup> Even so, the sages ruled that this should be motivated by love for God and his Torah and that Jews should not be compelled to spend more than they can afford.

### Karaite counterpoint

Rabbinic adaptation and rabbinic elaboration have determined the development of holiday observance in Judaism. The way in which they defined the calendar, the meaning and format of the sacred times, has become the traditional practice of virtually the whole of the Jewish people. Yet there is one exception: the Karaites.<sup>160</sup> From the ninth century onwards, a disparate number of Jews took a position against the rabbis. Contending that the Scriptures are the sole and direct source of religious law, they did not recognise the authority of the oral Law, and the rabbinic tradition which had grown out of it. This is not to say that they rejected all tradition, only that their theological and practical outlook was anti Rabbanite. In fact, they developed a tradition of their own, called *sevel hayerusha* ('yoke of inheritance'); a number of doctrines and customs not found in the Hebrew Bible but considered to be binding for the entire Jewish community.

Throughout the ages there have always been Karaites, although their numbers were always very small. Nowadays, there still is a small Karaite community in Israel. However, Karaism is more important than their small numbers would suggest. It represents a counterpoint to the dominant Rabbinic stream in Judaism, not unlike the Puritan/Calvinistic and Evangelical counterpoint to mainline historic Christianity. Karaite insistence on the sole authority of the Scriptures, in all matters of doctrine and conduct, recalls the regulative principle adopted by Puritan critics of Christian liturgy and calendar observance. It is no exaggeration to say that they are the only ones in Judaism who endeavour to strictly celebrate 'biblical holidays'. Many Rabbinic customs are absent from their Sabbath and holiday services. Nor do they celebrate the minor feasts and fasts, introduced after the biblical period.

The Karaite position is all the more interesting for our subject, since the Messianic movement belongs to Evangelical Protestantism; a branch of Christianity known for its critical stance whenever 'tradition' is put on a pedestal and given equal authority with the Bible. It will be interesting to see whether Messianic believers who develop a 'Jewish' expression of their faith, link up with the dominant Rabbinic tradition or rather with the Karaite counterpoint.

### 'Jewish' holidays, a major element of religious practice

As a result of the developments in Second Temple Judaism, most notably in the early rabbinic period, the original biblical holidays have become 'Jewish' holidays, in the eyes of Jews and Christians alike.

Granted, the term 'Jewish holidays' as distinct from 'biblical holidays', is ambiguous. In fact, the first overlaps the second, since the Jewish calendar is a continuation of the festal calendar of the Torah. But besides continuity there is also discontinuity, insofar as the biblical holidays have 'gone through' the paradigm shift of Judaism, and been subjected to rabbinic adaptation and elaboration. Perhaps the term 'Judaic' holidays would be more accurate, since 'Judaic' specifically refers to that which pertains to post-biblical Judaism. But as far as we have been able to verify, this term is not used in any literature on holiday practice, neither popular nor scholarly. Moreover, for Jewish people, the holidays do not only have a religious dimension ('Judaic') but also a cultural and national dimension ('Jewish'). It is appropriate therefore to speak of 'Jewish holidays'.

Holiday observance is a major element of Judaism. With slight overstatement, one could say that the holidays are to observant Jews what the creeds are to orthodox Christianity. A pithy phrase from Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the founding fathers of neo-orthodoxy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resumes well this practical outlook of Judaism: 'The catechism of the Jews is their calendar.'<sup>161</sup> No doctrinal system unites all Jews, but they all celebrate their festivals. Jacob Petuchowski expresses the same conviction when he writes:

<sup>158</sup> Mentioned in e.g. Mishnah, *Baba Kama*, 9b.

<sup>159</sup> A. COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 151.

<sup>160</sup> See for the Karaite critique on the rabbinic liturgical year: 'Karaites', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, p. 778f. See for their holiday observance in Israel today: RUTH DE JONG, 'Karaïeten in Israël, de sekte van de Bnei Mkira is na elfhonderd jaar gemarginaliseerd,' in *Israel Magazine*, January/February 1995, p. 31-35.

