

Southern Steps

Pentecost's Grand Stage

The Southern Steps of Temple Mount were significant in Temple life for observant Jews. They were the entry point for most common Jews who lived in the region, as well as for those who traveled from afar three times a year for the sacred feasts. Though God ordained seven major feasts (Leviticus 23), some occurred simultaneously. Thus, only three trips a year to celebrate all seven major feasts!



Those feasts hold historical significance to the Jewish people and prophetic significance to us as followers of Jesus. Why is that? For the Jews, each feast symbolizes an important facet of God's deliverance of them from Egyptian bondage. For Christians, Jesus is the fulfillment of each of the feasts. One is shadow and one is substance.

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

While the Jewish people look to feasts and festivals as sacred, we look to them as *shadows* that reveal the *substance* which is Jesus Christ. Consider this:

Feast	Shadow (Jewish perspective)	Substance (Christian Perspective)
Passover (Spring)	Blood of a sacrificial lamb was sprinkled upon the doorpost so the death angel would "pass over."	Jesus is our perfect and spotless Passover Lamb. (Jesus crucified.)
Unleavened Bread (Spring, in conjunction with Passover)	With no time for yeast to rise before escaping from Egypt, the Israelites prepared unleavened bread. (Leaven is a symbol of sin.)	Just like matzos (unleavened bread), Jesus was pierced, bruised, and broken for our sin. (Jesus buried.)
First Fruits (Spring, in conjunction with Passover)	In their escape, the Jewish people offered first fruits of their early crops as thanksgiving to God.	Jesus was the first resurrection (first fruit) that we might have resurrection life after Him. (Jesus resurrected.)
Pentecost (Late-spring)	Giving of the law on Mt Sinai.	Coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.
Trumpets (Fall)	Signaled field workers to come into the Temple for rest and celebration.	Trumpets will sound when Jesus returns. (This is the Second Coming, not the rapture! Remember, these are Jewish feasts.)
Day of Atonement (8 days after Trumpets)	Highest holy day of confession and atonement for sin.	Jesus is our full and complete atonement.
Tabernacles (5 days after Atonement)	Celebration of God's provision of shelter while in the wilderness.	During the Millennial Kingdom, the Lord will establish His tabernacle on earth and we will worship Him forever. (Meanwhile, our bodies are His tabernacle! He lives in us.)

The Jewish feasts are wonderful to study when you recognize the substance and avoid getting hung up on the shadow!

The Southern Steps played a key role in Jewish feasts because they were the entryway to Temple Mount, the large platform upon which the Temple, the temple courts, and the marketplace where Jesus

overturned tables were built. Today, the great arches of the triple gate are very visible atop steps hewn from the bedrock of Mount Moriah (the mountain upon which Temple Mount sits).

After purifying themselves at the Pool of Siloam or one of the nearby *mikviot* (ritual baths), pilgrims traversed uneven steps (to prevent hurry and increase reverence), carrying their sacrificial animal. After stopping to pay the temple tax, they entered to present their sacrifice.

Aren't you glad your baptism is a symbol of what Christ did for you, rather than your attempt to "get clean" before a holy God? And aren't you glad that Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, was the once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin? No need to continually dip in cleansing waters or present sacrifices. The substance made the shadow only a symbol of the fully completed work!

If those Southern Steps could talk, what a story they would tell! Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul who wrote much of our New Testament, sat at the feet of the great Rabbi Gamaliel upon those stone steps. (Acts 22:3) Great rabbis used this place as an outdoor classroom, so it was not unusual for the Southern Steps to be filled with teachers. Even Jesus, the greatest rabbi of all, taught there! (Luke 21:37) It was likely from that place He issued seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, including His "whitewashed tombs" comment while within sight of the nearby graveyard!

It was on the Southern Steps after Jesus' ascension into heaven, that Peter stood to speak, remembering Jesus' promise that the Father would send a Helper, the Holy Spirit. (John 14:16-18) There, he delivered the Pentecost message found in Acts 2 to quite a crowd of people.

According to Scripture, while gathered together, a mighty wind filled the house. Some believe the house to be the Upper Room where the disciples were staying, but evidence is strong that "the house where they were sitting" (verse 2) was the Temple (known as the house of God). After all, it was 9:00 am on one of the biggest feast days on the Hebrew calendar. The people would have been at the Temple. Also, verses 9-11 tell us the place was filled with a crowd much too large to fit inside the Upper Room.

Who was in the crowd? Unless you have studied the passage carefully, you may not know who was present that Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit came down! From the list in verses 9-11:

- **Parthians:** Persian people (modern-day Iran).
- **Medes:** Kurds of northern Iraq!
- **Elamites:** Elam (modern-day Southern Iraq, extending perhaps into Iran), including the city of Ur, from which God called Abram, and modern-day cities of Basra and Baghdad.
- **Mesopotamia:** The land between the great Tigris and Euphrates rivers (modern-day Iraq), known at the time of Pentecost as Mesopotamia.
- **Judea:** Known today as the West Bank, including Arabs and Palestinians.
- **Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia:** Areas likely situated in modern-day Turkey. The Apostle Paul was from Tarsus, a part of this region.
- **Asia:** Likely the west coast province of Asia Minor.
- **Egypt:** Yes, the Egyptians were present at Pentecost!
- **Libya:** The North African country of the late Muammar al-Gaddafi.
- **Rome:** Those who ruled Israel at the time of Jesus.
- **Cretans:** Also known as Philistines, this rebellious, deceitful people group were worshippers of man, and originated from the Aegean area, primarily Crete.
- **Arabs:** Yes, descendants of Ishmael from Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries!

Surprised? Imagine what heaven will be like! Right there on the Southern Steps of Temple Mount, all those people groups, along with the Jews, heard Peter's message as the Holy Spirit filled them:

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵ For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.
(Acts 2:14-18)*

At Mount Sinai, when the law was given to Moses, the people were busy worshipping the Golden Calf. It cost 3,000 lives that day. On this day of Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit upon Jews, Arabs and all who gathered there. The church was born and 3,000 souls were saved! (Verse 41) Coincident? I don't think so!

But there is more to the story. Remember, there is shadow and there is substance. Surely there were Jewish people saved that day, just as some are saved today. Yet, by and large, the Jewish people still pursue the shadow of Mount Sinai (the law) rather than the substance manifested that day on the Southern Steps. However, one day the full power of the Holy Spirit will work wonders among His people!

The Southern Steps represent the power of the Holy Spirit poured out on believers. Are we living in the power God delivered that day or do we, like the Jewish people, hold on to good works and the letter of the law? Though the feasts of Israel are but a shadow, they come around year-after-year, reminding us that we can tap into Holy Spirit power again and again! Jesus spoke this of the Spirit:

³⁷ On the last day, that great day of the feast [Tabernacles], Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive (John 7:37-39)

Do you believe in Him? Are you feeling powerless? Is so, why not come and drink from the One who pours out the Spirit, that from your heart will flow rivers of living water!