<sup>161</sup> Samson Raphael HIRSCH, *Gesammelte Schriften*, published by Naphtali HIRSCH, Frankfurt/Main, 1902, Vol. 1, p. 1, frequently quoted in publications on Jewish holidays, e.g. Barry KUSHNER in his foreword to Hayyim SCHAUS, *The Jewish Festivals*; and Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoeeka*, p. 7.

What a catechism expresses through clear definitions and formulas, Jewish festivals express through ritual and symbolic customs, while it is left to Scripture readings, liturgy and sermon to give words to the teachings, memories and meanings embodied by a particular feast.<sup>162</sup>

So important are the holidays for Jewish life, that their practice has deeply marked the religious and cultural heritage of the Jewish people. This even holds true for the Karaites, despite their critique of rabbinic elaboration. Holiday practice is one of the three major identity markers of the Jewish people, together with circumcision and food regulations. As the Jewish people kept their feasts and fasts, their identity was forged, transmitted from generation to generation, and secured against the outside pressure of assimilation.

Besides its use as a cultural identity marker, holiday practice also served as a boundary marker. It is no exaggeration to say that it was mainly due to their holiday practice, most notably through Sabbath observance, that Jews kept themselves apart. As they kept the seventh day, they went against the tide of their Christian (or Islamic) environment. As they kept the Seder and fasted on Yom Kippur, they singled themselves out from the people around them. This was 'for Jews only', in the positive sense of the term. It kept Jews together, and others outside. This was the border, religiously and socially.

Of course, other elements of Jewish life also contributed to forging their identity and marking the boundary, but holiday practice stands out as perhaps the single most important factor in this respect. All other religions have their sacred times, all other cultures their festivals, but the Jewish holidays are special, because Jews had no priesthood, no prince and, for a long time, no homeland. So it was the sacred calendar – especially the Sabbath – that kept them together and kept them in close contact with the Torah. This has led Abraham Joshua Heschel to coin his famous phrase:

Whereas other religions build great cathedrals or temples, Judaism constructs the Sabbath as an architecture of time'.<sup>163</sup>

He even went as far as saying that 'even if people fail to observe the Sabbath, it remains holy'.<sup>164</sup> Such a statement can only be understood when taking into account that the holidays have, in a very real sense, kept the Jewish people from culturally disappearing in the sea of peoples. They have a ruling function, a position of dominance. Even secularised Jews recognise this, as they continue celebrating some of the customs related to the festivals.

## Conclusion: at the Crossroads of Different Holiday Traditions

From the first century C.E. onwards, two calendars and two kinds of practice have developed side by side.

In Appendix A, the biblical, Jewish and Christian liturgical calendars are illustrated alongside each other, in a comparative way.

Both calendars, and the holiday traditions which go with them, have the Old Testament liturgical year as a common basis. But they have passed through different paradigm shifts. Consequently, they have treated the biblical data each in their own way. New meanings and new formats were developed; new feasts and new dates introduced.<sup>165</sup>

What are their distinctive traits?

To put it in a nutshell, the Jewish calendar is centred on the Torah, the Christian calendar on Christ.

Several qualifications flow from this basic statement: The first calendar tells the story of God and Israel, the second the story of Christ. The first calendar follows the pattern of the sacred times of the Torah – it is in fact a continuous remembrance of the same ancient feasts and fasts, an enduring recurrence of the same celebrations, a continuous recollection of the sacrifices of old, and an incessant anticipation of the Messianic time in which all the holidays will converge into one great festival without end. The second is a commemoration of one person and one event; it recalls what Christ has done, once and for all, for all mankind.

<sup>162</sup> Jacob PETUCHOWSKI, *Van Pesach tot Chanoekka*, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Abraham Joshua HESCHEL, *The Sabbath*, p. xiii and xiv.

<sup>164</sup> Abraham Joshua HESCHEL, *The Sabbath*, p. xiii and xiv.

<sup>165</sup> Dirk MONSHOUWER (*Vieren vol verwachting*) and Bruce CHILTON (*Redeeming Time*) have described in more detail the common sources and the independent development of the Jewish and the Christian liturgical year.

While the first marks the long journey of God's chosen people through history, the second represents, ever and again, God's decisive intervention in history, through Christ.<sup>166</sup>

Another closely related difference should be noted: the Jewish calendar stands in continuity with the biblical one, whereas the Christian calendar marks the discontinuity. While the rabbis reassured the people that the Covenant had not ceased, despite the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, the apostles proclaimed that Jesus had concluded a New Covenant. The Jewish holidays are meant to be essentially the same as the biblical ones; the Christian holidays are based on the conviction that something fundamentally new has been brought about in Christ. For Judaism, the biblical holidays remain the pattern; for Christianity they are shadows of something more important. In rabbinic eyes, the feasts of Israel have normative value; from the apostolic point of view they have illustrative value.

And so the two traditions diverged – in the area of holiday practice the Church and the Synagogue became worlds: even though in some streams of Christianity the holidays functioned in a similar way as in Judaism; even though many Christian rites and customs closely resemble Jewish religious practice; and even though some churches so much emphasised the Church Year that their feasts became an equally important identity marker for Christians as the Jewish holidays did for Jews. Notwithstanding all the outward resemblances, the theological differences remained. The two calendars simply tell a different story.

But then, after seventeen centuries of separation, Hebrew Christians arrived on the scene and attempted a synthesis between Jewish identity and faith in Jesus. This led them to take a renewed interest in the solemnities of the Old Testament. But they had to take into account the New Testament. And they could not bypass a long history of distinct holiday traditions, the one Judaic, the other Christian.

In actual fact, they stood at the crossroads of these two traditions.

On the one hand, they belonged to the Church, which had always considered the festal calendar of the Torah, as such, to be obsolete. She had retained only some of the elements, modifying them into Christian feasts. At the same time, the festal calendar of the Torah belonged to the Jewish people, because Judaism not only retained it but made it one of the pillars of religious practice.

Hebrew Christians took an interest in these holidays for two closely related reasons: because they are in the Bible, and because they are part of their national and cultural heritage. But, because of their Christian convictions, they could not just take over their given meaning and format in Judaism. For the 'Jewish' holidays to be meaningful for them, they had to be reinterpreted from a New Covenant perspective.

This is precisely what they did. And their reinterpretation was taken over by their Messianic Jewish successors, who developed them further.

Redefining a given tradition in the light of a new situation is a general religious phenomenon, by the way. Whenever a faith community takes up a rite or a custom which stems from another age redefinition is inevitable, at least to some extent. As the social and religious circumstances change, some elements will be retained while others need to be adapted or even left aside.

From a Jewish point of view – and our study concerns a movement that defines itself deliberately as *Jewish* – , tradition is a dynamic process of transmission and reception. The God of Israel is the God of history. He leads his people. He continues to manifest his presence. He intervenes on repeated occasions in the lives of individuals and societies, thus creating new circumstances. Such changes affect the way in which his words are understood and put into practice. As time goes on, new forms are developed, new insights gained, new situations addressed, new facts taken into account, but all the while the original message is retold and the original directive retained.

Hebrew Christianity took a lively interest in biblical holidays and the way in which their Jewish contemporaries celebrated them. They reinterpreted them from a New Covenant perspective. Yet they did not go as far as putting them into practice – with the notable exception of the Passover meal, for which they developed a Jewish Christian Haggadah. Only that night, 'different from all other nights of the year,' did they cross the age-old border between two holiday traditions. No wonder that this move aroused suspicion among Evangelicals and the Jewish communities alike.

Messianic Jews went further. As they started practicing many, or even all, biblical and Jewish holidays, they adopted quite a few Judaic rites and customs. But this was not simply a matter of crossing the border between

<sup>166</sup> See for a similar reflection on the differences between the Jewish and the Christian calendar, in terms of time: Bruce CHILTON, *Redeeming Time*, p. 97ff.

two holiday traditions; it was, rather, a position at the crossroads of the two. Theologically they remained squarely on the Evangelical Protestant side. Culturally they identified with the Jewish world.

This double identification creates a certain tension, insofar as Judaism and Christianity entertain opposing views on such fundamental issues as the economy of salvation and the person of the Messiah – issues that also have a bearing on the way in which holidays are interpreted and practised. Christianity and Judaism also differ in the area of calendar and holidays, even though their traditions are both grafted on the same root: the festal calendar of the Torah.